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THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT\*\*\*

The Supernatural in the New  
Testament

Possible, Credible, and Historical  
Or: An Examination of the Validity of Some  
Recent Objections Against Christianity as a Divine  
Revelation

By the

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London

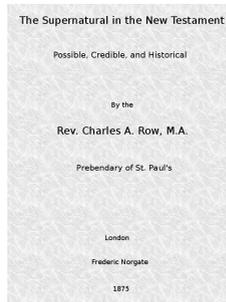
Frederic Norgate

1875

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# Dedication.

To The Committee Of The Christian Evidence Society.

My Lords and Gentlemen,

Having undertaken to compose this work at your request, I beg permission to dedicate it to you. In doing so I feel that it is a duty which I owe both to you and to myself that I should state the position which we respectively occupy with regard to it. Your responsibility is confined to having requested me to compose a work in refutation of certain principles now widely disseminated, which impugn the supernatural elements contained in the New Testament. For the contents of the work and for the mode of treatment I alone am responsible. When I considered the position of the present controversy, I felt that it was impossible to treat the subject satisfactorily except on the principle that the responsibility for the mode of conducting the argument and of answering the objections should rest with the writer alone. In dealing with a subject so complicated, involving as it does questions of philosophy and science as well as the principles of historical criticism, I can scarcely venture to hope that every position which I have taken will prove acceptable to all the various shades of theological thought. I have endeavoured to take such as seemed to me to be logically defensible without any reference to particular schools of theological opinion. As the entire question is essentially historical, I have done my utmost to exclude from it all discussions that are strictly theological. Modern unbelief however puts in two objections which if valid render all historical evidence in proof of the occurrence of miracles nugatory, namely that they are both impossible and incredible. In meeting these I have been compelled to appeal to what appear to me to be the principles of a sound philosophy. In all other respects I have

viewed the question before me as exclusively one of historical evidence.

If the Resurrection of our Lord is an actual occurrence, it follows that Christianity must be a divine revelation. If it is not, no amount of other evidence will avail to prove it to be so. As it has been strongly affirmed that for this great fact, which constitutes the central position of Christianity, the historical evidence is worthless, I have devoted the latter portion of this volume to the consideration of this question, with a view of putting before the reader the value of the New Testament when contemplated as simple history. Using the Epistles as the foundation of my argument, I have endeavoured to prove that the greatest of all the miracles recorded in the Gospels rests on an attestation that is unsurpassed by any event recorded in history. For this purpose I have used the Epistles as simple historical documents, and I have claimed for them precisely the same value which is conceded to other writings of a similar description. The feeling among Christians that these writings contain the great principles of the Christian faith has occasioned it to be overlooked that they are also contemporary historical documents of the highest order. As such I have used them in proof of the great facts of Christianity, above all in proof of the greatest of them, the Resurrection of our Lord. [v]

With these observations I now present you the following work, with the hope that it may prove the means of removing many of the difficulties with which recent controversial writers have endeavoured to obscure the subject. Trusting that it maybe accepted by the great Head of the Church, the reality of whose life and teaching as they are recorded in the Gospels it is designed to establish,

I remain, my Lords and Gentlemen,  
Your's faithfully,  
C. A. Row.

London, January, 1875.

[001]

# Chapter I. Introduction. The Position of the Controversy Between the Opponents and the Defenders of Christianity.

Although every portion of the Bible is vehemently assailed by the various forms of modern Scepticism, it is clear that the real turning point of the controversy between those who affirm that God has made a supernatural revelation of himself to mankind, and those who deny it, centres in those portions of the New Testament which affirm the presence of the supernatural. The question may be still further narrowed into the inquiry whether the person and actions of Jesus Christ, as they are depicted in the Gospels, are historical facts, or fictitious inventions. If the opponents of Revelation can prove that they are the latter, the entire controversy will end in their favour. It would in that case be utterly useless to attempt to defend any other portion of the Bible; and the controversy respecting the Old Testament becomes a mere waste of labour. If, on the other hand, Christians can prove that the narratives of the four Gospels, or even of any one of them, are a true representation of historical facts, then it is certain that God has made a revelation of himself, notwithstanding the objections which may be urged against certain positions which have been taken by Ecclesiastical Christianity, and the difficulties by which certain questions connected with the Old Testament are surrounded. [002]

It follows, therefore, that the historical truth of the facts narrated in the Gospels constitutes the central position of the entire

controversy. It is not my purpose on the present occasion to discuss the general question, whether the delineation of Jesus Christ which the Gospels contain is one of an ideal or an historical person. That question I have already considered in "The Jesus of the Evangelists." But as the various forms of modern unbelief are making the most strenuous efforts to prove that the supernatural elements of the New Testament are hopelessly incredible, and that the attestation on which the supernatural occurrences mentioned in it rests, is simply worthless, it is my intention to devote the present volume to the consideration of this special subject, and to examine the question of miracles, and their historical credibility.

Modern scepticism makes with respect to supernatural occurrences (under which more general term I include the miracles of the New Testament), the three following assertions, and endeavours to substantiate them by every available argument:

1st. That all supernatural occurrences are impossible.

2nd. That, if not impossible, they are incredible; that is, that they are contrary to reason.

3rd. That those which are narrated in the New Testament are devoid of any adequate historical attestation, and owe their origin to the inventive powers of the mythic and legendary spirit.

It is my purpose, in the course of the present work, to traverse each of these three positions, and to show:

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1st. That miracles and supernatural occurrences are not impossible; and that the arguments by which this has been attempted to be established are wholly inconclusive.

2nd. That they are neither incredible, nor contrary to reason; but are entirely consistent with its dictates.

3rd, That the greatest of all the miracles which are recorded in the New Testament, and which, if an actual historical occurrence, is sufficient to carry with it all the others, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, rests on the highest form of historical testimony.

Such is my position.

A recent writer, who has ably advocated the principles of modern scepticism, the author of "Supernatural Religion," has in the opening passage of his work clearly placed before us the real point at issue. He states the case as follows:

"On the very threshold of inquiry into the origin and true character of Christianity we are brought face to face with the supernatural. It is impossible, without totally setting aside its peculiar and indispensable claim to be a direct external revelation from God of truths which otherwise human reason could not have discovered, to treat Ecclesiastical Christianity as a form of religion developed by the wisdom of man. Not only in form does it profess to be the result of divine communication, but in its very essence, in its principal dogmas it is either superhuman or untenable. There is no question here of mere accessories, which are comparatively unimportant, and do not necessarily affect the essential matter, but we have to do with a scheme of religion claiming to be miraculous in all points, in form, in essence, and in evidence. This religion cannot be accepted without an emphatic belief in supernatural interposition, and it is absurd to imagine that its dogmas can be held, whilst the miraculous is rejected. [004] Those who profess to hold the religion, whilst they discredit the supernatural element, and they are many at the present day, have widely receded from Ecclesiastical Christianity. It is most important that the inseparable connection of the miraculous with the origin, doctrines, and the evidence of Christianity should be clearly understood, in order that inquiry may pursue a logical and consistent course."—*Supernatural Religion*, page 1.<sup>1</sup>

I fully accept all the chief positions laid down in this passage as an adequate statement of the points at issue between those who affirm and those who deny that Christianity is a divine revelation. A few minor points require a slight modification, as

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<sup>1</sup> My quotations throughout this work are taken from the first edition. The passage here quoted is somewhat altered in the third edition, but not so as to affect the general meaning.

incurring the danger of confusing ideas that ought to be carefully distinguished.

The writer before me also raises no minor issue. Although the work is entitled "Supernatural Religion, or an inquiry into the reality of divine revelation," its object, which is consistently carried out throughout it, is to impugn the historical character of the Gospels, and to prove that the supernatural occurrences which are recorded in them are fictitious. The title of the work might have justified the writer in assailing other portions of the Bible; but he clearly sees that to adopt this course is only to attack the outworks of Christianity, and to leave the key of the entire position unassailed. In doing so he has pursued a far nobler course than that which has been adopted by many of the opponents of the Christian faith. He has directed his attack against the very centre of the Christian position, the historical credibility of the supernatural actions attributed to Jesus Christ in the Gospels, being well aware that a successful assault on this position will involve the capture of all the outworks by which it is supposed to be protected; while it by no means follows that a successful assault on any of the latter involves the capture of the citadel itself. This writer does not take up a bye question, but he goes direct to the foundation on which Christianity rests. In doing so, it must be acknowledged that he has taken a straightforward course, and one which must bring the question of the truth or falsehood of Christianity to a direct issue.

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I fully agree with the chief position taken in the quotation before us, that Christianity involves the presence of the supernatural and the superhuman, what in fact is generally designated as the miraculous, or it is nothing. To remove these elements out of the pages of the New Testament, is not to retain the same religion, but to manufacture another quite different and distinct from it. In the first place, we have the great central figure in the Gospels, the divine person of Jesus Christ our Lord, and the entire body of his actions and his teaching. He, although depicted as human,

is at the same time depicted as superhuman and supernatural, not merely in his miraculous works, but in his entire character. To remove the divine lineaments of Jesus Christ out of the Gospels is simply to destroy them. Besides this, we have a large number of miraculous actions attributed to him. These are inextricably interwoven with the entire narrative, which, when they are taken away, loses all cohesion. Lives of Jesus which have been set forth, deprived of their supernatural and superhuman elements, are in fact nothing better than a new Gospel composed out of the subjective consciousness of the writers. Various attempts [006] have been made to pare down the supernatural and superhuman elements in the Gospels to the smallest possible dimensions. Still they obstinately persist in remaining. If everything else is struck out of the Gospels, except their moral teaching, we are left in the presence of teaching which is raised at an immense elevation above the thoughts and conceptions of the age that produced it; and of a teacher, who while distinguished by the marks of pre-eminent holiness and greatness of mind, is also distinguished by a degree of self-assertion in his utterances of moral truth, which is without parallel, even among the most presumptuous of men. Deal with the Gospels as we will, while we allow any portions of them to remain as historical, we are still in the presence of the superhuman.

As the narrative now stands it is at least harmonious. The lofty pretensions of the teacher bear the most intimate correlation to the supernatural and superhuman facts that are reported of him. The one are the complement of the other. If the facts are true, the lofty self-assertion of the teacher is justified; if they are not true, his pretensions conflict with the entire conception of his holiness and elevation of mind. The use which a wide spread school of modern criticism so freely makes of the critical dissecting knife, for the purpose of amputating the supernatural from the Gospels, can only be attended by the fatal termination of destroying the entire Gospels as of the smallest historical value. It is marvellous

that persons who retain any respect for Christianity as a system of religious and moral teaching, should have attempted to throw discredit on this element in the Gospels with a view of saving the remainder.

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Nor is the case different with the other portions of the New Testament. Christianity, as enunciated by its writers, does not profess merely to teach a new and improved system of morality. If this was its only pretension, it would certainly have but little claim to be viewed as a divine revelation. In morals its teaching is both unsystematic and fragmentary; though it is an unquestionable fact, that a great system of moral teaching may be deduced from the principles it unfolds. But if one thing is plainer than another on the face of the New Testament, it is that the great purpose sought to be effected by Christianity is to impart a new moral and spiritual power to mankind. It professes to be, not a body of moral rules, but a mighty moral force, which is concentrated in the person of its Founder. The acceptance of it had generated a new power or energy, a moral and spiritual life, which raised those who had embraced it above their former selves; and which it professes to be able to impart to all time. This supernatural element, concentrated as I have said that it is in the person of its founder, runs through the entire epistles, and constitutes their most distinguishing feature. If the supernatural elements in the person of Jesus Christ be removed from their teaching nothing remains but a number of moral precepts robbed of all their vitality. In one word, the whole system of teaching simply collapses.

In a similar manner, if we eliminate every thing supernatural out of the New Testament, with a view of arriving at a residuum of truth, we are brought into immediate contact with the most unique fact in the history of man, the creation of the Church of Jesus Christ, the greatest institution which has ever affected the destinies of our race, and which has for eighteen centuries exerted a most commanding influence on human happiness and

civilization. This is professedly based on a miraculous fact, [008]  
 the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, we remove the  
 supernatural elements out of Christianity, this institution, mighty  
 for good in its influence on the progress of our race, has been  
 based on an unreality and a delusion. Here again we encounter  
 something which has very much the appearance of the supernat-  
 ural.

On these accounts, therefore, I cordially accept the position  
 which is laid down by the author of "Supernatural Religion" as  
 a correct statement of the case, that Christianity involves the  
 presence of the Supernatural, or it is nothing. We must either  
 defend the chief supernatural elements of the New Testament or  
 abandon it as worthless.

But there is an expression which occurs in this quotation, and  
 which is frequently made use of in subsequent parts of the work,  
 which requires consideration, "Ecclesiastical Christianity." What  
 is intended by it? The meaning is nowhere defined, and unless  
 we come to a clear understanding with respect to it, we shall be  
 in danger of complicating the entire question. The expression  
 is ambiguous. If by it is meant any other form of thought, than  
 that which is contained in the pages of the New Testament; if, in  
 fact, by it is intended a systematic arrangement of doctrinal truth,  
 which has been elaborated at a subsequent period, I emphatically  
 assert that those who are called upon to defend the divine char-  
 acter of the Christian Revelation have nothing to do with it. The  
 only thing which those who maintain that the New Testament  
 contains a divine revelation can be called on to defend, is the  
 express statements of the book itself, and not a system of thought  
 which subsequent writers may have attempted to deduce from it. [009]

This point is so important, that I must make the position which  
 I intend taking with respect to it clear. It involves the distinc-  
 tion between revelation and theology. The religious and moral  
 teaching which is contained in the New Testament is in a very  
 unsystematic form. Not one of its writings is a formal treatise on

theology, nor does one of them contain a systematised statement of what constitutes Christianity. Its teaching of religious truth is incidental, and is called forth by the special circumstances of the writer. The plain fact is that four of the writings which comprise the New Testament are religions memoirs. One is an historical account of the foundation of the Church. Twenty-one are letters, written to different Churches and individuals, and all called forth by special emergencies. These all partake of the historical character. The only one which does not participate in this character is the Apocalypse, which, being a vision, is utterly unlike a formal or systematic treatise on Christianity. The result of the form in which the New Testament is composed is that its definite teaching is always incidental, called forth to meet special circumstances and occasions in the history of Churches and individuals, and never formal. It is also universally couched in popular, as distinct from scientific or technical language. Not one of its writers makes an attempt to formulate a system of Christian theology.

The person of Jesus Christ constitutes Christianity in its truest and highest sense. Three of the Gospels embody the traditionary teaching of the Church on this subject. The fourth is the work of an independent writer. The epistles may be received as a set of incidental commentaries on the person and work of Jesus Christ, called forth by the special occasions which gave them birth, and embodying the author's general views as to his work and teaching as adapted to a number of special circumstances and occasions.

[010]

Between the contents of the New Testament and what is commonly understood by Ecclesiastical Christianity the difference is extremely wide. The New Testament contains a divine revelation. Ecclesiastical Christianity is a body of religious teaching in which Christianity has been attempted to be presented in a systematised form, or, in other words, it is a theology more or less complete.

It is necessary that we should have a clear appreciation of the difference. Theology is an attempt of the human intellect to present to us the truths communicated in Revelation in a systematised form. It is in fact the result of the human reason investigating the facts and statements of Revelation. Theology therefore is a simple creation of human reason erected on the facts of divine revelation. As such it is subject to all the errors and imperfections to which our rational powers are obnoxious. It can claim no infallibility more than any other rational action of the human mind. Theology is a science, and is subject to the imperfections to which all other sciences are liable. It stands to the facts of Christianity in the same relation as philosophy and physical science stand to the works of nature. In the one the human intellect investigates the divine revelation contained in the works of nature, and endeavours to systematise its truths: in the other it does the same with respect to the divine revelation which in accordance with the assertions of the New Testament has been made in the person of Jesus Christ.

What I am desirous of drawing attention to is that theology is not revelation. Systems of theology may be accurate deductions of reason from Revelation; or they may be inaccurate and imperfect ones. It is very possible that a system of theology which has been evolved by human reason, although it may have attained a wide acceptance, may be as inadequate an explanation of the facts of revelation, as the Ptolemaic system of astronomy was of the facts of the material universe. Objections which were raised against the latter were no real objections against the structure of the universe itself. In the same way objections which may be raised against a particular system of theology, may leave the great facts of revelation entirely untouched. [011]

If we look into the history of Christianity, we shall find that as soon as the Church began to consolidate itself into a distinct community, the reason of man began to exert itself on the facts of revelation, and to attempt to reduce its teaching to a systematic

form. From this source have sprung all the various systems of theology which have from time to time predominated in the Church. It has been a plant of gradual growth, and as such may bear a fair comparison with the slow growth of philosophy or physical science. Such an action of reason on the facts of revelation was inevitable and entirely legitimate. What I am desirous of guarding against is the idea that when reason is exerted on the facts of revelation, it is more infallible than when exerted on any other subjects which come under its cognisance.

I am not ignorant that there is another theory respecting the nature of theology. A large branch of the Christian Church holds that a body of dogmatic statements has been handed down traditionally from the Apostles and other inspired teachers, which has been embodied in the system of theology which is accepted by this Church, and that this was intended to be an authoritative statement of the facts of the Christian revelation. It is also part of the same theory that the Church as a collective body has in all ages possessed an inspiration, which enables it to affirm authoritatively and dogmatically, what is and what is not Christian doctrine, and that which it thus authoritatively affirms to be so, must be accepted as a portion of the Christian revelation as much as the contents of the New Testament itself.

[012]

I fully admit that those who assume a position of this kind are bound to act consistently, and to defend every statement in their dogmatic creeds as an integral portion of Christianity. Nor is it less certain, if this principle is true, that if any portion of such dogmatic creeds can be successfully assailed as contrary to reason, as for instance the formulated doctrine of transubstantiation, it would imperil the position of Christianity itself. Those, however, who have taken such positions, must be left to take the consequences of them. It is not my intention in undertaking to defend the historical truth of the supernatural elements in the New Testament, to burden myself with an armour which seems only fitted to crash beneath its weight the person who attempts

to use it.

It has been necessary to be explicit on this point, in order that the argument may be kept free from all adventitious issues. The introduction into it of the expression, "Ecclesiastical Christianity," brings with it no inconsiderable danger of diverting our attention from what is the real point of controversy. I must therefore repeat it. Ecclesiastical Christianity is a development made by reason from the facts of the New Testament, and is a thing which is entirely distinct from the contents of the New Testament. With its affirmations therefore I have nothing to do in the present discussion. It will not be my duty to examine into its positions, with a view of ascertaining whether they are developments of Christian teaching which can be logically deduced from its pages; still less to accept and to defend them as authoritative statements of its meaning. In defending the New Testament as containing a divine revelation, I have only to do with the contents and assertions of the book itself, and with nothing outside its pages. What others may have propounded respecting its meaning can form no legitimate portion of the present controversy. The real point at issue is one which is simple and distinct. It is, are the supernatural incidents recorded in it historical events or fictitious inventions? As that is the question before us, I must decline to allow any other issue to be substituted in the place of it. Our inquiry is one which is strictly historical. [013]

Another statement made by the author before me requires qualification. He says that "Christianity is a scheme of religion which claims to be miraculous in all points, in form, in essence, and in evidence." This statement I must controvert. Christianity does not profess to be divine on all points. On the contrary, it contains a divine and a human element so intimately united, that it is impossible to separate the one from the other. It is also far from clear to me how it can be miraculous in form when it is contained in a body of historical writings. I shall have occasion to show hereafter, that although miracles form an important portion

of the attestation on which it rests, they are not the only one.

[014]

With these qualifications I fully accept the position taken by this writer as a correct statement of the points at issue between those who affirm, and those who deny the claims of Christianity to be a divine revelation, and accept his challenge to defend the supernatural elements in the New Testament, or to abandon it as worthless. To maintain that any of its dogmas can be accepted as true while its miraculous elements are abandoned seems to me to involve a question which is hopelessly illogical.

Modern unbelief rejects every supernatural occurrence as utterly incredible. Before proceeding to examine into the grounds of this, it will be necessary to lay down definitely the bearing of the present argument on the principles of atheism, pantheism, and theism.

As far as the impossibility of supernatural occurrences is concerned, pantheism and atheism occupy precisely the same grounds. If either of them propounds a true theory of the universe, any supernatural occurrence, which necessarily implies a supernatural agent to bring it about, is impossible, and the entire controversy as to whether miracles have ever been actually performed is a foregone conclusion. Modern atheism, while it does not venture in categorical terms to affirm that no God exists, definitely asserts that there is no evidence that there is one. It follows that if there is no evidence that there is a God, there can be no evidence that a miracle ever has been performed, for the very idea of a miracle implies the idea of a God to work one. If therefore atheism is true, all controversy about miracles is useless. They are simply impossible, and to inquire whether an impossible event has happened is absurd. To such a person the historical enquiry, as far as a miracle is concerned, must be a foregone conclusion. It might have a little interest as a matter of curiosity; but even if the most unequivocal evidence could be adduced that an occurrence such as we call supernatural had taken place, the utmost that it could prove would be that some

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most extraordinary and abnormal fact had taken place in nature of which we did not know the cause. But to prove a miracle to any person who consistently denies that he has any evidence that any being exists which is not a portion of and included in the material universe, or developed out of it, is impossible.

Nor does the case differ in any material sense with pantheism. When we have got rid of its hazy mysticism, and applied to it clear principles of logic, its affirmation is that God and the Universe are one, and that all past and present forms of existence have been the result of the Universe, *i.e.* God, everlastingly developing himself in conformity with immutable law. All things which either have existed or exist are as many manifestations of God, who is in fact an infinite impersonal Proteus, ever changing in his outward form. From him, or to speak more correctly, from it (for he is no person), all things have issued as mere phenomenal babbles of the passing moment, and by it will be again swallowed up in never-ending succession. Such a God must be devoid of everything which we understand by personality, intelligence, wisdom, volition or a moral nature. It is evident therefore that to a person who logically and consistently holds these views the occurrence of a miracle is no less an impossibility than it is to an atheist, for the conception of a miracle involves the presence of personality, intelligence, and power at the disposal of volition. All that the strongest evidence could prove to those who hold such principles, is that some abnormal event had taken place of which the cause was unknown.

It is evident, therefore, that the only course which can be pursued with a professed atheist or pantheist, is to grapple with him on the evidences of theism, and to endeavour to prove the existence of a God possessed of personality, intelligence, volition, and adequate power, before we attempt to deal with the evidences of miracles. Until we have convinced him of this all our reasonings must be in vain.

[016]

There are four modes of reasoning by which the being of a

God may be established. I will simply enumerate them. First, the argument which is founded on the principle of causation; second, that which rests on the order of the universe; third, that from its innumerable adaptations; fourth, that which is derived from the moral nature and personality of man. If the argument from causation fails to prove to those with whom we are reasoning that the finite causes in the universe must have a first cause from whence they have originated; if that from the orderly arrangements in the universe fails to prove that there must be an intelligent being who produced them; if its innumerable adaptations fail to establish the presence of a presiding mind; and if the moral nature of man fails to prove that there must be a moral being from whom that nature emanated, and of whom it is the image, it follows that the minds must be so differently constituted as to offer no common ground or basis of reasoning on this question. The whole involves an essential difference of principle, which no argumentation can really reach. To attempt to prove to a mind of this description the occurrence of a miracle, is simply a waste of labour.

A work, therefore, on the subject of miracles can only be addressed to theists, because the very conception of a miracle involves the existence of a personal God. To take this for granted in reasoning with a pantheist or atheist is simply to assume the point at issue. It is perfectly true, that a legitimate body of reasoning may be constructed, if the pantheist or the atheist agrees to assume that a God exists for the purpose of supplying a basis for the argument. We may then reason with him precisely in the same way as we would with a theist. But the contest will be with one who has clad himself in armour which no weapon at our disposal can penetrate. After the strongest amount of historical evidence has been adduced, and after all alleged difficulties have been answered, he simply falls back on his atheism or his pantheism, which assumes that all supernatural occurrences must be impossible, and therefore that alleged instances of them are delusions.

This is not unfrequently the case in the present controversy. A considerable number of objections which are urged against the supernatural elements of Christianity, derive whatever cogency they possess from the assumption that there is a God who is the moral Governor of the universe. These are not unfrequently urged by persons who deny the possibility of miracles on atheistic or pantheistic grounds. It is perfectly fair to reason against Christianity on these grounds; it is equally so for a person who holds these opinions, to attempt to prove that the historical evidence adduced in proof of the miracles recorded in the New Testament is worthless as an additional reason why men should cease to believe in them. But it is not conducive to the interests of truth to urge objections which have no reality except on the supposition that a God exists who is the moral Governor of the universe, and then to fall back on reasonings whose whole force is dependent on the data furnished by pantheism or atheism. I shall have occasion to notice a remarkable instance of this involved mode of reasoning hereafter.

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I shall now proceed briefly to state the mode in which I propose to treat the present subject. The point which I have to defend is not any conceivable body of miracles or their evidential value, but specially the supernatural occurrences recorded in the New Testament. I must therefore endeavour to ascertain what is the extent of the supernaturalism asserted in the New Testament, and what is the degree of evidential value which its writers claim for it.

It has been asserted by many writers that the sole and only evidence of a revelation must be a miraculous testimony. Whether this be so or not, this is not the place to enquire. But in relation to the present controversy the plain and obvious course is to ask the writers of the New Testament what is the precise evidential value of the supernatural occurrences which they have narrated. This is far preferable to falling back on any assertions of modern writers, however eminent, on this subject. They may have

over-estimated, or under-estimated their evidential value. The writers of the New Testament must be held responsible, not for the assertions of others, but only for their own. I must therefore carefully consider what it is that they affirm to be proved by miracles.

One primary objection against the possibility of miracles is founded on that peculiar form of theoretic belief, which affirms that both philosophy, science, and religion alike point to the existence of a Cause of the Universe, which is the source of all the forces which exist, and of which the various phenomena of the universe are manifestations, and designates this cause by the name of God. But while it concedes his existence, it proclaims him to be Unknown and Unknowable. If this position is correct, the inference seems inevitable, that any thing like a real revelation of him is impossible. It will be necessary therefore for me to examine into the validity of this position.

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A vast variety of arguments have been adduced both on philosophic grounds and from the principles established by physical science, for the purpose of proving that the occurrence of any supernatural event is contrary to our reason. If this be true, it is a fatal objection against the entire mass of supernatural occurrences that are recorded in the New Testament. The most important points of these reasonings will require a careful consideration.

A very important objection has been urged against the Christian mode of conducting the argument from miracles. It is alleged that it involves reasoning in a vicious circle, and that Christian apologists endeavour to prove the truth of doctrines which utterly transcend reason by miraculous evidence, and then endeavour to prove the truth of the miracles by the doctrines. If this allegation is true, it is no doubt a fatal objection to the argument. I shall endeavour to show that it is founded on a misapprehension of the entire subject.

An attempt has been made to re-affirm the validity of Hume's argument that no amount of evidence can avail to prove the

reality of a miracle unless the falsehood of the evidence is more miraculous than the alleged miracle. It will be necessary to consider the validity of the positions which have been lately assumed respecting it.

A very formidable objection has been urged against the truth of the supernatural occurrences recorded in the New Testament on the ground that the followers of Jesus were a prey to a number of the most grotesque beliefs respecting the action of demons, and that their superstition and credulity on this point was of so extreme a character as to deprive their historical testimony, on the subject of the supernatural of all value. As this objection is not only one which is widely extended, but has been urged with great force by the author of "Supernatural Religion," I shall devote four chapters of this work to the examination of the question of possession and demoniacal action as far as it affects the present controversy. [020]

The entire school of modern unbelief found a very considerable portion of their arguments against the historical character of the Gospels, on the alleged credulity and superstition of the followers of our Lord. This is alleged to have been of a most profound character, and it forms the weapon which is perhaps in most constant use with the assailants of Christianity. All difficulties which beset their arguments are met by attributing the most unbounded credulity, superstition and enthusiasm to the followers of Jesus. It has also been urged that the belief in supernatural occurrences has been so general, that it renders the attestation of miracles to a revelation invalid. I purpose examining into the validity of this objection. As this may be said to be the key of the position occupied by modern unbelief, I must examine into the reality of the affirmation, and also how far the love of the marvellous in mankind affects the credit of the testimony to miracles. This I propose discussing in two distinct chapters.

It is an unquestionable fact that in these days we summarily

reject whole masses of alleged supernatural occurrences, as utterly incredible, without inquiry into the testimony on which they rest. It will be necessary to inquire into the grounds on which we do this, and how far it affects the credibility of the miracles recorded in the New Testament.

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The historical value of the testimony which has been adduced for the truth of the miracles recorded in the New Testament, has been assailed by every weapon which criticism can supply. It is affirmed in the strongest manner that they are utterly devoid of all reliable historical evidence. The Gospels are pronounced to consist of a bundle of myths and legends, with only a few grains of historic truth hidden beneath them. They are affirmed to be late compositions, and that we are utterly devoid of all contemporaneous attestation for the facts recorded in them, and that the true account of the origin of Christianity is buried beneath a mass of fiction. If this be true, there cannot be a doubt that it is a most serious allegation, which affects the entire Christian position. It is further urged that while the defenders of Christianity publish works in which they attempt to prove that miracles are possible and credible, they carefully avoid grappling with the real point of the whole question by showing that any historical evidence can be produced for a single miracle recorded in the Gospels, which will stand the test of such historical criticism, and it is loudly proclaimed that no real evidence can be made forthcoming. Such a charge as this, it is impossible to pass over in silence.

I propose, therefore, to examine into the general truth of these allegations, and to consider the nature of the historical evidence which unbelief, after it has exhausted all its powers of criticism, still leaves us unquestionably in possession of.

This consists of the epistles of the New Testament viewed as historical documents. Their value as such has been greatly overlooked by both sides to the controversy, especially by the Christian side. Christians have been in the habit of viewing them as inspired compositions, and have studied them almost

exclusively on account of the doctrinal and moral teaching which they contain, and each sect has viewed them as a kind of armoury from which to draw weapons for the establishing its own particular opinions. In doing this they have forgotten that they are also historical documents of the highest order, the great majority of which even the opponents of Christianity concede to have been composed prior to the conclusion of the first century of the Christian era, and many of them at a much earlier period. [022]

Of these writings four are universally admitted to be genuine, and to have been composed prior to the year 60 of our era. Four more are genuine beyond all reasonable doubt, and of two more the evidence in favour of their authenticity is very strong. The Apocalypse, which is also admitted to be genuine, although not strictly an historical document, can be rendered valuable for the purposes of history. Of the remaining writings the genuineness is disputed; but whether genuine or not, it is impossible to deny their antiquity, and that they are faithful representations of the ideas of those who wrote them. In fact the names of their authors are of no great importance in the present controversy, when the writings themselves bear so decisively the marks of originality. Thus the epistle of James, by whomsoever written, bears the most unquestionable marks of the most primitive antiquity. It is in fact a document of the earliest form of Christianity,—in one word, the Jewish form, before the Church was finally separated from the synagogue.

Such are our historical materials. Little justice has been done to their value in the writings of Christian apologists. As included in the Canon of the New Testament, it has been for the most part the practice to view them as standing in need of defence, rather than as being the mainstay of the argument for historical Christianity, and constituting its central position. [023]

It will be admitted that it will be impossible for me to do full justice to such a subject in a work like the present. To bring out all the treasures of evidence respecting primitive Christianity,

and the foundation of the Christian Church which these writings contain, the whole subject would require to be unfolded in a distinct and separate treatise exclusively devoted to the subject. Still, however, this work would be very incomplete if I did not accept the challenge so boldly thrown down to us, and show that Christianity rests on an historical attestation of the highest order. To this I propose devoting the six concluding chapters of this work.

I intend, therefore, in the first place to examine the value of the historical documents of the New Testament, and show that several of the epistles take rank as the highest form of historical documents, and present us with what is to all intents and purposes a large mass of contemporaneous evidence as to the primitive beliefs, and the original foundation of the Christian Church. In doing so I propose to treat them in the same manner as all other similar historical documents are treated.

I shall then show that these documents afford a substantial testimony to all the great facts of Christianity, and especially to the existence of miraculous powers in the Church, and that the various Churches were from the very earliest period in possession of an oral account of the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ substantially the same as that which is now embodied in the Gospels; and that this oral Gospel was habitually used for the purposes of instruction. Further, that this oral Gospel was a substantial embodiment of the beliefs of the primitive followers of Jesus, and that the Church as a community was a body especially adapted for handing down correctly the account of the primitive beliefs respecting its origin, and that the peculiar position in which it was placed compelled it to do so.

I shall further show on the evidence furnished by those epistles, the genuineness of which unbelievers do not dispute, that from the earliest commencement of Christianity the whole body of believers, without distinction of sect or party, believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a fact, and viewed it not only as

the groundwork on which Christianity rested, but as the one sole and only reason for the existence of the Christian Church. I shall be able also to prove on the same evidence that a considerable number of the followers of Jesus were persuaded that they had seen him alive after his crucifixion, and that his appearance was an actual resurrection from the dead. The same writings prove to demonstration that this was the universal belief of the whole Christian community, and that the Church was established on its basis.

These things being established as the basis for my reasonings, I shall proceed to prove that it is impossible that these beliefs of the Church could have owed their origin to any possible form of delusion; but that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was an historical fact, and that no other supposition can give an adequate account of the phenomenon.

Having proved that the greatest of all the miracles which are recorded in the Gospels is an historical fact, I have got rid of the *à priori* difficulty with which the acceptance of the Gospels as genuine historical accounts is attended; but further, if it is an historical fact that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead, it is in the highest degree probable that other supernatural occurrences would be connected with his person. I shall therefore proceed to restore the Gospels to their place as history, and to show that even on the principles of the opponents of Christianity, they have every claim to be accepted as true accounts of the action and teaching of Jesus Christ as it was transmitted by the different Churches, partly in an oral, and partly in a written form. I shall also show that even if they were composed at the late dates which are assigned to them by opponents, they were yet written within the period which is strictly historical, while tradition was fresh and reminiscences vivid, and long before it was possible that a great mass of facts which must have formed the basis of the existence of the Christian Church could have been superseded by a number of mythic and legendary creations. Having placed

these facts on a firm foundation, I shall proceed to consider their accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to estimate its historical nature.

The proof that the greatest miracle recorded in the Gospels, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is an event which has really occurred, places the remainder of them in point of credibility in the same position as the facts of ordinary history; and they must be accepted and regarded in conformity with the usual methods of testing evidence.

## Chapter II. Definitions of Terms.

Nothing has more contributed to import an almost hopeless confusion of thought into the entire controversy about miracles than the ambiguous senses in which the most important terms connected with it have been employed, both by theologians and men of science, by the defenders of revelation as well as by its opponents. Of these terms the words “nature,” “natural,” “law,” “force,” “supernatural,” “superhuman,” “miracle,” and “miraculous,” are the most conspicuous. It is quite clear that unless we use these terms in a definite and uniform sense, we shall be fighting the air. The neglect to do so has thrown the greatest obscurity over the entire subject. This vague and uncertain use of them is not confined to writers on theological subjects, but is diffused over a large number of scientific works. My object in the present chapter will be, not to lay down strictly accurate definitions of all the terms used in the controversy (for this in the present state of thought on the subject is hardly possible) but to endeavour to assign a definite meaning to those which it will be necessary for me to employ, and to draw attention to some of the fallacies which a vague use of language has introduced.

First: No terms are more frequently used in this controversy than the words “nature” and “natural.” They are constantly used as if their meaning was definite and invariable. Nothing is more common than to use the expression “laws of nature,” and to speak of miracles as involving contradictions, violations, and suspensions of the laws and order of nature, as though there was no danger of our falling into fallacies of reasoning by classing wholly different orders of phenomena under a common name.

What do we mean by the terms “nature” and “natural”? It is evident that no satisfactory result can come from reasonings on

this subject, unless the parties to the discussion agree to attach to those words a steady and consistent meaning. Are we in fact under the expression "nature" to include both matter and its phenomena, and mind and its phenomena? Is nature to include all things which exist, including their causes; laws, and forces; or is it to be restricted to matter, its laws and forces? Or is it to include all things that exist, except God? I need hardly observe that the laying down some clear and definite principles on this subject is vital to the present controversy.

Again: What do we mean by the laws of nature? How do we distinguish between the laws and the forces of nature? Do the laws of nature, in the sense in which that expression is used by science, possess any efficient power whatever; or ought not efficiency to be predicated only of the forces of nature, and never of its laws? Or when we speak of the forces of nature, do we recognise any distinction between material and moral forces, or do we confound phenomena so utterly differing in outward character, and on whose difference some of the most important points of the controversy about miracles rest, under a common name? What again do we mean by the order of nature? Is it its material order; or does it include the order of the moral universe? Until we can agree to attach a definite meaning to these expressions, to argue that miracles are contrary to nature, or involve a suspension of its laws, or a violation of its order, or even to affirm the contrary position, is fighting the air. Yet this I may almost say is the present aspect of the controversy.

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Again: What do we intend, when we use the different expressions, "miracles," "supernatural," "superhuman," or events occurring out of the order of nature? It is evident that whether they point to any real distinctions or not, it is necessary to employ them with consistency.

The mere enumeration of these questions makes it clear that by a vague and indefinite use of terms, or by attaching to them meanings which they cannot accurately be made to bear, we may

unconsciously assume the entire question at issue.

First: With respect to the terms “nature” and “natural.” What do we include under them? Bishop Butler considers that the latter term is satisfied by attaching to it the meaning “usual.” Nature then would mean the ordinary course of things. But such a meaning would by no means satisfy the requirements of modern science, philosophy, or theology.

One obvious sense to attach to the word “nature” is to use it to denote the entire mass of phenomena as contemplated by physical science. In this point of view it would include matter, its forces, and its laws, and embrace the entire range of those phenomena and forces where action is necessary; and into the conception of which neither volition nor freedom enters. If “nature” and “natural” had been used only in this sense, it would have saved us from a great mass of inconclusive reasoning. But this is far from being the case. Not only are they used to include matter, its laws and forces, but also the whole phenomena of mind. [029]

To this use of the terms the Duke of Argyll has given no inconsiderable countenance in his admirable work, “The Reign of Law,” especially in the sixth chapter. He uses the term law as alike applicable to the operations of mind and matter, and this of course implies that the whole of our mental phenomena form a portion of nature and its order. He is led to this, among other considerations, by the use which we make of the word “natural” as applied to the results of all kinds of mental operations. The question may fairly be asked, Are not the works wrought by man in nature, or is not the building of its nest by a bird, or of its comb by the bee, a natural operation? If so, man, bird, and bee, must form a portion of nature, and their various actions, of its order.

In a popular point of view such expressions involve no difficulty, and as a mere verbal distinction the whole question would not be worth the labour of discussion. But in a question like the one now under consideration, which requires the utmost accuracy

both of thought and reasoning, the case is far different. The classing together of phenomena which differ so entirely as mind and matter, under a common term, leads to the inference that there is no essential difference between them, which involves at the outset a *petitio principii* of the entire question under definition. I shall have occasion repeatedly to point out in the course of this work the number of fallacious reasonings which have been introduced into the question about the possibility and the credibility of miracles by thus including under a common term phenomena utterly different in character. It would be far better to get rid of words so vague as "nature" and "natural" in this discussion, and substitute for them terms of which it is impossible to mistake the meaning, than to employ them in senses which are simply ambiguous and misleading. But of this more hereafter.

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What then are we to do with man? Is he a part of nature and its order? I reply that man is within material nature as far as regards his bodily organization; but that he is outside, or above it, and belongs to a different order, as far as his rational action, his volition, and his moral powers are concerned. All that I am contending for is that a clear distinction must be preserved between the necessary action of the forces of material nature, and the voluntary action of man; and that terms must be used which accurately denote this distinction. Matter, its forces and laws, involve the conception of necessary action. They act in a particular manner because they cannot help so acting. With action purely intellectual I am not concerned, but all moral action is voluntary. Man as an agent can act or forbear acting; matter cannot. This distinction is of the highest importance, and must not be lost sight of behind a confused use of such terms as natural, law, force, or order of nature, applied indeterminately to the necessary action of material agents, and the voluntary action of moral ones.

It will doubtless be objected by a certain order of philosophy that all mental and moral force is only some special modification

of material force, and consequently that there is no distinction between material and moral action, or between material and moral force, and that the words “nature” and “natural” are correctly applied to both alike, as being simple manifestations of the same original force. To this it will be sufficient to reply, first: that this is an assertion only, and never has been nor can be proved. Secondly: that it contradicts the highest of all our certitudes, the direct testimony of consciousness, which affirms that we live under a law of freedom, wholly different from the necessary laws of material nature. Thirdly: that it contradicts the universal experience of mankind, as embodied in the primary laws of human language and human thought. To assume this at the commencement of the argument is to take for granted the point which requires to be proved. [031]

It would be quite out of place in a treatise like the present to attempt to discuss the question of the origin of the free agency and the moral nature of man. It is sufficient for the purpose to observe that, however voluntary agency may have originated, it is a simple fact that it exists in the universe, and that its phenomena belong to an order of its own. It is no mere theory, but a fact, that man not only is capable of modifying the action of the forces of the material universe, but that he has modified them, and has produced results utterly different from those which would have followed from their simple action. To use terms in this controversy which overlook this plain and obvious fact, can lead to no satisfactory result.

Are then the actions of man, the bird, and the bee, properly designated as natural? In a popular use of language the question may be one purely verbal; but when we are dealing with subjects requiring accurate thought, it is in the highest degree necessary to use language which does not confound the distinct phenomena of mind and matter under a common designation. Both together compose the universe; but each belongs to a different order of phenomena. The whole difficulty proceeds from the fact that

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both material forces which act in conformity with necessary laws, and moral ones which act in conformity with those of freedom, are united in the person of man.

Another order of thought uses the term “nature” as including everything that exists, even God; or in other words, it affirms that every thing which has existed and exists is a manifestation of Him. As this theory involves the denial of the personality of the Divine Being, it stands excluded from the question under consideration, namely, the credibility of miracles, which is utterly irrelevant, except on the assumption of the existence of a personal God. It ought to be observed, however, that while theism affirms that God and the universe, whether material or moral, are distinct, it fully recognises the fact that God is immanent in both the worlds of mind and matter, while at the same time he transcends them both. This is an important consideration, which is too often overlooked by both parties to the discussion.

Secondly: a still greater confusion has been introduced by a vague and indefinite use of the term “law,” and by confusing a number of utterly diverse phenomena under the designation of the “laws of nature.” It is absolutely necessary to trace this fallacy to its source. The Duke of Argyll tells us in his “Reign of Law” that there are five different senses at least in which this word is habitually used even in scientific writings. They are as follows:—

“First, we have law as applied simply to an observed order of facts.”

“Secondly, to that order as involving the action of some force or forces of which nothing more can be known.”

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“Thirdly, as applied to individual forces, the measure of whose operation has been more or less defined or ascertained.”

“Fourthly, as applied to those combinations of forces which have reference to the fulfilment of purposes or the discharge of functions.”

“Fifthly, as applied to abstract conceptions of the mind—not corresponding with any actual phenomena, but deduced therefrom as axioms of thought, necessary to an understanding of them. Law, in this sense, is a reduction of the phenomena, not merely to an order of facts, but to an order of thought.”

“These leading significations of the word Law,” says the Duke, “all circle round the three great questions which science asks of nature, the what, the how, and the why.”

“What are the facts in their established order?”

“How, *i.e.* from what physical causes does that order come to be? What relation do they bear to purpose, to the fulfilment of intention, to the discharge of function?”

Such are the multiform acceptations attached by scientific men to the term “law,” yet the Duke is not quite certain whether they may not be even more numerous. It is evident that if they are all imported into the question of the credibility of miracles, our position must resemble that of persons who are compelled to fight in the dark; and that the question whether an occurrence is natural or supernatural, whether it is contrary to, or a violation of the laws of nature, or above nature, and many others which enter into this controversy must be without definite meaning. It is clear that unless we can restrict the word “law” to one, or at most, two definite meanings, we shall get into hopeless confusion, or to speak more correctly, we shall open the gate wide for the introduction of any number of fallacies.

The primary conception implied by the term “law” is unquestionably one which is strictly applicable to man and his actions, and can only be applied metaphorically, and in some systems of thought after a considerable change of meaning, to the facts and phenomena of the material universe. A law is a rule of action for human conduct and nothing more. Such rules of conduct for the most part pre-suppose that they are imposed by some external authority, which has the right or the power to enforce obedience to them; or else that the person obeying them has an inward

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feeling that it is right to do so, and knows that his conscience will reproach him for the omission. But law, strictly speaking, is simply the rule of action itself, as for instance, an Act of Parliament; but as in practice all such rules are enforced by a sanction of some kind, our conception of a law is also united with that of a lawgiver, who has both the right and the power to enforce it.

It follows therefore that such a conception is essentially a moral one. It is also intimately united with the knowledge that we possess the power to act or forbear acting in conformity with its dictates, and, if we prefer it, of taking the consequences of disobedience. But when such a conception is transferred to material nature it loses a considerable portion of its original significance.

In its application therefore to physical science, it may with strict propriety be used to denote an invariable order of events: and if the human analogy could hold in physics it might be used to include the power which originated and enforced them. But as the consideration of will or purpose forms no portion of strictly physical science, and is expressly excluded from it, the term law as used by it ought to denote the invariable order of sequences, and not to include the forces which generate them. Unless this distinction is carefully observed, we shall be in danger of introducing into our reasonings human analogies to which there is nothing corresponding in nature viewed as a mere body of unintelligent forces.

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The use of the term "law" in physical science ought to be confined to denote the invariable sequences of the material phenomena. Physicists profess to know nothing of efficient causation; or of a lawgiver standing outside his laws and possessing power to enforce them. The whole question of intelligent agency or purpose lies in a region outside their province. Law, as far as physical science is acquainted with it, can consist only of a set of antecedents, followed by an invariable set of consequents. Of any inherent efficacy in these antecedents to produce their con-

sequents, it can affirm nothing. A very popular philosophy even denies the power of the human mind to penetrate beyond this, and affirms that its entire knowledge is limited to phenomena.

But physical science also deals with forces. These, and not its laws, are its true principles of causation. Mere invariable sequences can effect nothing; but forces, such as gravitation, heat, electricity, and the entire body of chemical forces, or whatever force they may ultimately be resolved into, can effect much. They are in fact the antecedents of which the invariable order of events are the consequents. Respecting the ultimate principle of force, or what is its real nature, or how it is directed, or came to be, physical science is silent. All that it can do is to observe the order of their occurrence, measure their quantities, and tabulate their results. By this means it rises to the conception of what are called the laws of nature.

If in the present controversy the word law had been used in this sense only, it would have been wholly unexceptionable. But [036] it becomes far otherwise when the idea of force or efficiency is introduced into it. Nothing is more common in the reasonings of those who attempt to prove that miracles are impossible, than to import into the term law the idea of force, or efficient causation, even at the very time when the presence of intelligent action is denied. It is this which imparts to this class of reasonings their entire speciousness. The laws of material nature are continually spoken of as though they were forces which are energetic in the universe, and to the energy of which all things owe their present form; or in other words, it is assumed that the laws of nature are causes which have produced by their unintelligent action the present order of the universe.

Nothing however can be clearer than that a law of nature, in the sense in which purely physical science can take cognizance of one, can effectuate nothing. What can an invariable order of sequences effect? Before the idea of efficiency can be attached to law, the conception of force must be introduced into it. Modern

controversy, however, is constantly in the habit of speaking of the laws of nature as though they were efficient agents. We hear of creation by law, evolution by law, of results brought about by the action of invariable laws, and a countless number of assertions of a similar description. To such expressions in a popular sense when no accuracy of expression is required, there is no objection; but when they are introduced into the controversy respecting the credibility of miracles, they create nothing but confusion. What is really meant is, that such results are brought about by the action of forces which act in conformity with invariable laws, but the idea of intelligence and volition is carefully excluded from the conception. It is clearly inaccurate to speak of laws reigning. Laws do not reign even in political societies; but only the power which is able to enact and enforce them. In material nature the only things which possess efficiency are its forces.

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There can be no objection to the use of the expression, “the laws of mind,” when care is taken to use language which clearly distinguishes between them and unintelligent and necessary sequences of material nature. But when the term “law” is without any qualification applied to both sets of phenomena alike, it is certain either to lead to fallacious reasoning, or to involve the assumption of the point at issue. Whatever may be the origin of the moral and spiritual in man, it is certain that as they at present exist in him, they stand out in the strongest contrast with the forces which act upon material things, and with the laws of their action. Nothing can be more entirely different in character than the force of gravitation and the principles of volition and self-consciousness, or than the unconscious forces of material nature and those principles which constitute our rationality. If we affirm that the forces of mind act in conformity with law, it ought to be clearly understood that they act in conformity with a law of their own, which affords free action to the principle of volition. Otherwise there is the greatest danger that the expression will involve the covert assumption of the truth of the doctrine of

philosophical necessity, or in other words, that all mental and material forces are of the same character, that is to say, that they are both equally necessary. This involves the assumption of the very point on which the entire controversy turns, for if moral and material forces and laws are all alike, it destroys the conception of a God, and the significance of a miracle.

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This brings us to the conception of force, what is it? Various definitions of it have been given sufficiently accurate for practical purposes. It should be observed however that physical science can know nothing of it except as a phenomenon. The determination of its nature, and its ultimate cause lie entirely beyond its limits. Many facts respecting it, have been ascertained and tabulated. Many of its manifestations, which bear a different phenomenal aspect, it has ascertained to be capable of transmutation into one another. But it must never be forgotten that it is able to affirm nothing respecting the source in which the forces of the universe originate. All that it can affirm is, that they do exist. The original conception of force is one, however, which we derive, not from the material universe, but from the action of our own minds. We are conscious that we are efficient agents, and that definite results follow the action of our wills. This gives us the conception of force. We apply it in a metaphorical sense to certain things which we observe in the material universe and call them forces, having abstracted from our primary idea of force the conception of volition. But all that we really know about force tends to prove that its origin is mental and not material.

It is of the utmost importance to preserve a clear distinction between the unconscious forces of matter and the intelligent ones of mind; otherwise we shall inevitably be misled by such expressions as "the forces of nature." It is impossible to argue the question unless the distinction is admitted as a fact, whatever theory may be held about their origin. It is absurd to confound principles so distinct as heat, or gravitation, or electricity, with those which produce the most disinterested moral actions, and

[039] designate them by the common term “natural forces.” In common language we are in no danger of error when we speak of the force of conscience, or the force of a motive; but in discussions like the present, where such expressions really involve the assumption of the whole controversy, it is absurd to classify such phenomena, and the unintelligent forces of matter under a common designation, unless it can be demonstrated that they are all manifestations of the same power.

We come now to the much vexed question as to the meaning to be attached to the words “miracle” and “miraculous;” and the terms closely allied to them, “supernatural” and “superhuman.” Is there any valid distinction between miracles and supernatural occurrences? Are, in fact, all miracles supernatural occurrences, and all supernatural occurrences miracles? The determination of this question is closely connected with an important point which will be considered hereafter, viz., whether a miracle could have any evidential value if it were brought about by a special adaptation of the known or unknown forces of material nature.

Let it be observed that we are not discussing this question as a purely abstract one, but in reference to the truth of Christianity. What miracles may be in themselves, I shall not inquire; but in relation to the question before us, what we mean when we call an occurrence a miracle ought to be made sufficiently clear and distinct. In this controversy it would greatly tend to precision if we used the term “miracle” as distinguished from an occurrence which is supernatural or superhuman, to denote only those supernatural occurrences which have an evidential value in connection with the evidences of a divine revelation, since there may be supernatural occurrences which would not be in any proper sense evidential.

[040] But the further question arises, Is it necessary in order to constitute an event a miracle that it should be one which transcends the known or the unknown forces of material nature to have produced? It is clear that to constitute an event a miracle it must

involve supernatural or superhuman agency of some kind; that is to say, it must be either supernatural in the mode of its production as an objective fact, or superhuman in its productive elements, by which I mean, that it must be preceded by an announcement that it is going to occur, which must be beyond the sphere of human knowledge. In order to render a supernatural event evidential, or in other words to constitute it a miracle, it must not only consist of an external objective fact, but its occurrence must be unknown beforehand, and take place at the bidding of the agent. Such previous announcement, or prediction, is necessary to render even a supernatural occurrence in the strictest sense of the word a miracle. The prediction of some occurrence in physical nature previously unknown may therefore convert such an event into an evidential miracle, although the occurrence itself as a mere objective fact may have been brought about by some known or unknown forces of material nature. To render it such it would be necessary that the knowledge of the occurrence should be clearly beyond the bounds of existing knowledge. Thus, if any person, when the science of astronomy was utterly unknown, had announced beforehand the day and the hour of the occurrence of the next two transits of Venus, and the various places on the earth's surface in which they would be visible, and if the events had taken place accordingly, this would have unquestionably proved the presence of superhuman knowledge. The only question which in such a case would require to be determined would be whether [041] such a knowledge must have been communicated by God, or by some being inferior to God. As however none of the miracles recorded in the New Testament have the smallest appearance of being of this character, I need not further discuss a supposed case. My only reason for referring to it is, that if it is supposable that any of the miracles recorded in the New Testament could, at some future day, be shown to have been due to a combination of physical forces, their occurring instantly at the direct command of the agent would still give them an evidential value.

But it is clear that the miracles recorded in the New Testament, if caused by material forces at all, could not have been due to their ordinary action. They must have been due either to an unknown combination of known forces, or to the calling of unknown forces into activity, or to the immediate agency of the divine mind. It is clear therefore that their occurrence as objective facts proves the presence of mind acting in some way on the material forces of nature. To determine the mode in which this action must have taken place has nothing to do with the question of miracles, or the reality of their occurrence.

A miracle therefore may, for all practical purposes of this argument, be defined as an occurrence which cannot be effectuated by the ordinary action of the known material forces of the Universe, and could only have been brought about by the agency of intelligent volition; and which is preceded by an announcement on the part of the agent that it is about to happen or takes place directly on his bidding. The latter element, as I have observed, is essential to constitute the occurrence an evidential miracle. Otherwise in our ignorance of what unknown forces may exist in the universe, we could have no certainty that the event was not a mere unusual occurrence effected by some already existing but unknown forces. To the highest form of the miracles in the New Testament, however, such an idea would be inapplicable.

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It may perhaps here be objected that in laying down this definition of a miracle, I have not sufficiently identified its performance with the governing power of the universe, *i.e.* God; but that if supernatural agents exist, inferior to God, it may be due to their operation; and consequently that it may not be evidential of a divine commission. This objection will be fully considered in a subsequent portion of this work.

A supernatural event is one which exceeds and which cannot be effected by any force existing in material nature. But there must always be a difficulty in determining whether an occurrence, viewed as a bare objective fact, belongs to that class of

events which is supernatural, or only to that which is unusual. This will always be the case until our knowledge of the forces of the universe is so complete that we can ascertain for certain what are the limits of their possible action, and whether it is possible to bring into action any forces that may exist, but are unknown to us. In strict language therefore, it is impossible to be certain whether an occurrence, as a bare objective fact, is supernatural, until we are acquainted with the possible action of every force that exists in the universe. This difficulty, however, is one that is entirely theoretical, and has not the smallest practical importance with respect to the miracles of the New Testament. Men have had several thousand years' experience of what can be effected by the ordinary forces of material nature. Occurrences which lie beyond their power to effectuate prove the presence of intelligence and volition. The introduction of an unknown force can only be accomplished by a being who, although he may be immanent in nature, is yet capable of controlling its material forces. Occurrences therefore which transcend the power of the known forces existing in the universe to accomplish, whether they are material or human, may for all practical purposes be viewed as supernatural; that is to say, they denote the presence and agency of a being who is possessed of power, intelligence, and volition. Whether that being be human, superhuman, or divine, must be determined by an intelligent exercise of our reason. [043]

It is useless to discuss this question further. We are dealing with a very definite question, the miraculous events recorded in the Gospels. With respect to the great majority of them, there can be no doubt as to their being supernatural occurrences, if they took place precisely as they are recorded. We know enough of the ordinary forces of material nature to be certain that the instantaneous cure of a blind or leprous man by a word does not lie within the sphere of their operation. Such an event must denote the special interposition of an extremely high degree of intelligence and power. Common sense will affirm that it could

only be brought about by the intervention of the supreme power of the universe, *i.e.* God.

In this sense every supernatural occurrence may be said to be likewise evidential, when we have ascertained for certain that it is due to supernatural causes, and that it cannot have been brought about by the action of unintelligent forces, or by those which are capable of being modified by the agency of man. But in that case it would only prove the presence and intervention of a being who is capable of controlling the unintelligent forces of nature. The real difficulty, as I have observed, is to prove the supernatural nature of the occurrence. But although, if it was certainly supernatural, it would prove the intervention of a supernatural agent, it would say nothing as to the purpose for which such an intervention took place. It follows therefore, that to constitute a supernatural occurrence in the strict sense of the term a miracle, it must take place after an announcement that it is going to happen, and take place at the bidding of the agent who performs it.

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It is highly important, in considering the miracles of the Gospels, that the distinction between a merely supernatural event and an evidential miracle should be kept steadily in view. All creative acts would be supernatural events, but they would not necessarily be evidential miracles. The incarnation, and other occurrences mentioned in the New Testament, are supernatural ones; but to mix them up with evidential miracles is simply to invite confusion of thought. Another class of supernatural occurrences mentioned in the New Testament seem to have been wrought, not for purposes directly evidential, but to awaken attention; and another class of supernatural endowments were vouchsafed, to render it possible to lay deep in human society the foundations of the Church as a visible and permanent institution. Such occurrences are not directly but indirectly evidential, and it will be necessary carefully to distinguish between them and occurrences brought about for directly evidential purposes.

To keep this distinction clear, I shall designate the last by the term “miracle.” A miracle is supernatural in two ways: namely, in the agency which produced the objective fact, and in the announcement of its occurrence.

The common definition of a miracle, as a violation or a suspension of the laws of nature, is open to very grave objections. The question, as I have observed, at once arises, what is included under nature? It also assumes that we are acquainted with the mode in which miraculous agency must be exerted; which we are not. Other definitions which have been proposed take for granted positions which those who undertake to prove the credibility of miracles ought never to concede. The plain fact is, that we are simply ignorant of the mode in which God acts on material nature; and every definition must be faulty which assumes that we have that knowledge. To say that miracles must involve even a suspension of the laws of nature introduces a needless difficulty. No law or force of nature need be suspended in its action to render the occurrence of a supernatural event possible. All that is necessary is that forces should be introduced which are capable of overbalancing the action of opposing forces. It is extremely inaccurate to affirm that the force of gravitation must be suspended in order to render possible either walking on the water, or an ascent into the sky. [045]

It is equally unwise and unphilosophical to affirm that God cannot work a miracle by the use of intermediate agencies, *i.e.* by the partial employment of the forces of the material universe. It is true that in most of the miracles recorded in the New Testament we cannot affirm the use of such media, although we observe an economy in the use of divine power: *i.e.* no power is exerted beyond that which is necessary to produce the particular result in question. But in the Old Testament the use of such media is unquestionably affirmed. To lay down in our definition of a miracle a particular theory as to the mode in which it must be accomplished, involves the whole subject in needless difficulties.

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This question has been obscured by representing a miracle as performed by the intervention of a higher law, superseding the action of a lower one. This introduces the conception of force into the idea of law, and leads to confusion of thought. Laws, or the invariable sequences between phenomena, are neither forces nor powers. The counteraction of one force by another is an event of daily occurrence. All that is needful for the working of a miracle is the intervention of a force or mental energy which is capable of acting on matter, and of overbalancing those ordinary forces which would produce a contrary result.

It has also been urged that miracles may obey a law of miracles. The best illustration of this idea is that which has been supplied from the supposed operations of Mr. Babbage's calculating machine. He supposes that a machine might be constructed which could go on grinding out a particular set of results for a long, yet definite period of time; then by the operation of the same machine, that a fresh order might be introduced; and afterwards that it might revert to the original one; and that this operation might be continued for ever. If therefore the great Author of nature had so planned the machine of the universe that whenever a miracle was requisite in His scheme of Providence this abnormal event occurred, like the new series introduced into the calculating mill, in that case miracles might be said to follow a definite law, which might be designated the law and order of miraculous intervention.

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It is impossible to deny the ingenuity of this theory, but unfortunately it is not only one which takes for granted that the perfection of mechanical contrivance is the only thing that the Creator had in view in the production of the universe, but even if this were an unquestionable fact, it could afford us no help with respect to all the most important miracles recorded in the New Testament. How is it possible, I ask, to account for many of our Lord's miracles on such a supposition? It is expressly affirmed that this supernatural energy was frequently made to depend on

the faith of the person who invoked His help. Could any miracle-working mill be even conceived of, which could bring out, as part of the normal law of its operations, the cure of blind, deaf, and leprous men by a word, or effectuate His own resurrection from the dead, or ascension into Heaven? Such occurrences could not be produced by the action of any machine which has the smallest analogy to a calculating mill. But further: such an operation would be impotent to answer the purposes of a miracle, unless the particular result was announced beforehand by one who was completely ignorant that the machine was capable of producing such extraordinary results. This ignorance would likewise have to be extended to those to whom the announcement was made. It would also be necessary that the announcer should proclaim that on a particular day and hour the machine would grind out the particular result of the cure of a blind man, or a resurrection from the dead. The ability to do this would be utterly abnormal, and impossible ever to be ground out by the self-acting agency of any conceivable machine, however cleverly constructed. Mr. Babbage's miracle-working mill, however ingenious a conception, must therefore be dismissed as incapable of affording us the smallest help in the present argument.

The term "superhuman" remains to be considered. It need not detain us long. Superhuman implies a result brought about by the intervention of a being superior to man. Whether such an agent be divine or otherwise can only be determined by the exercise of our reason. It has been objected that the agency which produces an earthquake is a superhuman agency, that is, it exceeds the powers of man to produce it. Granted: but this has no bearing on the subject under discussion. When we use the word "superhuman" we always mean by it, not the action of the unintelligent forces of material nature, but of a being possessed of intelligence and will. [048]

There is a large number of other subjects having an intimate bearing on the correct definition of the terms habitually used

in this controversy, and which greatly modify their meaning. These however will best be considered when I enter on the direct discussion of the possibility and the credibility of miracles.

# Chapter III. The Supernatural Elements Contained in the New Testament: In What Do They Consist? And What View Do Its Writers Take Respecting Them?

Before entering on the general question of miracles, it is only reasonable to inquire of the writers of the New Testament what they have to say on the subject. Their opinion of the nature and character of the supernatural occurrences which they have reported is certainly of more value than that of all other writers put together. St. John and St. Paul must have been in the habit of coming in contact with unbelievers. It would be most important if we could ascertain the mode adopted by them of commending Christianity to their acceptance, and what use was made by them of the supernatural power with which they professed to be endowed.

First: It is impossible to read the New Testament without arriving at the conclusion that the superhuman character which is ascribed to Jesus Christ is perfectly unique, and differs entirely from that which is ascribed to any other person. Others wrought miracles; but they were men like ourselves. But in the person of Jesus Christ the supernatural is represented as inherent. To say that he possessed the power of working miracles, is an inadequate statement of the fact. Although he embodies the perfection of human nature with all its finite limitations, the supernatural and the divine take up their abode in his personality. Whenever our [050]

Lord is represented as working miracles, he is always represented as performing them by a power which was inherent in himself. This is never once attributed to his followers. The supernatural action which is ascribed to Jesus Christ must be viewed, as a case distinct and separate, by itself. The miracles performed by him are not only evidential, but also portions of his supernatural manifestation.

According to the author of the fourth Gospel, our Lord himself rarely designated them by either of the three terms by which miracles are usually designated in the New Testament, viz., signs, wonders, and mighty works (σημεῖα, τέρατα, δυνάμεις). He almost uniformly called them "Works" (ἔργα). An important distinction is here intended. Our Lord did not view his miracles as a separate class of actions by themselves, but as portions of his ordinary superhuman working, and as having a distinct relation to his entire character. Four passages will be sufficient to show this clearly. "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "If ye believe not me, believe the works." "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" When contemplated by others only, they assume the form of signs and wonders: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It is highly important that we should keep steadily in view that the divine character attributed to Jesus is by no means restricted to the performance of miracles; but that it extends throughout his entire working, and that the two together constitute an harmonious whole. It pertains no less to its moral and spiritual aspects, than to the displays which he made of a power capable of controlling nature. Even in this portion of his working, he draws special attention to its moral and spiritual aspects. According to his view of his own mighty works, they not only exhibited a power of controlling nature, but were uniformly invested with a moral and spiritual environment. Throughout the Gospels he is represented as exhibiting a greatness and dignity,

a purity, holiness, humility and benevolence, so far transcending that of other men, as to constitute him what may be almost designated a moral and spiritual miracle. Perfection in the moral and spiritual world is as essentially superhuman, as power over nature is supernatural. In considering the miracles which have been attributed to Jesus Christ, it is important to bear in mind the manner in which they stand related to his entire superhuman character. Otherwise we shall fail to observe the double aspect which they bear. They were manifestations of the divine, which dwelt within him, and also they possessed an evidential value.

I shall occasionally use the term “superhuman” instead of “divine,” as applied to Jesus Christ, because for the purposes of this argument it will be unnecessary for me to define the precise degree of divine character which the evangelists intended to attribute to him. To ascertain this is the proper function of the theologian, by comparing together the facts and statements of the New Testament. It is sufficient for my present purpose to observe that the perusal of the Gospels leaves the inevitable impression on the mind that it was the purpose of their writers to depict a divine character in union with a human one—a supernatural power acting within the regions of the natural. This covers alike the aspects of character presented of him both in the Synoptic and the Johannine Gospels.

Although our Lord speaks of his actions by the common name of “works” (ἔργα), when the sacred authors speak generally of miracles, they apply to them, as I have observed, three distinct terms, signs, mighty works, and wonders (σημεῖα, δυνάμεις, τέρατα). Each of these denotes different aspects in which they contemplated miracles. The sign included the supernatural fact wrought on external nature with the whole of its moral environment. In this point of view, the “sign” was the direct proof of a divine mission. It is worthy of observation that the author of the fourth Gospel has uniformly described the supernatural actions which he has ascribed to Jesus Christ by this term. The [052]

expression "mighty works" is intended to bring under our notice the power which was displayed in the performance of a miracle, thereby directly connecting it with a superhuman agency. The term "wonder" contemplates a supernatural event in its simple aspect as an occurrence pre-eminently fitted to command attention to the person who was capable of performing it. We may therefore conclude that the writers of the New Testament considered that these were the three special functions of miracles. It is quite possible that the same miracle might have fulfilled all three at the same time: but as three such functions of supernatural occurrences are distinctly stated, it is quite conceivable that there were occasions when they were limited to some one of these in particular.

It is evident that our Lord attached the highest importance to a miracle contemplated as a "sign," *i.e.* to the moral environment with which it was connected. This, although more definitely brought out in St. John's Gospel, is also distinctly borne witness to by the Synoptics. It forms the ground of the reiterated refusal of our Lord to comply with the demand of the Pharisees that he would show some sign from heaven, as a proof of his divine mission. His miracles combined in one the two conceptions of signs and mighty works. None of them were mere prodigies devoid of a moral aspect.

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It is worthy of consideration whether our Lord's primary purpose in performing supernatural actions was always directly evidential. I have already drawn attention to their twofold aspect, as divine manifestations, and as evidential miracles. A considerable number of the miracles recorded in the Gospels are represented as performed by him because he was moved with compassion. These evidently belong to the former class of his supernatural workings. But although this was their primary object it did not deprive them of an evidential value. But there is also another remarkable class of supernatural actions attributed to him, *viz.*, those in which he is recorded to have expressly

forbidden the persons whom he healed to publish the fact. As it is evident that these miracles could only have become extensively known by the persons cured disobeying his orders, it is clear that they could not have been directly performed for evidential purposes, but were the manifestations of the divine which resided in his person.

Such are the supernatural actions attributed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, respecting which as a whole, whether performed for purposes avowedly evidential or not, he himself affirms, that they bore witness of him, that the Father had sent him. Two other classes of miracles, affirmed to have been performed by his followers, require notice.

The whole of these are stated to have been performed by a delegated power and commission. The great majority of them are described as having been performed in the name of Jesus Christ. They are affirmed to have been performed for two purposes; [054] to prove the divine commission of those who wrought them, and to attest the reality of their Master's resurrection, by giving exhibitions of his present power. These therefore are distinctly affirmed to have been evidential miracles. A few others were providential interferences in favour of the infant Church. There is also another class of supernatural actions referred to in the Acts of the Apostles, such as the passing of St. Peter's shadow, and the supposed supernatural effects resulting from it, and the conveyance from St. Paul's person of handkerchiefs and aprons to the sick, and one or two other instances. These involve special manifestations of supernatural power, and belong to supernatural occurrences in their aspect of wonders, or very extraordinary events, and as such were specially adapted for drawing attention to the message of the Apostles. But the New Testament also affirms another and very peculiar form of the manifestation of the supernatural, as then actually existing in the Apostolic Church. I need hardly say that I allude to the various gifts of the Spirit, with which large numbers of its members believed themselves

to be endowed. I shall not consider them any further here, as it will be necessary for me to enter largely on the subject in a subsequent portion of this work. Their use and purpose was to lay deep the foundations of the Christian Church. All that will be necessary in this place is to draw attention to them as a distinct order of supernatural manifestations, to the existence of which the writers of the New Testament are pledged.

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There is also one further form of supernatural manifestation affirmed by them, namely, a great moral and spiritual transformation effected in those who cordially embraced the Gospel. This is most positively stated by St. Paul to have been a fact constantly taking place under his own observation. It is only necessary for me to notice its existence, as it is a form of supernatural manifestation, the truth or falsehood of which forms no portion of the present controversy.

Such then are the various forms of the supernatural, to the existence of which the writers of the New Testament are pledged as objective facts. To these only, and not to any conceivable or possible ones, is the defender of Christianity committed. If their occurrence can be shown to have been impossible, either on grounds of science or philosophy, or because human testimony is of so fallible a character that it cannot establish the truth of a supernatural occurrence, it follows that the whole of Christianity must have been an invention of a purely human origin, that it can have no claim to the designation of a divine revelation, and that it is hardly possible to free its inventors from the charge of fraud. No mere paring down of its supernatural elements will enable us to escape from this conclusion.

I must now proceed to consider whether the writers of the New Testament rest the truth of Christianity on the evidence of miracles alone, and what position they occupy respecting it.

If we assume for the sake of argument that the fourth Gospel is the work of the Apostle John, it is evident that neither Jesus Christ nor the Apostle accepted the theory which has been pro-

pounded by some divines, and readily accepted by unbelievers, that the evidence of his divine mission was exclusively founded on the testimony of miracles. To state the point distinctly:—This Gospel places the evidence afforded by our Lord's own divine person, *i.e.* the moral evidence of his mission, in the first rank, [056] and his miraculous works in the second.

As this is a point of considerable importance, and one to which its proper weight has been seldom attached, I will enumerate the chief statements made in this Gospel on this subject.

First: The author of the Gospel directly affirms that Jesus is “the light of men;” and he himself distinctly affirms of himself, “He that seeth me seeth Him that sent me.” “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” (John xii. 45, 46.) Again, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John viii. 12.) It is impossible to read these and kindred passages without feeling that our Lord appealed to something else besides his miraculous works, viewed as mere objective facts, as a proof of his divine mission. He evidently places the highest proof of it in his great moral and spiritual manifestation. He asserts the possession of an inherent illumination in his own divine Person in union with the great truths which he enunciated, and the entire course of his divine working. To a mind capable of appreciating a manifestation of holiness, his person and divine working would be self-evidential. “He that seeth me, seeth Him that sent me.” It is evident therefore that he considered the moral aspect of even his supernatural works as an important portion of the evidence that he came from God.

The fourth chapter of this Gospel contains an account of our Lord's visit to the Samaritans. He performed no miracle on this occasion. The Evangelist tells us that many of them accepted him as the Messiah; and expressly states that they affirmed that this was not on account of the report of the woman as to his [057] supernatural insight into her character; but because they them-

selves had heard him, and on this account they had arrived at the persuasion that was the Christ. There was something therefore in his moral manifestation, even apart from his miracles, which produced this persuasion. The Evangelist accepts this position as a correct one. He has even gone further, and has attributed it in the same chapter to our Lord himself. He makes him address the nobleman who came to solicit his interference in behalf of his sick son with these remarkable words: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." (John iv. 48.) These words can only imply that, in the opinion of the speaker, there was a moral and spiritual attestation of his divine mission, which stood higher than objective miracles; and that those who witnessed it ought to have received it as such.

In John vi. 30, ff., a remarkable dialogue is described as taking place between our Lord and the Jews on this very subject. The Jews demand of him to work some distinct sign in proof of his divine mission. Let it be observed that the demand of a sign, here stated to have been made, is of precisely the same character as similar statements which are made by the Synoptics on the same subject, and shows that a common conception, underlies them all. "What sign," say they, "showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? what dost thou work?" They then proceed to define the particular sign which they wish to see exhibited, by making an invidious comparison between his miracles and those of Moses, viewed as mere objective facts. In reply our Lord does not appeal directly to even the miracle of which the Evangelist had just described the performance; but throughout the remainder of the chapter, he proceeds to draw attention to the moral and spiritual aspects of his working. "Moses gave you not that bread from Heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from Heaven; for the bread of God is he which cometh down from Heaven, and giveth life unto the world," &c.

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In chapter vii. (17, 18) our Lord affirms: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of

God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.” Here the affirmation is clear and distinct that there is a moral and spiritual element in our Lord's person and teaching, which jointly with his miraculous works bear witness to his divine character. The testimony given by the one is convergent with that of the other. This the following affirmation of our Lord most strongly asserts. “I am one who bear witness of myself, and the Father who sent me hath borne witness of me,” that is to say, His moral and spiritual manifestation is in a certain sense evidential; and the Father who sent him bore a concurrent testimony of his supernatural work.

On similar principles our Lord reasons with the Jews in the eighth chapter of this Gospel. In reply to the charge that he performed miracles by the aid of the evil one he affirms, that his own absolute sinlessness, constitutes a complete answer to it. “Which of you convinceth me of sin? and if I say the truth why do ye not believe me?” (v. 46.) We have here a direct appeal to men's moral and spiritual perception, as an independent witness to the truth of his teaching; and the affirmation that a being who is not simply good and holy, but perfectly sinless, is worthy of absolute credence. In other words, he does not rest the truth of his teaching on miracles wrought to confirm his different utterances, but on the inherent truthfulness of a sinless character. [059] The moral aspect of his works is the predominant one.

In the fourteenth chapter of this Gospel we have the following remarkable declaration, which puts the whole subject in the clearest light. Philip says to him; “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” Jesus said unto him, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father: Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in

me, or else believe me for the very works' sake." (vs. 8-11.)

This passage contains several most important considerations directly bearing on this subject. I will mention them in order. First—

Philip asks for his complete conviction, a visible miracle in the form of an appearance of God, such as was recorded in the Old Testament as having taken place at Sinai.

Secondly. Our Lord affirms that the manifestations of his character made in his person and work during his previous acquaintance with him were the truest manifestations of the person, character and being of the Father.

Thirdly. That the words which he spake and his entire working, possessed an evidential character as proving that he came from the Father: and that his moral and spiritual perfections were such as to entitle his affirmation to be received on his own word.

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Fourthly. That if Philip was unable to receive them on this evidence, which occupied the highest place, then he was entitled to be believed on the evidence of his supernatural works, "If ye believe not me, *believe the works.*"

This entire passage makes it clear that in the mind of our Lord the moral evidence afforded by him constituted a most important portion of the attestation of his divine mission. Nor was its value confined to those who witnessed it during the time of his personal ministry, but he viewed it as extending to all time. This is made clear by his reply to Thomas in reference to his demand to be allowed to handle his risen body. "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed, Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." (xx. 29.)

With these statements before us, unless we reject the authority of this Gospel, it is clear that those Christian writers who have asserted that the evidence of the Christian revelation rests exclusively on miracles as objective facts are in error.

But the same Gospel refers us no less distinctly to the miracles of our Lord as very important evidences of his divine mission, al-

though they are subordinated to those we have been considering. One or two further references will be sufficient.

We have several declarations on this subject in the fifth chapter. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for whatsoever things he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." (vs. 17, 19.) "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." (ver. 36.)

Here a plain parallel is drawn between the whole course of our Lord's working and that of the Father. In this working he evidently intended to include his miracles. Taken in combination with his entire character the speaker affirms that they form a conclusive proof that the Father had sent him. He subsequently draws attention to the evidence afforded by his miracles as such, "and the Father himself which hath sent me hath borne witness of me." (ver. 37.) [061]

So again in the tenth chapter, "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me," (ver. 25.) A little further on the moral aspect of his miracles, and their close connection with his entire working is distinctly brought forward. "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" (vs 37, 38.) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not, but if I do, *though ye believe not me, believe the works*, that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." (vs. 37, 38.) No words can bring out more strongly the weight which our Lord attached to the moral aspect of his miracles as proofs of his divine mission.

In the fifteenth chapter we have our Lord's own reflections on the evidences which he had afforded of his Messianic character, during his entire ministry. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father." (ver. 24.) Here the miracles are classed with the other exhibitions of

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our Lord's divine character; and attention is especially drawn to the moral aspect of his entire working as in the highest degree evidential. "They have seen and hated both me and my Father." It is worthy of remark that while our Lord uniformly spoke of his miracles as part of his general working, by which he manifested his divine character, the Evangelist himself almost invariably calls them "signs." This is brought out when he gives us his own reflections on the results of his public ministry. "Though he had done so many signs<sup>2</sup> before them yet they believed not on him." (xii. 37.) So again, "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (xx. 30, 31.) In both these passages our Lord's miracles are evidently referred to. They are pronounced to be both evidential of his divine mission, and at the same time to be manifestations of his character. The Evangelist while contemplating them as miracles never loses sight of their moral aspect.

In the Synoptic Gospels one allusion is made to the evidential purpose of a particular miracle which is worthy of notice. Generally speaking they are viewed by the authors of these Gospels as simple manifestations of his divine character. On this occasion, when his power to forgive sins was questioned, he directly performed a miracle to prove that he possessed it. "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house." In this case it is clear that the purpose of performing the miracle was not to prove the truth of any doctrinal statement which he had made; but to establish the reality of his divine authority and commission.

While it is quite true that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels have not enunciated the purpose of our Lord's miracles in the

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<sup>2</sup> The word which is here translated in the A. V. "miracles" is in the original σημεῖα.

formal manner in which it is done in St. John's Gospel, it is clear that they must have taken the same view of their general character. In fact the evidential purpose of their performance is less clearly stated in them than in the fourth Gospel. All four Gospels view his miracles only as a portion of his superhuman manifestation, and are ignorant of that broad distinction which has been laid down between them and the other portions of his divine working. They are in fact included under it; and it is the concurrence of both together, and the moral aspect thereby impressed on the whole, which proves him to be the Christ. [063]

It has been important to ascertain what are the views of the writers of the New Testament on this subject, because it has been strongly asserted by authors on both sides of the controversy that the doctrines of Christianity are proved by miracles, and that they can rest for their attestation on no other evidence. The precise value of this position I will consider in the following chapter. It must, however, be observed that this is not the view taken by the writers of the New Testament. There is not a single miracle recorded in it which is alleged to have been performed with the direct purpose of proving the truth of a single doctrine properly so called. Those wrought by our Lord are uniformly represented as having been performed in proof of his divine mission, or as an essential portion of the manifestation of the divine which dwelt within him. As such they were signs, precisely in the same manner as the performance of those actions which can only be performed by man are signs; that is, they are proofs of the presence of man. In the same manner the actions performed by our Lord are signs and proofs of the presence of the divine man Jesus Christ. If our Lord was in truth what he asserted himself to be, supernatural manifestations would be the concomitants of his presence.

In exact conformity with these facts as we find them in the Gospels is the direct dogmatic statement made by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews on this subject. After having asserted [064]

in the first chapter that divine revelation is made in the person of Jesus Christ, and that God speaks to man under the Christian dispensation “in him, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,” the author proceeds to compare it with the former dispensation, and to give us his views of the evidence on which it rests. “How,” says he, “shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. God also bearing them witness both by signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.” (ii. 3, 4.)

These words distinctly inform us what were the writer's opinions as to the nature of the evidences on which Christianity rests. First, it reposes on the testimony of Christ respecting himself. Secondly, it is confirmed by a number of miracles wrought by God. This view is strictly in accordance with our Lord's own affirmation respecting it as recorded in the fourth Gospel, “I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me hath borne witness of me.” (viii. 18.)

With respect to numerous miracles recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, they are affirmed to have been performed for purposes directly evidential, not however to prove the truth of any doctrine, but of our Lord's Messianic character. The affirmations on this point are express. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” (iii. 6.) “His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong.” (iii. 16.) “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (ii. 36.) Of the fact of the resurrection, they affirm that they were witnesses; and that the miraculous powers imparted to them were the consequence of that event, and a proof of its truth.

The nature of the other supernatural occurrences affirmed in the New Testament must be fully considered hereafter. There re-

main however two further statements, made by the sacred writers respecting this subject, which require to be briefly noticed here. First, although the Gospels affirm that John the Baptist had a divine commission to announce the immediate setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, and even to point him out, they expressly assert that he performed no objective miracle in confirmation of it. His prophetic assertions rested for their verification on their fulfilment only, *i.e.* on the immediate appearance of a person who united in himself all the attributes of the Messiah. The following was the line of argument adopted by those who believed his testimony: "John did no miracle, but all things that John spoke of this man were true." Secondly, while in the Apostolic Epistles, miracles are stated to have been performed by our Lord, and supernatural powers no less clearly asserted to have been at that very time actually present in the Church, there is only one miracle which is directly referred to in proof of the divine mission of Christ. I need not say that this is the greatest of all the miracles recorded in the Gospels, *viz.* his resurrection from the dead. On this their unanimous testimony affirms that Christianity rests. This is the one final and decisive proof of our Lord's divine mission. On its truth they affirm that their claims as divine teachers stand or fall. His resurrection from the dead puts all his other miracles in the back ground in point of evidential value. According to their statements it constitutes the one great assurance that God has given unto all men that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and Christ. [066]

It follows, therefore, that if this one miracle can be proved to have been an historical fact, it carries with it the entire force of all the remaining miracles of the New Testament. But it leaves entirely untouched the moral aspects of our Lord's divine character. These, I may say, constitute a standing miracle which will continue to speak for itself in all time. This evidence is again and again referred to by the writers of the Apostolic Epistles. The two constitute one harmonious whole. To the latter of these

it is impossible to do more than refer in the present work; I have already devoted a distinct volume to the examination of its evidential value, in which I have examined Christ's witness to himself; here I must confine myself to the consideration of the witness borne to him by the Father.

## Chapter IV. Miracles, What Do They Prove?

Having considered the direct assertions in the New Testament in reference to the supernatural, it will be necessary to take a brief view of the question in relation to modern difficulties and objections.

The following subjects present themselves for our consideration:—

1st. To what extent, and in what sense are miracles the proofs of a revelation?

2nd. Are supernatural occurrences devoid of all moral environment capable of affording such proof?

3rd. Can doctrinal statements or moral truths be proved by miracles?

4th. Are miracles objects of faith merely, or if not, how are they related to our reason; and if in any sense they are objects of faith, how can they be the media of proof?

It will be evident that these questions will immediately lay open a number of the most important considerations. They can only be adequately dealt with in the subsequent portions of this work. The natural place to discuss them will be when I come to consider the objections that can be urged against the possibility and credibility of miracles. A few preliminary observations, however, will be necessary for the purpose of putting the reader in possession of some of the most important points of debate and of the positions which I intend to assume respecting them. They will also help to clear the way for the solution of the various difficulties by which the subject has been attempted to be obscured.

The manner in which Christianity claims to be a divine revelation, as we have seen in the former chapter, in its most proper and distinctive sense is that the person of Jesus Christ constitutes that revelation. It is the manifestation of the divine character and perfections by means of the various acts and deeds of his earthly life and ministry. It is a revelation of the divine shining forth in the human. I have already adduced some of the affirmations of the sacred writers on this subject. It would be easy to multiply them indefinitely. Perhaps it would be impossible to express the position which they take on this subject in more distinct language than by citing two brief passages in St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians: "Who is," says the Apostle, "the image of the invisible God;" "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Both passages affirm, as the writer's view, that all revelation is made in the person of Jesus Christ.

It follows, therefore, that the Christian revelation in its highest sense is not a body of abstract dogmas, but that it consists of an objective fact, the Incarnation. As God has manifested his eternal power and Godhead in the material creation, so he has manifested himself as a moral and spiritual being, 1st, imperfectly in the moral nature of man, and afterwards perfectly, in the perfect man who unites in himself the divine and human, Jesus Christ. God, when he effected the work of creation, made a manifestation of himself which chiefly revealed his power and wisdom. When he effected the Incarnation he made an additional manifestation of himself which chiefly revealed his moral character and perfections. The four Gospels contain the historical account of this manifestation, as made in the actions and teaching of Jesus Christ. As this revelation consists of a number of historical facts, all that was necessary was that his life and actions should be correctly reported. The remaining books of the New Testament are historical in character, with one exception, and as far as they treat of doctrines, they may be viewed as commentaries on the Divine fact of the Incarnation.

It follows, therefore, that the essence of Christianity consists of a superhuman or divine fact, the Incarnation. In this point of view the supernatural is not only a concomitant of Christianity, but it constitutes its essence. It is the manifestation of a supernatural and superhuman being appearing within the sphere of the natural and the human. It cannot be too carefully observed throughout this entire controversy that the character which is ascribed to Jesus Christ, while it embraces every perfection of man, is no less superhuman than the powers which are attributed to him are supernatural. In this sense the supernatural is not merely an evidence of revelation, but its essence.

The Incarnation has frequently been designated a miracle. To do so seems to me to incur the danger of involving the whole controversy in confusion of thought. In a loose way of speaking, the creative acts of God may be called miracles: that is, they involve a deviation from the previous order of existing things, and the introduction of a new one; all such results are unquestionable manifestations of supernatural agency, but they differ wholly in conception from what we usually designate by the term miracle. The Incarnation, therefore, ought not to be placed on the same [070] footing as miracles, which are supernatural occurrences, having a definite evidential value, but with God's creative acts, being the highest manifestation of himself which he has made to man. It is perfectly true, as I have already observed, that the miracles of Jesus Christ stand in a double aspect, as part of his supernatural manifestation, and as possessing an evidential value.

It is clear, therefore, that a supernatural event such as the Incarnation, if evidential, can only be self-evidential. It was not wrought for the purpose of proving anything. But, as we have seen, the sacred writers and our Lord himself assert that in a certain sense it was self-evidential. "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us."

A recent writer affirms that Christianity professes to be a revelation of supernatural truths utterly inconceivable to reason, and that such truths can only be proved by miracles. I can understand what is meant by a truth derived from a supernatural source of information, or one respecting a supernatural being or occurrence: but what a supernatural truth can be contradistinguished from other kinds of truth is far from evident. Revelation may disclose truths which reason alone would have been unable to discover; but this does not make the truths themselves, when they are discovered, either supernatural or incomprehensible.

I will now proceed to consider whether there is any real ground for affirming that occurrences which we designate as miracles are the only proofs of a divine revelation.

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The same writer, whose object is to prove that Christianity is utterly destitute of all claims to our acceptance as a divine revelation, endeavours to show that miracles, viewed as bare objective facts, are the only evidence which can substantiate such a mass of incredible assertions as those contained in the New Testament, and that their moral environment cannot be taken into account in estimating their evidential value. For this purpose he quotes the following passage from Dr. Mozley's Bampton Lectures: "Dr. Mozley," says he, "supposes the case, that if a person of evident integrity and loftiness of character had appeared eighteen centuries ago announcing himself as pre-existing from all eternity, the Son of God, the maker of the world, who had come down from heaven, and had assumed the nature of man, in order to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, and so on, enumerating the other doctrines of Christianity; Dr. Mozley then adds, what would be the inevitable conclusion of sober reason respecting that person? The necessary conclusion of sober reason would be that he was disordered in his understanding.... By no rational being would a just and a benevolent life be accepted as a proof of such announcements. Miracles are the necessary complements of the truth of such announcements, which with-

out them are powerless and abortive, the fragments of a design which is nothing unless it is the whole. They are necessary to the justification of such announcements, which unless they are supernatural truth are the wildest delusions.”—*Supernatural Religion*.

In justice to Dr. Mozley, the passage which is omitted in this citation from his lectures ought to be quoted. It is as follows: “What other decision could be come to when a man, looking like one of our own selves, and only exemplifying in his life and circumstances the ordinary course of nature, said this about himself, but that when reason had lost its balance a dream of supernatural and unearthly, grandeur might be the result.”—*Bampton Lectures*. [072]

Some expressions in this passage leave it open to the assumption which this writer wishes to fasten on it that Dr. Mozley intended to affirm that the only adequate proof of such affirmations as were made by Jesus Christ respecting himself would have been visible miracles wrought in confirmation of them. This, however, is not necessarily its meaning, for the omitted passage above cited, distinctly affirms that the person who is supposed to make such assertions is only an ordinary good and holy but imperfect man.

But the assertions in question were not made by an ordinary man like ourselves, but by one who is described as possessed of superhuman greatness and holiness and of profound spiritual insight into truth. He is uniformly depicted as speaking with the fulness of knowledge of the subject on which he speaks. I cannot therefore admit, supposing the character of Jesus to have been historical, that if he had made such assertions respecting himself prior to the performance of his first miracle at Cana, they would have been utterly unworthy of serious attention. It must be readily admitted that if they had been affirmed of himself by an ordinary man like ourselves, no affirmation of his would have been a guarantee of their truth, for the simple reason that they

would have been self-contradictory. Nor would the performance of a miracle have made them one atom more credible. But the credibility of such an assertion, if it had been made by such a person as Jesus Christ even prior to his performance of a single miracle, is a wholly different question.

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It follows, therefore, on the supposition that the delineation given us in the Gospels is that of an historical reality, that his assertions respecting himself would stand in a wholly different position from those of any other man. He could neither deceive nor be deceived. When he made assertions respecting himself he must have known whether they were true. The assertions of such a person therefore would be worthy of all acceptance.

Miracles are not the means of substantiating assertions respecting the truth of unseen realities, nor are they used for such purposes in the New Testament. The whole question is one of adequate knowledge. If we have the means of knowing that a person has a complete acquaintance with truths of which we are ignorant, we can rationally accept them as true on his assurance that they are so, exactly on the same principles as we accept the truths of physical science although we ourselves are ignorant of the processes by which they are arrived at. To state the position generally, it is quite rational to accept the affirmations of those who possess full knowledge of any subject of which we ourselves are profoundly ignorant. The only thing necessary is to attain an assurance that the knowledge of our informant is adequate to justify his assertions. It is on the ground of the fulness of his knowledge that we accept the assertions of Jesus Christ, and not because he wrought a miracle for the purpose of proving that his assertions were true.

Let us now consider in what sense miracles are a proof of the truth of a divine revelation.

I lay down that the proper function of miracles is to establish the truth of a divine commission. From this we argue to the truth of the assertions of the persons who are intrusted with it.

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If an ordinary man, such as a prophet or an apostle, were to affirm that he had a communication from God which he was directed to make to others, or in other words that he had a divine commission, it is evident that no one would be bound to believe him on his mere affirmation. The simple and obvious reply would be, Give us some proof of the reality of the fact. Your claim is far too lofty to be admitted as valid on your simple affirmation. The question then is, how is such a claim to be tested? I reply by the person who makes it performing some action which is adequate to prove that the Great Governor of the Universe ratifies this claim. He must do something analogous to what all persons who claim to be acting under commissions from others do, *i.e.* he must produce some direct and formal credentials from the authority in whose name he claims to be acting. In this case the authority is God. He must therefore perform some action which directly identifies himself with God.

How is this to be accomplished? I answer by the performance of an unequivocal miracle which will directly connect him with the Great Governor of the Universe. I say unequivocal miracle, because if there were any doubt as to its supernatural character it would be useless. Nor would it be of any avail if it were a bare objective fact in external nature, devoid of its moral and spiritual environment. What is required is some direct manifestation of the divine on the sphere of the human and the natural. It must, in fact, exactly fulfil the character so often assigned to miracles in the Gospels. It must be a σημεῖον, or indication of the presence of God, resembling as it were the Great Seal which is affixed to state documents as the final mark of sovereign authority. Of such a character are all the chief miracles recorded in the Gospels. [075]

The question about miracles has been beclouded by debating it in an abstract instead of in a concrete form; thus forgetting that it is not every conceivable form of alleged supernatural occurrence with which we have to deal, but the miracles recorded in the New Testament. By discussing it in this form it has been possible to

raise a number of difficulties which may be abstractedly conceivable, but which have no bearing whatever on the miracles in question. Thus it has been frequently urged that to enable us to be certain that an alleged miracle is really due to supernatural agency, a jury of savants ought to be impanelled, before whom the worker of the miracle should exhibit his miraculous operation. They are to subject it to a variety of scientific tests. Even then if they have failed to discover error, they are to demand a second and a third performance, in order that it may be again and again submitted to the same process of scientific scrutiny. Until miracles can be submitted to and verified by tests of this description they have been affirmed to be unworthy of credit, even on the strongest ordinary testimony.

I shall discuss this and kindred questions more fully in the subsequent portions of this volume, when I consider the nature of the evidence which is adequate to prove the performance of a miracle. For the present I shall only observe that the entire plausibility of this position arises from its being stated in an abstract or general form. We cannot help seeing in reference to the chief miracles recorded in the New Testament, such as the cure of blind, lame or leprous persons, instantaneously by a word or a touch, that common sense is fully adequate to determine that such occurrences must belong to the regions of the supernatural and to no other.

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Two things are necessary to establish the reality of a supposed miracle. First, that the alleged fact should not only have been brought about by supernatural causes but previously announced by him who performs it: secondly, that the fact actually happened as it appeared to happen.

There can be no doubt that the power of juggling and sleight of hand, to perform actions which would be supernatural, if they were only what they appear to be, is considerable, and the difficulty of detection is great. Enthusiasm also when once excited, is capable of generating various unreal appearances which if actual,

would be supernatural. It is also mighty in those regions where the union takes place between mind and matter, but the chief miracles recorded in the Gospels belong to a wholly different order of occurrence. If they took place as they are reported, no one possessed of common sense can doubt as to whether they were due to supernatural agency. It is no less clear that such miracles were occurrences in which successful imposture was impossible. What is required to prove them is the evidence of common sense, and not of scientific analysis. Let it be observed that it is not my intention to affirm that the whole of the supernaturalism recorded in the New Testament is of the same unequivocal character.

The evidential value of a miracle viewed as a matter of common sense maybe briefly stated thus. A person comes to me who affirms that he has a divine message to communicate. I ask him to prove it. He lays his hand on one whom I have known to be blind for the last twenty years, tells him in the name of Jesus Christ to receive his sight, and he forthwith receives it. There is probably no person gifted with ordinary understanding who would not consider such an act to be an adequate proof of divine agency, all theoretical or metaphysical difficulties to the contrary notwithstanding. [077]

It will doubtless be objected that such an act would prove only the presence of a superhuman instead of a divine power. This point will be fully considered hereafter. For my present purpose it will be sufficient to fall back on the decision of common sense, that he who can restore sight to the sightless eye-ball, by no other apparent instrumentality than a word or a touch, can be no other than the Maker of the Universe.

I must now consider whether supernatural occurrences devoid of all moral environment, are capable of proving a divine commission.

It has frequently been the habit, both of the opponents and the defenders of Christianity, to discuss the subject of the evidential value of miracles apart from all reference to their moral

environment. As, however, the overwhelming majority of the miracles recorded in the New Testament profess such an environment, the question of the value of supposed miracles which are destitute of it, forms no legitimate portion of the subject before us. What might or might not be proved by them, even if it could be determined satisfactorily, is quite foreign to the present discussion, which is limited to the truth or falsehood of those contained in the New Testament. The most important of these are not mere displays of power, but have an unquestionable moral environment impressed upon them, and they profess to have been wrought for a definite end and purpose. This is less distinctly marked in some of the miracles recorded in the Old Testament, but with them I have no present concern. It will be sufficient to observe that while many of them were unquestionably performed in attestation of a divine mission, as a class they bear another distinctive purpose, viz. that of correcting the polytheistic tendencies of the age. Hence their leading impress is that of power. The necessity of counteracting the tendency which I have referred to, rendered it necessary emphatically to assert the Lordship of one God over universal nature, in opposition to that conception of it so widely diffused throughout the ancient world, which saw a distinct power exerted in every combination of material forces.

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The very conception of a miracle as a supernatural occurrence, brought about for the purpose of authenticating a revelation, distinguishes such an action from one which involves only a simple exhibition of power. All acts of moral agents must display a purpose of some kind. No conception of God is of the smallest religious value which does not contemplate him as being a moral agent and a being on whose actions a moral character of some kind must be impressed. Consequently an act entirely devoid of all moral aspect cannot prove that it has resulted from direct divine intervention. The difficulty has originated from dividing into three separate parts an action which is essentially one, and

contemplating separately the objective fact in the supernatural action, the circumstances attending its performance, and the purpose for which it was performed. It is the union of all these which constitutes the occurrence in question an evidential miracle.

Let me now offer a few observations on a very important point for our consideration. Can abstract doctrinal statements or moral truths be proved by miracles?

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I have already observed that as far as the miracles of the New Testament were wrought for directly evidential purposes, they were performed, not to prove particular doctrines, but as the credentials of a divine mission, or that they formed a part of the superhuman manifestation of our Lord. The apparent exceptions are those which were performed to attract attention to the divine message, to assist in the foundation of the Church, or to bear witness to the truth of the Resurrection. These last were in fact attestations to the reality of the Messianic character of Jesus Christ, which is the highest conceivable form of a divine mission, on which miracle the truth of Christianity is directly pledged by the sacred writers. A mere statement of the facts of the New Testament is a practical solution of the difficulty. It nowhere affirms that a miracle was ever performed to bear witness to the truth of an abstract doctrine.

I will now endeavour to lay down some general principles as to the relation in which doctrinal statements stand to supernatural manifestations. As on such a subject it will be impossible to lay down a general rule which will be applicable to every supernatural event, it will be necessary to consider each case by itself.

First, that of our Lord.

We believe his statements about unknown truths, on the ground that he was perfectly veracious, and had the most perfect knowledge of the subject on which he spoke. The actions which he performed (I mean by these, not his miracles merely, but the entire course of his working) are evidences of his divine

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character. He himself avers that he possessed the most intimate knowledge of God, and of the great realities of the spiritual world. "We speak," says he, "that we do know, and testify that we have seen." "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." Throughout the Synoptics likewise he is represented as having the most entire knowledge of both spiritual and moral truth, and as teaching direct from his own insight. We believe the assertions, not because he confirmed their truth by the performance of a miracle, but because he afforded evidence that he was a veracious witness, and fully acquainted with the subject on which he spoke. His miraculous actions proved that he was God's messenger, and as such were additional attestations to his veracity.

The acceptance of such affirmations as worthy of the highest credit may be correctly designated as acts of faith; but let us never forget that such acts of faith are also high exercises of reason. Writers in opposition to Christianity are never wearied in running a contrast between reason and faith, and in representing the two as standing in opposition to each other, and belonging to wholly different regions of thought. Nor can it be denied that they have received much encouragement to do this by the indistinct or misleading statements of some Christian writers on the subject. Between them no little confusion has been introduced into the controversy, and a general idea has become prevalent that reason and faith are two distinct, if not opposing faculties, each of which acts within a subject matter of its own. The effect of this confusion has been disastrous.

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My contention is that faith is only another name for reason when operating on a particular class of phenomena. To enter on an elaborate proof of this would be out of place here; a few illustrations must therefore suffice. To accept information from persons who have knowledge of subjects which we have not studied, or who have mental powers of insight or perception of which we are destitute, or who have seen phenomena which we

have not seen, is an act in conformity with our highest reason. A constant effort has been made by unbelievers to confound faith with credulity: Faith is not credulity, but the acceptance of truth on adequate evidence, and the rejection of mere affirmation, when the evidence is inadequate. On the other hand multitudes of Christians have assiduously laboured to decry reason as the instrument for the investigation of truth. I admit that it is not a perfect instrument, but it is the only one which we have. The light of a candle may not be all that we can wish, but if we have no other we shall not improve our condition by extinguishing it.

Let me illustrate this subject by a few examples. We believe the assertions of Dr. Livingstone about the interior of Africa, although we have no means of verifying them by ocular observation, because we know that he has travelled there, and we are persuaded that he is a veracious witness. We accept the higher truths of astronomy, not because we have studied them, or are even able to appreciate the nature of the processes by which they have been arrived at, but because they are affirmed by persons who have afforded evidence that they possess a high order of knowledge on that subject. The same is true throughout the whole of the higher departments of science. We may call this an act of faith if we like, but it is also an act of our reason. The same thing is true throughout every department of human knowledge. It is astonishing how small a part of it is the result of our own personal observation. It follows therefore that the attempts which are so constantly made to separate faith and reason, and to erect an impassable wall between them, are suicidal alike both to faith and reason. [082]

As therefore we accept the affirmations of others on subjects within the limits of their own knowledge, although we ourselves are ignorant of the processes by which it has been arrived at, so we accept the affirmations of such a person as the Jesus of the Evangelists on those subjects on which he affirms that he possesses the fullest knowledge.

But it will be objected that some of these assertions are made respecting high mysteries incomprehensible to the human intellect. Can we accept such truths?

I answer that we are only capable of accepting propositions the two terms of which we are able to comprehend with more or less distinctness. Nothing has been the subject of greater abuse than the word "mystery" in connection with revelation. It is frequently represented as denoting something which from end to end is utterly incomprehensible, like the unknowable God of a certain system of philosophy. In the New Testament the meaning of the word "mystery" is not an incomprehensible proposition, but a truth which once was hidden in the divine counsels, and has been revealed by the Gospel. That which is actually unthinkable is incapable of affirmation or denial. None of the affirmations of Jesus Christ partake of this character. They are mysteries only in the sense that they ran up into spheres of thought which transcend the limits of human knowledge. But this is done by all ultimate philosophical and scientific truths. If it be urged that some of them are difficult or incapable of definition, the same is true of not a few of the conceptions of science. It is also true that they respect truths with which we could not be acquainted apart from such a revelation as that made in the person of Jesus Christ; but this is true of the phenomena of Creation likewise. We do not acquire a knowledge of its phenomena by reasoning, but by observation, or from the statements of others when they lie beyond the limits of our own observation. The Incarnation, including as it does the divine actions and the teaching of Jesus Christ, is not the revelation of a dogma, but the manifestation of a new fact. This fact, like all other phenomena, although undiscoverable by our reasoning powers without the exercise of observation, becomes after observation a fact on which reason may justly exercise its powers. If he be really what he professed to be, then his statements about himself give as an account of his previous history, before he came under human observation.

Let me now consider the relation in which miracles stand to the affirmations of those who claimed a commission from Jesus Christ to publish his religion in the world, and to lay the foundation of the Church.

I must here also adhere to my original position that miraculous powers are never described in the New Testament as being used for the direct proof of dogmas, but for the proof of the Messianic character of Jesus Christ, or of the divine commission of those who wrought them. The truth of the assertions of its writers rests on no other foundation than the fulness of their knowledge of the subjects on which they spake, whether acquired by ordinary or by supernatural means, and on their veracity, when they affirm that particular truths were within the limits of their knowledge. Thus St. Paul claims acceptance for the things which he asserted because he had been taught them by Revelation from Jesus Christ, not because he had proved their truth, by working miracles in confirmation of them. This course is uniformly adopted by him throughout his epistles. The object of the mighty works that were wrought by him was to prove his own apostleship or the fact of the resurrection.

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I must not allow myself to enter on the question of inspiration, its nature and limitations, or the degree of supernatural guidance afforded to the apostles and their followers. Such an inquiry would be foreign to the present subject, which is strictly historical. It is of course a direct and necessary inference that when the miracles proved the reality of the commission of those who performed them, they also proved that they were fully instructed in its terms, and entitled to credit within its limits. But the extent of their enlightenment can only be inferred from the nature of the commission itself, and from the facts and phenomena of the New Testament. It has been an idea widely spread that inspiration must confer a general infallibility. The inference that a man is rendered infallible in general matters because he is invested with a limited and definite commission, and with endowments

adequate to render him competent to fulfil the purposes of his mission, is one which the premises will not justify. The utmost that the possession of such a commission can prove is that its possessor is enlightened up to its subject matter, but no further.

But in the present discussion I need not go beyond the affirmations of the New Testament. The actions performed by Jesus Christ proved him to be the Messiah. The miracles wrought by the apostles, were performed either to prove the fact of his resurrection, *i.e.* that he was the Messiah, or their own divine mission, which was dependent on its truth, or to draw attention to their message. The supernatural gifts so frequently referred to in the epistles, are affirmed to have been designed for the building up of the Church into a distinct community, and when that purpose was accomplished they were to cease. Being functional, the enlightenment communicated by them was necessarily limited to the special subject matter on which they were exercised. In this point of view miracles may be viewed as attestations of the veracity of the persons who performed them, and of the sufficiency of their knowledge on the subjects they were specially commissioned to communicate.

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But the question still remains for consideration, Can miracles prove moral truths?

I answer emphatically in the negative. If dogmas, which may be viewed as intellectual truths, are incapable of a direct proof by miracles, still more so are moral truths. Such truths can rest only on a moral basis. With respect to the miracles recorded in the New Testament, the question is nugatory, for it nowhere affirms that its miracles were wrought for such a purpose. It is true that Jesus Christ, as the great legislator of the kingdom of heaven, gave an authoritative utterance to many moral precepts as the laws of his kingdom. This royal right of legislation was inherent in his Messiahship. But to give utterance to moral truths in a legislative capacity, has no connection with attempting to prove them by authority. Ordinary human legislation has its

authoritative utterances. But when it does this, it does not rest the truths themselves on authority, or base them on adventitious testimony. Our Lord and his apostles uniformly appealed to the internal perceptions of our moral and spiritual nature as the only ground on which moral obligation rests.

Let it be observed, however, that this by no means pre-supposes the truth of the absurd proposition, that every man, however imperfect or degraded, is capable of reasoning out all moral truth for himself. On the contrary, definite moral knowledge requires to be communicated, as all other kinds of knowledge. Its great principles require to be enunciated, and to be worked out to their special applications. But the principles themselves, as far as their binding power is concerned, must ultimately rest on the internal perceptions of our moral and spiritual being. A miracle, therefore, can communicate to them no higher degree of certainty or obligation. The only thing which it can aid in establishing is, that one invested with a divine commission may have a right to claim obedience to special precepts on the authority of God, in whom all moral obligation centres. [086]

But even in this case, the ground on which the obligation rests is a moral one, which no miracle can possibly prove or even confirm. A moral teacher can only appeal to that in man which we variously designate as conscience, moral sense, or the principles which are the foundation of our moral perceptions. The fact that many men through a long course of evil get morally blinded does not alter the case. It only exemplifies a remarkable saying of our Lord, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." When the light within us has become darkness, there is nothing left to which an appeal to the sense of duty or obligation can be made.

The objection urged against Christianity, that because a miracle cannot prove a moral truth it is therefore useless, is quite beyond the question at issue. The special function of the Christian revelation is one far higher than the mere laying down of

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rules for the regulation of human conduct. Its great purpose is to impart to man a moral and spiritual power, which is able to make obedience to the moral law a possibility; to supply a motive of sufficient potency to make us capable of resisting the vehemence of our passions; and one which is able to lift the morally degraded from their degradation, and to strengthen the holy in their holiness. According to the teaching of the New Testament, this constitutes the great distinctive purpose of Christianity, and the end of all divine revelation. This most important truth has been greatly overlooked in the present controversy. It entirely disposes of the objection that if moral truth cannot be proved by miracles, they must be valueless. To such a revelation the presence of the supernatural is essential.

But it by no means follows because miracles are unable to impart to us a sense of moral obligation, that a duly commissioned moral teacher would be useless. They might prove his superior knowledge, or as attesting a divine commission, enable him to bring obligations already existing to bear on the mind with superior power. Thus it by no means follows that because men possess in their mental constitution the great principles on which scientific truths are based, each man is able to reason them out for himself. The most highly gifted man would make slow progress without a teacher. As I have already observed, moral truth is capable of being taught like all other truth; and although a miracle cannot prove it, it may establish the fact that the worker of one is a man eminently entitled to be heard on the great subjects of moral obligation, or that he is able to communicate knowledge which is capable of acting mightily on our moral being.

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I must now proceed to offer a few observations on the question, Are miracles objects of faith? and if they are so in any sense, how can they be the media of proof of a revelation?

The author of "Supernatural Religion" starts the following difficulty in connection with this subject: "Consciousness of the

difficulties which beset miracles in the present age has led many able men to deal thus illogically with them, and to represent them alternately as evidence and as objects of faith." He then proceeds to refer to Dr. Arnold, Professor Baden Powell, and Archbishop Trench, as having been in various degrees guilty of making this confusion.

I am not prepared to deny that many Christian writers have expressed themselves with great indistinctness on this subject, especially in works where miracles have been only referred to incidentally, and which only partially treat of the supernatural elements of Christianity. This question will be discussed more fully when we consider his definite objections; but it will tend to a clearer understanding of the subject if in the present place, I lay down the following propositions:—

I. That it is impossible to believe in any assertion which contradicts the first principles of our reason, even if it were supposable that a miracle could be wrought in confirmation of it.

II. That, although the illumination which reason imparts is imperfect, yet as it is the only instrument that we possess for the investigation of truth, attempts to disparage it are absurd.

III. So far is faith from standing in opposition to reason, that it is a legitimate branch of it when exercised on a special subject matter.

IV. That beliefs which reason refuses to authorise do not originate in faith but in credulity.

V. That even those who entertain irrational convictions are compelled to base them on evidence of some kind which is satisfactory to themselves: that is to say, on the dictates of their own imperfect reason. [089]

VI. That, while we can believe in nothing that is contrary to our reason, yet it is perfectly rational to believe in many things which our reason would have been unable to discover.

VII. That extraordinary facts which lie beyond the limits of human experience are not contrary to our reason: and it is per-

fectly rational to believe them whenever they are adequately attested.

VIII. That a large portion of our beliefs on subjects scientific, philosophical, historical, moral, and religious, rest on testimony; the belief in them is highly rational, when the knowledge of those from whom we derive our information is adequate: and consequently that faith is a principle co-extensive with the activities of the human mind, and is by no means confined to subjects simply religious, however intimately it may be connected with them.

A few brief observations will suffice in this part of our subject.

It will be observed that I have included under the term "reason" the whole of our mental processes which are necessary for the cognition and the discovery of truth. These include, not only our powers of inductive and deductive reasoning, but our intuitions, our forms of thought, those powers of our mind, which whether intuitional or instinctive, form the foundation of many of our most important convictions and our moral conceptions. These constitute our reason as distinct from our reasoning powers. No little confusion has been introduced into this controversy from the want of attending to this distinction.

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It has been asserted that we can accept things as matters of faith which to our reason would be utterly incredible. This assertion has arisen from the confusion of things which differ widely, viz. things which our reason might have been unable to discover, but which when discovered may be perfectly rational, and things directly contradictory to reason. The existence for example of a square circle is a thing absolutely incredible, and while thus contradictory to reason, it is impossible to accept it by faith. So would any doctrine which in a similar manner contradicted the first principles of our rational convictions. No more pernicious principle can be laid down than that things which are contradictory to our reason can be accepted by the principle of faith. Such a principle would divide the human mind into two hostile camps, and if carried to its logical consequences, must

land us in universal scepticism.

It by no means follows that things which transcend our rational powers to discover must be contrary to our reason when they have been discovered. We can only arrive at the knowledge of unknown facts by observation, or accept them on the testimony of others. Until they have been brought within our knowledge in this way, no amount of reasoning could lead to their discovery. In a similar manner with respect to several of the facts in the New Testament connected with the Incarnation, our reason might never have discovered them, but when they have been discovered, they may form suitable subjects on which to exert its energies.

The whole of the confusion in which this question has become involved has originated in the assumption that faith is a faculty of the mind distinct and separate from our reason, and in a certain sense opposed to it; and that things which cannot be subjects of rational conviction may yet be the objects of faith. Whatever opinions may have been held by divines upon this subject, I can discover nothing which countenances them in the New Testament. [091]

To what class of truths is the word "faith" properly applied? I answer to those which we accept on testimony. It has been asserted that some of the first principles of our rational convictions, such as our belief in the existence of an external world, or in the truth of experience, is an act of faith. This, however, is to introduce a confusion of thought. Such convictions can be only acts of faith as far as we believe in ourselves.

Viewing faith as the acceptance of truth on adequate testimony, it follows that all our knowledge of things, whether natural or supernatural, that is not the result of the action of our own minds, but which we accept on the testimony of others, is an act of faith. Our acceptance of them depends on the validity of the testimony that can be adduced for them. The important question for determination is, is the subject on which it is given within the knowledge of the informant? If it respects a fact,

has he witnessed it, or received it from others who have? Are his powers of observation good and his judgment sound? Is he worthy of credit? The determination of these and similar points is the proper office of our rational powers, yet the acceptance of the fact is an act of faith. When our reason is satisfied on all these points, faith becomes an act of reason. To assert that the acceptance of supernatural facts belongs to a faculty of our minds which we designate faith, and that our acceptance of others is the result of the action of our reason, is to lay down a distinction entirely of our own creation. In both cases the evidences must form the subject of rational investigation, and they must be accepted or rejected as they approve themselves to our reason.

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It will perhaps be urged, that the acceptance of propositions, such as the doctrinal statements of the New Testament, is an act of faith which stands out in manifest contra-distinction to an act of reason. It would be so unquestionably, if we accepted them on insufficient evidence; but when we do so with the knowledge that others have a full acquaintance with the subject on which they speak, it is in the highest degree rational to accept and to act on their testimony. A large portion of the business of life is conducted on this principle. A man is ignorant on some subject, or he distrusts his own judgment respecting it: he consults one who knows, or on whose judgment he relies. For example: let us suppose that I have a bottle full of a certain substance; I do not know whether it is a medicine that I am in need of, or a deadly poison. I consult my chemist, and without hesitation I act on his opinion. In all such cases (and they are spread over the entire sphere of life) we act on faith; but it is a faith which is in conformity with the dictates of reason. The function of the latter is to ascertain the adequate knowledge and the veracity of the person whose assurance we accept. If it is a rational act thus to receive truths on the testimony of man, whose knowledge must be imperfect, it must be still more so to accept them on the authority of him who knows all things, *i.e.* God.

I am aware that certain writers have given such a representation of faith as to produce the impression that it is one of its special functions to accept certain dogmas, the terms of which are extremely obscure, or absolutely incomprehensible. But no rational evidence can be adduced in support of this position. To exert actual belief in a proposition the terms of which are incomprehensible, is an impossibility, and we only deceive ourselves when we imagine that we can. All that we can do in such cases is to repeat words, but if they have no definite meaning we cannot believe them: for the act of faith or conviction is founded on the affirmation that the two terms of a particular proposition agree. It is quite true that the facts and statements of the New Testament run up into principles which transcend our limited power of reason; but this is common to it, and every system of science or philosophy; and forms no peculiarity of religion. I am far from wishing to affirm that theologians have not fallen into this practice; but my concern is not with them, but with the statements of the New Testament. One of the most important acquisitions made to our mental science in the present day is that we have ascertained that there are limits to our mental powers beyond which we cannot penetrate. This was imperfectly realized by many of the reasoners of earlier times, and the result has been that they have fallen into a hazy mysticism, or logomachy. [093]

Equally pernicious is the view that there is something particularly meritorious in accepting truth on little or no evidence, and that to do so is a high act of faith. Not only is this founded on no rational principle, but it is entirely unsupported by any account of faith as given in the New Testament, which again and again assumes the contrary position. Faith is the acceptance of truths which lie beyond the sphere of our personal knowledge on an adequate attestation. If an astronomer should happen to be ignorant of chemistry, and accept its truths on the testimony of one who was an eminent master of it, this would constitute an act of faith. Surely such an act is one which is highly rational. [094]

It follows, therefore, that although our belief in miracles being founded, as it now must be, on testimony, is an act of faith, yet it is also an act of our reason. It is, therefore, by no means absurd to speak of miracles as objects of faith, and at the same time as possessing an evidential value. We accept them as we do all other adequately attested facts, and reason on them in the same manner as we do on other facts. This is the precise course which will be pursued by the overwhelming majority of astronomers who will be unable to witness the coming transit of Venus. They will accept the facts on adequate testimony, and afterwards use them as media of proof.

## Chapter V. The Antecedent Improbability of Miracles.—The Unknown and Unknowable God.

The proof on *à priori* grounds that an event is either possible or probable, cannot establish that it has actually occurred. This must rest on its own particular evidence. To prove that a revelation is both possible and probable, and that it ought to be evidenced by miracles, may form an essential portion of our general argument, because the degree of probability of the occurrence of a particular fact affects the amount of positive evidence necessary to establish its truth. But the proof that a revelation has actually been given, or a miracle wrought, can only be effected through the same media as those through which other facts are established. To prove that a revelation is probable will not be of the smallest avail to prove that one has been actually given, without adequate proof of the fact itself.

Still the examination of the antecedent question is in this case particularly important, because modern unbelief boldly affirms that a revelation and its attestation of miracles are both impossible and incredible. If this can be demonstrated, the discussion of the evidence that can be adduced for them as facts is a useless expenditure of our reasoning powers; for no evidence can prove the occurrence of that which is impossible. It may be assumed, however, that those who make this affirmation are not quite satisfied as to the cogency of their reasonings; because, after having demonstrated, as they allege, that miracles are impossible, they proceed to attack the evidence of those narrated in the Gospels, and pronounce it worthless. As, therefore, the opponents of

Christianity boldly affirm that both a supernatural revelation and miracles are impossible, it is necessary that the defender of Christianity should examine the validity of the assertion.

Our opponents constantly charge us with reasoning in a circle, or assuming the fact which ought to be proved. To avoid even the appearance of this, I lay down the following positions:—

If direct atheism is a just conclusion from the phenomena of the Universe, it follows that a divine revelation is impossible. Nor are miracles in any proper sense of the word less so, because they are not merely facts occurring in external nature, but facts in the production of which we recognize intelligence and will. With the principles of atheism the occurrence of an extraordinary event is quite compatible, because as it cannot rise to any higher knowledge than that of phenomena, the knowledge of the invariability of past phenomena is incapable of giving the fact that all future phenomena will resemble the past. Still the occurrence of a fact, however extraordinary, would not constitute a miracle, and would prove only the existence of an unknown force in the universe, or the predominance of chance.

The same remark is equally applicable to that form of modern atheism which does not affirm that no God exists, but contents itself with the denial that there is any evidence that there is one.

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Nor is the case altogether different with regard to pantheism. According to this system, God is only another name for nature, which works out every form of fleeting existence for itself in an unceasing round of unconscious self-evolution. The essence of its affirmation is, that God has no conscious personal existence, but that He is only another name for the blind unconscious forces of the universe. Such a being (if it is possible to conceive of it as a being at all, or as a unity) is everlastingly making a revelation of itself by a ceaseless evolution of phenomena, the result of the blind action of its inherent forces. But to whom? Obviously only to beings capable of reason and consciousness, whom it (I dare not say, He) has evolved out of its own bosom, and will again

resolve into unconsciousness. Prior to their evolution this mighty τὸ πᾶν must have been everlastingly making manifestations of itself, without a single being in existence capable of recognizing them. Whatever be the result of such theories in a logical point of view, it is evident that if pantheism be a rational account of the order of the universe, a revelation and miracles, in any sense in which such terms can bear meaning, are impossible.

No less applicable is the same remark to that form of pantheism held by Mr. Herbert Spencer, which, while it affirms the existence of a cause of all things, as alike required by the demands of philosophy, science, and religion, yet affirms that He is unknown and unknowable, and that every thing which is knowable, although a manifestation of that great unknown cause, yet conveys no idea of Him that the intellect can apprehend. In one word, the unknown cause of all things is inconceivable, and incapable of becoming the subject of rational thought. The intellect cannot help assuming the existence of this cause of all things; but all that it can affirm of him is, that He is unknown and unknowable; and that everything within the bounds of our knowledge, though it may represent some mode of his existence, cannot be he, or like him. With respect to this theory, while it cleverly evades some of the harsher difficulties of pantheism and atheism, it is not too much to say that it is a civil way of bowing God out of the universe, of which He is alleged to be the cause. He can neither be a person, nor have wisdom, nor be benevolent, nor be capable of conscious self-manifestation; because all these conceptions are limited and finite. All that we can know of Him is, that such a cause exists beyond present phenomena; and that we are condemned respecting Him, to a profound and perpetual ignorance. It is possible to designate such a being by the name of God, but it would be to use the term in a sense peculiar to those who thus employ it. Such a God is a bare abstract conception of the intellect, void of all moral value. It is sufficient for my present purpose to observe that it is impossible for the unknown and the

unknowable to make a revelation of himself. Consequently St. Paul's affirmation with respect to the unknown God at Athens, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you" (Acts xvii. 23), is untrue. To such a God a revelation of Himself, and miracles to confirm it, are alike impossible.

It is evident, therefore, that if either of these principles can be demonstrated to be a true account of the nature of things, all further discussion as to the truth of a revelation or of miracles is useless. Let us take the most favourable hypothesis, that of Mr. Spencer. It concedes that the necessities of reason compel us to assume the existence of an unknown cause of all things, which may be called God. But He is unknowable; He is inscrutable. No conception of Him can be realized in thought; it follows, therefore, that no revelation of such a being can be made to the finite intellect of man, for if a revelation of Him could be made, He cannot be unknowable. This being so, the person who attempts to reason out the truth of Christianity is placed under a difficulty. Christianity assumes the existence of a personal God, possessed of moral attributes. This is the very truth, the evidence of which these systems assert to be wanting. The Christian advocate, therefore, has only two courses before him: First, To assume, in conformity with the all but universal belief of mankind, that a personal God exists; and then to argue for the truth of Christianity, and to answer the objections urged against it. When we do this, objectors affirm that we beg the question. Or, Secondly, To prove the existence of a personal God; and then to argue for the truth of revelation. If he adopts the latter course, he is compelled to adduce the proof on which the belief in theism rests, and to answer the objections to it—or, in other words, to compose a bulky volume, before he can get at the immediate subject of inquiry.

Now I affirm that the defender of Christianity is no more open to the charge of begging the question when he assumes the existence of a personal God as the foundation of his reasonings,

than the author of a treatise on trigonometry is, who takes for granted the truth of Euclid's propositions.

The author of the work to which I have already referred does his utmost to fasten on the modern defenders of Christianity the charge that they begin and end in assumptions. I will not deny that much ambiguous language has been used on this subject, but I trust I shall show that the charge is utterly unfounded. I must briefly notice a few of his reasonings.

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At page 68 he writes as follows: "Dr. Mozley is well aware that the assumption of a 'personal' God is not susceptible of proof; indeed, this is admitted in the statement that the definition is an assumption."

An assumption, I ask, in what sense? Is it a simple assumption without evidence, taken for granted for the bare purposes of argument; or is it one which, though taken for granted in the present case, rests on a substantial basis of evidence previously established, and which bears the same relation to the question of miracles which the truths of Euclid do to those of trigonometry? The latter is the fact though the mode in which the writer puts it implies the former. Without referring to the authority of any particular author, is he not fully aware that theists maintain that their belief in a Personal God rests on a basis of proof which commends itself to their reason? Have not numbers of men, endowed with the highest powers of intellect, accepted it as satisfactory? Yet he seeks to imply that, after all, it is an assumption. It is true that in the argument for miracles we take it for granted; but we do so, because the proof has commended itself to our highest reason.

I admit that Dr. Mozley has used, in speaking of this subject, language which I cannot but think is wanting in precision. Still it does not bear the meaning that this author seeks to fasten on it. "It is then to be admitted," says he, "that historically, and looking to the general actual reception of it, this conception of God was derived from revelation. Not from the first dawn

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of history to the spread of Christianity in the world do we see in mankind at large any belief in such a Being.” The learned author then states, at considerable length, the philosophic and vulgar views entertained of God, and shows their inadequacy and imperfection, and concludes as follows: “But although this conception of the Deity has been received through the channel of the Bible, what communicates a truth is one thing, what proves it is another.” He then proceeds to summarize the general proof.

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I cannot think this statement altogether free from ambiguity. Whatever may have been the precise forms in which the ideas of the vulgar or the philosopher were embodied, there is strong proof that a higher and better conception of God, though indefinite and indistinct, underlay them all. The most degraded polytheist has indistinct conceptions of a Supreme God above all the degraded objects of his worship. It seems to me impossible that such a conception of God can have been attained from revelation. It may, in a certain sense, be said, looking at the precise form in which it is embodied, that it has been derived by us historically from the Jewish race. But it must have had a prior origin. St. Paul considered that the material universe manifested His eternal power and Godhead. The primitive form of all the great oriental religions contained in them the idea of God. It is simply absurd to affirm that they derived it from the Bible. It is true that the existence of a primitive revelation anterior to the Bible has often been assumed to account for this knowledge, but this is a bare assumption of which we have no proof, and whose only basis is conjecture. Judaism and Christianity have been instrumental in widely spreading correct conceptions of the Deity and dissipating false ones. Yet if the conception had not existed in the mind at least implicitly, no formal revelation could have put it there, for every such revelation must be conveyed in language, and all language is meaningless, unless the mind can realize its conceptions. The assertion, therefore, that the conception of God has been first communicated through the channel

of the Bible, and is afterwards proved by reason, seems to me to be one not devoid of danger. On the contrary, our belief that God exists is the very pre-condition of our being able to believe that He has revealed Himself. This conception revelation may modify, invest with a higher moral character, and import into it definiteness and precision, but it cannot create it. It is on such grounds that the author in question seeks to involve his reasoning and that of all other defenders of Christianity in a vicious circle. I fully admit that the conception of God has been elevated and purified by the influence of Christianity, and that the teaching of Christianity on this subject is in conformity with our highest reason. But it is absurd to affirm that this is reasoning in a circle, and that the Christian argument involves reasoning from Theism to Christianity and from Christianity back to Theism.

The following passage, cited by Professor Mozley from Baden Powell, is referred to by this author as a proof that all our reasonings on this subject are a simple argument from reason to revelation, and from revelation to reason. The passage itself is a clear statement of the grounds of the charge, and requires our careful consideration. "Everybody may collect from the order and harmony of the physical universe the existence of a God; but in acknowledging a God, we do not thereby acknowledge this peculiar or doctrinal conception of a God. We see in the structure of nature a mind, a universal mind, but still a mind which only operates and expresses itself by law. Nature only does and can inform us of mind in nature; but in no other sense does nature witness to the existence of an omnipotent Supreme Being. Of a universal mind out of nature, nature says nothing; and of an omnipotence which does not possess an inherent limit in nature, she says nothing either. And therefore that conception of a supreme Being which represents Him as a spirit independent of the physical universe, and able from a standing-point external to nature, to interrupt its order, is a conception of God for which we must go elsewhere. That conception is attained from revela-

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tion, which is asserted to be proved by miracles. But that being the case, this doctrine of theism rests itself upon miracles, and therefore miracles cannot rest on this doctrine of theism.”

It will be necessary carefully to point out the inaccurate reasoning of this passage.

First: The author speaks of nature as another expression for the forces, laws, and phenomena of the physical universe, and for these alone. To this I have no objection, for it would greatly conduce to clearness if it was always confined to this meaning. But while he uses it thus, he nowhere tells us in what relation man, including his faculties, intellectual and moral, and above all, his will, stands to nature. Are they included in, or excluded from it? Do they, or do they not, form a part of it? If they are included in nature, then there are other facts in nature bearing on the being of a God, beyond those on which the author reasons. If they are excluded, then the reasoning is inadequate to sustain his conclusion. Our reasonings respecting God are founded not only on the forces and laws of physical nature, but on man, his reason, his conscience, and his will. What makes this fallacy the more plausible is that the term nature is very frequently used to include man, as well as the forces and laws of the material universe.

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As far as the physical universe is concerned, the mind infers the existence of a God from its order and its harmonies; that is to say, having observed that order and harmony have been produced by intelligence within the sphere of our own observation, and being deeply convinced on other grounds of reasoning that they are incapable of resulting from any other source, we infer that the results we behold in nature are due to a similar principle which we experience in ourselves. Such an inference is not due to simple observation of the order of the universe only, but unites with it an act of reasoning founded on our own self-conscious being. But the intelligence which produces order, as far as we are cognisant of it, is invariably united with will. We therefore infer from the order and harmonies of nature, not simply the

conception of a God, such as the God of pantheism; but, if they are valid to prove anything at all, of a God who is possessed of intelligence adequate to arrange the order, and of purpose adequate for its production. If the inference of the existence of a God from the works of nature is valid, it must be of a God possessed of the attributes in question, for all our inferences on such a subject derive their validity from applying to them the analogies of our reason.

It is quite true that in the structure of the material universe we see only the indications of a mind operating and expressing itself by law; that is to say, we observe in the physical universe no instances of its violation. But WE, that is the reasoning, rational beings, whether existing in nature or outside it, have inferred from the structure of the universe the existence of mind, and we know of no mind which is not possessed of conscious intelligence and will. If our reasoning from the order of the material universe is valid to prove the presence of mind, which is a conception entirely derived from our consciousness of ourselves, it must be equally so to prove the existence of purpose and volition, for we know nothing of mind which is devoid of these attributes. The material universe proves that its order and harmony is the result of the action of mind; but it cannot prove that the mind which produced this order and harmony is unable to introduce a different one. But if our minds form part of nature, then they are a proof that the author of nature has produced something else in nature besides the order and harmonies of the physical universe. If they are outside nature, then we have direct evidence of the existence of beings outside and above nature, *i.e.* above the physical forces of the universe. It follows that if finite beings possessed of intelligence and will, exist within nature or without it, a God who possesses similar powers may exist also. [105]

In a narrow and restricted sense it may be quite true that nature, *i.e.* matter and its phenomena, only informs us of the presence of mind in nature, the partner and correlative of orga-

nized matter. But let us here guard against a latent fallacy in this mode of statement. We learn the presence of mind, not from material nature, but by the application of our own reason to the investigation of what its phenomena denote. This is overlooked in the above argument. It is perfectly true that as a mere matter of phenomenal appearance, we do not actually behold in natural phenomena manifestations of mind acting outside nature. In fact we do not see mind at all, but simply infer its presence from the phenomena before us through the agency of our own reason; and this inference carries along with it all the other attributes of mind.

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The writer before me is one of those who affirm that the utmost our minds can infer from the contemplation of nature, in which he includes every species of vital organism, is the presence of order and harmony; and that any inference that its phenomena testify to the presence of adaptation, contrivance and design is invalid. I reply that this affirmation is only valid on the assumption of a principle which altogether denies that from natural phenomena we can infer the existence of mind. But we also observe in natural phenomena, and above all in animal and vegetable structures, that the results effected are produced, not by simple forces, but by the careful adjustment of many, or by one counteracting and qualifying the action of another, and by forces intersecting one another at precisely the right time and place. Had any of these occurred otherwise, the result would have been different. Throughout nature we observe innumerable instances in which various forces have thus combined to produce a definite result. This we usually designate by the word "adaptation." Adaptation implies intelligence and purpose. We are quite as much justified in ascribing this purpose to the power manifested in nature, as any other quality whatever, even the possession of mind.

I fully concede that natural phenomena and even the phenomena of the mind of man, only testify directly to the existence of a

power adequate to their production, and that we cannot directly infer from them the presence of omnipotence. But this is to quarrel about words. For the power manifested in nature and in man is so great that the human mind can make no distinction between it and omnipotence; or in other words, it justly infers from its manifestations that the power which could originate this universe and all things in it must be capable of effecting anything which is possible. To this mind, whether in or out of nature, our reason ascribes the attributes of intelligence and will. Such a power it is incapable of conceiving as inherent in material forces; it therefore assumes that this power exists outside nature, and is capable of controlling it. [107]

It follows therefore that the reasoning is fallacious, which asserts that the conception of a supreme Being which represents Him as a spirit independent of the physical universe, and able from a standing-point external to nature to interrupt its order, is a conception which we must seek from revelation, and cannot be arrived at by any exertion of our rational powers on the facts of nature and of man. Its apparent plausibility has arisen solely from ignoring the presence of man, either in nature or outside it, and neglecting to take the facts of human nature, man's reason, conscience and will, into consideration. To affirm that, independently of man's moral and intellectual being, physical nature, its forces and laws, can prove nothing, is a simple platitude. We have not to go to revelation for the principles on which we reason, but to man, and the phenomena of his rational, self-conscious, and voluntary agency. It follows, therefore, that the affirmation that in conducting the Christian argument we reason from God to miracles and from miracles to God, is utterly disproved. Yet the writer before me has ventured to affirm that, when we commence with the being of a personal God as the groundwork of our reasonings, we begin and end with a bare assumption.

The philosophical writings of Dr. Mansel are also pressed into the service for the purpose of discrediting the evidences of

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Christianity, and, I own, with considerably greater reason. Mr. Herbert Spencer has also invoked them in confirmation of his theory that God is unknown and unknowable. He refers to them in the following words: "Here I cannot do better than avail myself of the demonstration which Mr. Mansel, carrying out in detail the doctrine of Sir W. Hamilton, has given us in his 'Limits of Religious Thought.' And I gladly do this, not only because his mode of presentation cannot be improved, but because writing as he does in defence of current theology, his reasonings will be more acceptable to the majority of readers."

Before referring to Dr. Mansel as an unquestionable authority on this subject, it would only have been candid in both writers to have informed their readers that not only have his principles been repudiated by a considerable number of Christian writers as unsound, but they have been carefully examined by that eminent atheistic philosopher, Mr. Mill, who gives it as his deliberate opinion that they are founded on fallacious principles. It is absurd to urge principles, though they have been maintained by an eminent Christian writer, which an eminent unbeliever has pronounced unsound, as a clear and conclusive argument against Christianity.

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The work of Dr. Mansel may be described as an attempt to prove the truth of Christianity on the principles of the most sceptical philosophy. It may be briefly stated thus: Reason is incapable of forming any idea of God as He is, whether as the Infinite, the Absolute, or the first Cause. All the conceptions which we can frame on the subject are mutually self-destructive. On similar principles our conceptions of His moral attributes are wholly inadequate to inform us of His real perfections. It by no means follows that our human conception of benevolence or justice is a measure of the divine benevolence, or of divine justice; and so of His other attributes. It is affirmed that because they are the attributes of an infinite Being, they lie beyond the possibility of being realized in human thought. Consequently, holiness in

God may admit of very different manifestations from holiness in man. Upon these principles, which affirm the inadequacy of the human intellect, even to conceive of anything as it exists in God, it follows that our only possible conceptions of God are relative; or, to use the word chosen by the author in relation to Christianity, regulative; *i.e.* fitted to regulate our conduct, but not to illuminate our understanding.

Upon the assumption that reason, when it attempts to analyse our ideas of the Infinite, the Absolute, or the first Cause, lands us in hopeless contradictions, Dr. Mansel arrives at the conclusion that it is incapable of forming any conception of God as he actually exists. It follows as a necessary consequence from this, that even by revelation we are only capable of attaining relative ideas of Him, and that these relative ideas do not represent His real nature, but are only regulative of conduct, *i.e.* we are to act upon them as if they were true. *E.g.* God is revealed as holy. Our only conception of holiness is our human conception of it. But we cannot know that this is an adequate measure of the divine holiness. God is declared to be benevolent. We have no conception of benevolence but that which is derived from the human mind. So likewise with respect to justice. But benevolence and justice as they exist in God may differ from these qualities as they exist in man. The same thing follows as a necessary conclusion from Dr. Mansel's premises with respect to all the other attributes of God. Nothing will better illustrate the position to which this argument reduces us than to apply it to the truthfulness or veracity of God. All that we know about truthfulness is as it exists in finite beings, that is, in men. But God is an infinite being. It follows therefore that truthfulness in man is no adequate representation of truthfulness as it exists in God, that is to say, that the divine veracity may differ from our human conception of it. This is certainly a very startling position. [110]

If, therefore, these principles are correct, acquiescence on the part of man in the divine character is impossible. It is impossible

to love a being who does not present to us the aspect of loveliness; or to reverence one who does not present to us an aspect capable of exciting this emotion; or to feel trust in a being of whose justice we have no certainty that it resembles our conception of justice; or to rely on the promises of one whose veracity may differ from our own. Such feelings cannot be made to order. They can only be generated by the contemplation of a being who is holy, benevolent, just, and true, in the ordinary acceptation of these words. They cannot be excited by any merely regulative ideas. We love, reverence, and trust, not ideas or conceptions, but persons, possessing moral attributes. But on the principle of merely regulative ideas of God, the assertion that "God is love," loses all its value, if God is not what I mean by love, but, because he is infinite, he may be something else, I know not what; and thus the great precept of the moral law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength," becomes meaningless. Such devotion of our entire nature cannot be created by the mere command to render it. It can only be rendered to a being whose claims over us we both feel and know to be an absolute reality, and to whom on the conviction of their reality we can offer ourselves up a voluntary sacrifice. But if we cannot know Him as He is, how is the fire of devotion to Him to be kindled in our hearts? How shall we trust in Him? How shall we acquiesce in His character? How shall we worship Him, how shall we adore Him, if it is true that the justice, benevolence, or holiness of the divine character may not resemble our conception of them? Nay, more: the theory in question lays the axe to the root of the Christian revelation itself. There is no affirmation of the New Testament more decisive than that Jesus Christ in His divine and human personality is the image of the invisible God, as far as His moral perfections are concerned. Are the perfections of the character of Jesus Christ only regulative, or are they real representations of these attributes as they exist in God? Are the divine attributes of holiness, benevolence, or justice, adequately

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represented by the manifestations of them, as made by Jesus Christ? If we accept the testimony of St. John's Gospel, our Lord himself has expressly affirmed, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9). But this is impossible if our conceptions of God's moral attributes are only regulative, and if the human idea of holiness is no adequate representation of the divine.

However erroneous a system may be, yet if it has been elaborated by a powerful mind, it has generally some foundation in reason, and I am far from affirming that, with considerable qualifications, some important elements of truth may not be found in that of Dr. Mansel. It is well that we should be made to feel that there are limits of thought beyond which the human mind cannot penetrate, and that there are profundities of metaphysics which an imperfect measuring-line cannot reach. But placing the matter as he has, the Christian apologist may well feel indebted to Mr. Mill for his crushing demolition of the dangerous portions of Dr. Mansel's system. When unbelievers quote the authority of Dr. Mansel, why do they not also tell their readers that there was at least one unbeliever of very high logical power, who wrote against the validity of his system. [112]

It is one thing to affirm that we cannot penetrate to the depths of the Deity, and that after we have raised our thoughts to the highest, there is something higher still; and quite another to affirm that our highest thoughts of him have no validity; or, to use the terms of a fashionable philosophy, that God is unknown and unknowable, that no true conception of Him can be formed in thought; in one word, that he is absolutely unthinkable. The difficulties of this subject have arisen mainly from discussing it in terms of pure abstractions, instead of embodying them in a concrete form. It is impossible in this place to enter on the profound depths involved in these questions; but a few observations will be necessary for the purpose of clearing away the difficulties in which our opponents seek to involve the subject of miracles. I

shall confine myself to our conceptions of the Infinite.

It is affirmed that no conception of the infinite can be framed in thought; that it is therefore unthinkable, and transcends the limits of human knowledge; that it is a negation; and that therefore our reason is unable to affirm anything respecting it; that the idea of personality is incompatible with that of infinity; and that therefore when we speak of God as a person who possesses infinite perfections, we enter on a region where human thought is invalid, and respecting which all affirmation involves a contradiction.

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But when we are told that the infinite transcends thought, we are entitled to demand that we should not be kept playing with an abstraction, and to ask, what is infinite? In what sense does it transcend thought? Does this mean that it is absolutely unthinkable; or only partially so; or that our conception of it is imperfect? Is it simply unknowable, or does it consist of something which we know, *plus* something that has not come within the limits of our knowledge, but which something is of a similar character to the known? It will be at once seen that the determination of these questions is at the root of the whole controversy. If then by the infinite we mean something known *plus* something unknown, to speak of God as unknowable and unthinkable is absurd. Our knowledge of Him may not be full, but yet real so far as it goes. When it is affirmed that God is a being who exists, but is unthinkable by man, the effect is to place Him beyond the bounds of human knowledge, and thereby free us from all necessity of troubling ourselves about Him. We know that He exists in the profundities of the unknown; and that is all. For the purposes of thought and of morality, He is thus made of less value than an algebraic  $x$ .

When it is affirmed that the infinite is unknowable, I again ask, what infinite? The infinite as an abstract idea has no real existence; but something that is infinite. The conception itself is an essentially quantitative conception, and is only strictly applicable to number and extension. When I speak therefore of an

infinite number, what do I mean? The only answer possible is, “The greatest number I can conceive, *plus* all possible number without limit.” Does my adding on the latter factor invalidate the reality of my conception of the former? Is that which is added on anything else than number? Surely here I have a valid conception. The same is true when we speak of the infinity of space. I mean by it the greatest space I can conceive, *plus* space without limit. Is the idea of space rendered unthinkable, because I add the conception of space without limit? Does it cease to be space? But space is conceivable. It follows therefore that neither infinite number nor infinite extension is absolutely unthinkable. We speak of the infinite divisibility of matter. Does matter, because it goes on to be divided for ever, cease to be matter? [114]

In the same manner we speak of God, and call Him infinite. It would be far more correct to speak of Him as a Being who has infinite attributes. Here, however, if accuracy of thought is to be preserved, a distinction must be made. Some attributes of God may be viewed as quantitative; others cannot. It is to the former only that the term infinite properly applies. A moral attribute cannot have a quantitative measure applied to it. It is therefore not infinite, but perfect.

When we speak of God as a being possessed of infinite power, what do we mean? The thing intended is, that He is a being who possesses such power as enabled Him to create the universe, and that He is capable of exerting every other degree of power which is possible. We may call this, if we like, power without limit; though there is always one limit to possible power, viz., that of working contradictions. Of course we are ignorant of what are the limits of possible power.

But when we make this addition to our finite conception, we mean by it power similar to that exhibited in the universe—it and all other power beyond it. Must such a conception be banished outside the limits of rational thought? Is the idea of a being who possesses power sufficient to build the universe, and all

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possible power besides, unthinkable? Again, we speak of God as infinitely wise. What do we mean by it? We affirm that He knows all things actual and possible. The knowledge is none the less knowledge, because to the knowledge of the actual we add on the knowledge of the possible. Such a being is certainly not unthinkable.

Again: God is often spoken of, not only as a being possessing infinite attributes and perfections, but as the Infinite Being. Here the attempt is made to entangle us in a puzzle. It is argued: if He be the infinite Being, there can be no being beyond Him. He must therefore include all being, both actual and possible. If this be so, He must also include the finite, otherwise there would be a being which is not included in infinite being—or in other words, being without limit would not include all being, which is self-contradictory. Several other self-contradictions may be easily adduced by reasoning on the same principles.

I reply that the term “Being” is used here in a sense so intensely abstract, that we have removed it out of all those conceptions of which quantity can legitimately be predicated. Of material being we can affirm that it is quantitative, but of no other. The adding on the word “infinite,” and calling God the infinite Being, is to use words which have no validity as conceptions.

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But it is also common to speak of God's moral attributes as infinite, such as His benevolence, holiness, justice and truth. This again is inaccurate, and its result is to plunge us into hopeless confusion of thought. Such attributes admit of no quantitative measures. They are perfect, not infinite. To speak of God's truthfulness as infinite is simply absurd. A thing is true, or not true. A moral being is truthful or not truthful. Benevolence may be perfect or imperfect; but it cannot be measured by number or by line. These conceptions can only mean what we mean by them, and nothing else, even when applied to God, or we are attempting to pass off forged notes for genuine ones. The only possible additional idea which we introduce when thus ascribing

them to God, is that in Him they are perfect, free from the imperfections with which they exist in us. To affirm that when we say that God is perfectly benevolent, or perfectly truthful, we introduce into the conception, as applied to Him, a new factor, beyond the meaning of benevolence and truthfulness as used in human language, and that this new factor can make the divine benevolence different from our human conception of it, or can lead God to actions which man can by no possibility view as benevolent or true; and then to say that God is benevolent or true, is an abuse of language, or, to use Mr. Mill's words, an offensive flattery.

But it has been urged that the moral attributes of God, even if we view them not as infinite but as perfect, must be beyond the limits of human thought, and therefore may produce results different in character from the corresponding principles in man, because they are the attributes of an infinite being. I have already disposed of this objection. Benevolence, holiness, and truth cannot be other than benevolence, holiness, and truth, to whatever being we may attribute them.

It is therefore no necessary consequence, because we ascribe to God some attributes which are infinite, and others which are perfect, that God must therefore be unknowable or unthinkable. We may know much about Him, without knowing all things. Our not knowing all about things does not render them either unknowable or unthinkable. Our knowledge may be imperfect; but as far as it goes it maybe real. If we were to affirm that we only know that which we know perfectly, or were unable to reason on imperfect knowledge, mental progress would be brought to a standstill. Nor is it right to affirm that we are only reasoning in a circle when we reason from His moral attributes as displayed in the government of the world in favour of the probability of a revelation; or if because a revelation which claims to be from God, bears the impress of His character, we employ this fact as an evidence that it comes from Him. To affirm that

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He is unknowable or unthinkable is to proclaim that man has no concern with God, and that all revelation is impossible; therefore, the objections urged against the evidence of supernatural religion on these grounds are untenable.

But there are the difficulties about the Absolute and the First Cause. It has been urged that the Absolute is that which is out of relation to every thing else—perfectly independent in itself. It is argued, therefore, if God be this Absolute, he cannot be the first Cause, because a cause can only be a cause by its being in relation to that of which it is the cause. For similar reasons, if he be the first Cause, He cannot be the Absolute. But as He is both, He must therefore be unknowable and unthinkable.

It is impossible in a treatise like this to enter into such profound metaphysical questions. For my present purpose, I can safely refer to Mr. Mill's discussion on this subject. As far as the views in question bear adversely on Christian evidence, he has sufficiently refuted them. It is not fair for unbelievers to put forth these positions as subversive of Christianity, without answering the reasonings of so eminent an unbeliever as Mr. Mill in proof of their inconclusiveness, or even alluding to the fact that he has pronounced them untenable.

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There is no point which reasoners of this class have laboured more diligently to prove than that it is impossible for human reason to think of God as a person. The assumption of the personality of God is the foundation of the Christian argument, without which, even if the occurrence of miracles could be proved as objective facts, they would have no evidential value. It follows, therefore, that if our only mode of attaining the knowledge of the personality of God be from revelation, we are arguing in a vicious circle.

Briefly stated, the argument of unbelief is as follows: God is the infinite Being. Personality is a conception which necessarily involves the finite. Therefore it cannot be predicated of an infinite Being. It follows therefore that to speak of God as infinite, and

at the same time as a person, involves a contradiction.

It is an unquestionable fact that the only beings whom we are directly acquainted with as persons are finite beings, *i.e.* men. No less certain is it that the only beings whom we know to be possessed of wisdom and intelligence are finite beings, *i.e.* men, and those various classes of animals by which the latter quality is manifested. The argument is equally valid for proving that wisdom and intelligence can only belong to finite beings; and consequently that the existence of wisdom and intelligence in the first Cause of all things is inconceivable, and the assumption that He is wise and intelligent is a contradiction. The same argument is no less valid against ascribing any moral perfection to Him, or in fact any other, for all our knowledge of such things is both in itself finite, and derived from finite beings.

But it even goes further than this. If, as the positive philosophy lays down, our real knowledge of things is confined to direct subjects of cognition; as the only beings which we know to be possessed of wisdom and intelligence are men and animals, it is quite contrary to sound reasoning to infer that these qualities can be possessed by any other class of finite beings. To do so is to transfer human conceptions to beings who are not human. Equally valid would be the reasoning of an animal, if he could reason on the subject, as for instance a horse or a dog, that the existence of wisdom and intelligence beyond his own limited sphere was an unwarrantable assumption. Pantheists have also propounded theories on the assumption of the existence in nature of an unconscious wisdom and intelligence. This assumption is open to the most formidable objections; but even on their own principles it is utterly invalid; for if on the grounds which they allege it is impossible to ascribe personality to God, the same reasonings are equally valid against ascribing wisdom and intelligence to unconscious nature. [119]

I conclude, therefore, that it by no means follows because our direct knowledge of personality is confined to human beings, and

is derived from them, that personality itself cannot be conceived of as a property belonging to any other than human beings. It is absurd to maintain that the qualities of things must be confined to those things from which we learn their existence.

But it will be objected that the very essential notion of personality is limitation; consequently that although it may be conceived of as belonging to limited beings, it transcends the power of thought to conceive of it as the attribute of a being who is unlimited or infinite; that is to say, that although it lies within the power of thought to conceive of the Being who had adequate power to build the universe as a Person, because the power may be a limited power, yet when I ascribe to Him beyond this the possession of all possible power, the conception of personality becomes unthinkable. This is the real meaning of the affirmation, unless our reasonings are to be confined within the region of abstractions. But we have no assurance that such reasonings are valid, unless we can bring them to the test of some concrete form of thought.

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Next: It by no means follows because our conception of personality is derived from finite beings, that it is necessarily limited to them; and that it cannot be thought of in connection with a being, some of whose attributes are infinite and others perfect; in other words, that the idea of finiteness is necessarily involved in that of personality. What are the conceptions that make up the idea of our own personality? I reply, the power to affirm "I" of one's own being—the possession of will—the power of self-consciousness, and these in union with rationality. These conceptions we undoubtedly derive from the contemplation of our own finite being, but there is nothing in them which is necessarily limited to the finite. If the conception of an infinite being is possible (and the fact that it is so constantly introduced into this controversy proves that it is possible), then there is no reason why these conceptions, which certainly contain in them nothing quantitative, should not be applicable to such a being. The real

fact is, these conceptions are not inherently finite, because they have nothing in them of a quantitative character,—they are only derived from a being whose manifestation in space we conceive of under the form of limitation, and whose attributes are neither infinite nor perfect.

I must call attention to the remark already made that the correct representation of God in thought is not that of a pure abstraction, the infinite Being, but of a being who possesses attributes, some of which are infinite and others perfect. To affirm that such a being is a person, is not to attempt to think that which is unthinkable. When we affirm that God possesses the power adequate to build the universe, and all possible power beside, we do not ascribe to Him that of which it is impossible to predicate the possession of will or self-consciousness. When we affirm that such a being exists now, that he has existed in all past known times, and that no limits in point of time are conceivable of him, there is nothing contradictory in ascribing to such a Being personality. It is quite thinkable that an ultimate particle may never have had a beginning and never will have an end; no less so is it that such a particle may be possessed of personality, for it is finite. Surely therefore there is nothing in the ascription to God of existence without beginning and without end, which destroys the idea of His personality. [121]

It has been necessary to enter thus far into this subject, because in reasoning on the Christian revelation we must assume the existence of a personal God, unless all such treatises, in addition to their own proper subject-matter, must likewise contain an elaborate work on the principles of theism, and a refutation of those of pantheism and atheism. The defender of Christianity is charged with reasoning in a circle, as though he first assumed the existence of a personal God, and then derived the idea of his existence from revelation. This charge would undoubtedly be true if the idea of God being a person is unthinkable. I am at a loss to conceive how it becomes one atom more thinkable

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if communicated by a revelation. Much obscurity has undoubtedly been thrown on this subject by Christian writers who have fancied that the more they can invalidate our reason the greater gain accrues to Revelation. This is not only unwise but irrational. Our reason doubtless is but an imperfect light, but its extinction is to leave us to grope in darkness. I affirm therefore that the assumption of the divine personality as the groundwork of our argument involves no *petitio principii*, or reasoning in a circle.

One more remark and I will bring this portion of the subject to a close. The affirmation made by this philosophy that certain things are unthinkable is fallacious. What do we mean by "unthinkable"? It may mean many things; first, that the subject cannot be made in any sense an object of thought. This, in fact, is the only legitimate use of the word. But in this sense the affirmation cannot be true of even Mr. Herbert Spencer's unknown and unknowable God, for it is evident that he does manage to reason and think about him somehow. It may mean a being respecting whom we may know much and attain a knowledge continually progressing, but respecting whom there is much which is unknown. This unknown is called unthinkable. But it is not unthinkable. It has only not yet become the subject of our knowledge, and is no more unthinkable than any other unknown truth. Or that may be pronounced to be unthinkable respecting which our conceptions are wanting in definiteness and precision. But to designate such things as unthinkable is an abuse of language. Or that may be designated as unthinkable of which our conceptions fail fully to represent the reality. As far as they go, they may be true, but there may be something beyond of a similar kind, which they do not embrace. This is the only sense in which it can be affirmed that God is unthinkable, but the assertion is altogether misleading. The only correct meaning of the expression is when some particular thing is affirmed to exist and at the same time contradictions co-exist in it. The actual co-existence of these two contradictions is unthinkable, but nothing

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more. Thus the existence of a round square is unthinkable, so would the affirmation that the divine power was at the same time both limited and unlimited. But in no other sense is a conception unthinkable. To affirm that the cause of all things is unthinkable because our conceptions of Him do not measure the entire depths of His being is simply misleading.

I have gone into this question because it is evident that if God is unthinkable a revelation of Him is impossible, and if a revelation of Him is impossible, all miracles affirmed to have been wrought in attestation of one must be delusions.

## Chapter VI. The Objection That Miracles Are Contrary To Reason Considered.

Under this head are included the whole of that class of objections which extend from the direct assertion of the impossibility of miracles to the affirmation that even if their possibility is conceded, they are so extremely improbable that it is a violation of the first principles of our reason to believe in their actual occurrence. They are alleged to be violations and contradictions of the laws of nature, and as such to be incredible, as the stability of its laws is founded on a universal experience. This unquestionably forms the most formidable difficulty in the way of the acceptance of miracles, as actual occurrences, at the present day, and therefore demands a careful consideration.

The question of the abstract impossibility of miracles need not occupy us long. Such an affirmation can only be made on the assumption that our reason is inadequate to affirm the existence of such a being as a personal God. If this can be established, the whole argument is ended for all practical purposes. It may be conceded that the occurrence of some anomalous event as a bare objective fact is quite possible, even on the principles of pantheism or atheism. But such objective fact would be no miracle in any sense in which the word can be used in this discussion. If the evidence was sufficiently strong to attest it as a fact, it would be explicable on the supposition of some unknown force in nature, or even as a purely chance occurrence. A miracle, in any sense in which it enters into the present argument, is not only an abnormal objective fact, but one which takes place at the bidding of a moral

agent. It is the union of these two which imparts to a miracle any power to attest a revelation. If, therefore, there is no evidence of the existence of a God, miracles may be pronounced impossible for all practical purposes in this controversy, and we need not further discuss the question.

The whole argument as to whether the occurrence of a miracle is or is not contrary to reason must proceed on the assumption of the existence of a personal God. It is also a proposition so clear as to render all proof of it superfluous, that if a personal God exists who has created the universe and governs it by His Providence, miracles are possible.

First, I observe that a miracle cannot be pronounced incredible, on the ground that it is an effect without an adequate cause. On this point I may refer to the high authority of Mr. Mill, that the idea of a miracle contradicts no law of causation. "In order," says he, "that any alleged fact should be contradictory to a law of causation, the allegation must be not simply that the cause existed without being followed by the effect, for that would be no uncommon occurrence, but that this happened in the absence of any adequate counteracting cause. Now in the case of an alleged miracle the objection is the very opposite of this. It is that the effect was defeated, not in the absence, but in consequence, of a counteracting cause, viz., a direct interposition of an act of will of some being who has power over nature; and in particular of a being whose will being assumed to have induced all the causes, with the powers by which they produce their effects, may well be supposed able to counteract them." (*Logic*, vol. ii. p. 167.)

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A miracle therefore may not be the result of the action of any force which falls within the range of our knowledge. It may be necessary for its performance to neutralize the action of all existing forces by the calling into energy of more powerful ones. But their operation need not even be suspended. An adequate force, or power, or cause (it matters not by what name we call it) is present to effectuate the result; viz. the power which rules

the universe, *i.e.* God. As Mr. Mill justly observes, the only question which can be raised if the existence of God is assumed, is, not the want of the presence of an adequate cause, for the supposition pre-supposes the presence of one, but the want of will on the part of God to bring about the result. Thus it may be fairly argued that God will not work a miracle, from the fact that He has not done so in the course of previous observation.

It has been frequently affirmed that a miracle is an act which is contrary to the laws of nature, or a violation of them, or a suspension of them, or a violation of the order of nature; and that its occurrence is therefore incredible, as being contrary to reason. A miracle need involve neither of these. The laws of nature as conceived by physical science are a set of antecedents followed by a set of invariable consequents. A miracle does not interfere with this. Its very conception involves a new antecedent followed by its consequent. The utmost that can be urged is that we have never before witnessed the presence of that particular antecedent and consequent, or that the antecedents which we have witnessed have been followed by totally different consequents. The only mode in which such a law could be violated would be, if a particular antecedent was present and no other capable of modifying its action, and it failed to be attended with its proper consequent. But this is not involved in the conception of a miracle.

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Let us now suppose that the expression “laws of nature” is extended so as to comprise the forces of nature as well as its invariable sequences. Such a use of the term is very common. In this point of view, it is impossible to affirm that the laws of nature are violated by the performance of a miracle. This could only be the case if they were made to produce the opposite results to those which they actually produce. Thus, if a boiler were filled with water and a fire kindled under it, and no other force was present capable of neutralizing the action of the fire; if, instead of the temperature of the water being raised, it gradually froze, there would be a clear violation of the laws of nature, *i.e.* its forces

would cease to produce their usual results. But there is nothing in the idea of a miracle that involves this. It postulates the presence of a force or forces which are adequate to counteract the action of those already in existence, and to produce the adequate result.

It will be objected that we have never recognized the existence of such forces in our previous experience. Such an objection would be valid only on the assumption that there is no force in the universe besides those which have been already recognized by us. This, however, science will in the present state of our knowledge hardly venture to affirm. Besides, it is contrary to the supposition with which we started, viz. the existence of a power able to control nature, that is, God.

Nor is the assertion correct that the performance of a miracle necessarily involves even a suspension of the laws of nature. [128] This may be the mode of the divine acting; but it is most important to observe that it by no means follows that it must be so. A miracle may be performed by the introduction of a force which has sufficient power to counteract the forces of nature even while they are in the fullest operation. To take an illustration: It has been frequently said that the force of gravity must have been suspended in favour of Peter's body when he walked on the water, and in favour of that of our Lord when he ascended into heaven. But this is by no means the case. The mere suspension of the law of gravitation would not in either case have effected the results in question. The presence of other forces was necessary. The law of gravitation might have been in the fullest operation, and the miracle might have been performed by the action of other forces adequate to neutralize it. The narrative itself implies that this force was so far from being suspended, that it was in full operation at the time when the miracle was performed, for the moment the power which supported Peter's body ceased to act he began to sink.

But further: even if we assume that any natural forces have been suspended in the performance of a miracle, we are not

called on to assume their general suspension, but only in favour of the particular case in question. This observation is rendered necessary because it has been frequently urged against the possibility of miracles that their performance must have thrown the whole mechanism of the universe into confusion, and involved an extensive reconstruction of the processes of nature. This would unquestionably be the case if the working of a miracle involved the difficulty in question. But I have shown that it need not involve even the suspension of any natural law whatever, and if such suspension took place in any particular case, the force might have been acting with full energy everywhere else.

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The counteraction or modification of one force by the agency of another is an event which we witness every day. The force of gravity is in the fullest operation whenever we lift a weight from the ground—it is not suspended for a single moment. The ability to modify the results of the action of one force by the agency of another, or to combine many forces so as to produce a definite result, constitutes the essence of all mechanical contrivance. The self-determining power of the human will is that which calls all these particular modifications of existing forces into activity. By means of it, the entire aspect of external nature has been changed from the appearance which it would have presented, if no other agency had existed besides the forces of nature which belong to matter. Man has been a power manifested in the midst of them. I am quite aware that he can create no new force, and that he can only control or modify the action of those which exist, but is never capable of suspending them. Yet this power has produced marvellous results on the external world, so that it presents a wholly different aspect from that which it would have done if the forces of nature had simply continued acting uncontrolled by the influence of mind. Even in material nature itself, we meet with repeated instances of such modifications of the results of one force by the action of another, as for example when the force of gravitation is counteracted by that of magnetism, or of

capillary attraction. The action of no force is suspended, it is only modified.

The assertion therefore is inaccurate which affirms that the performance of a miracle involves the suspension of a single force in nature. It is consequently so far no violation of any natural law. All that the idea of it involves is the presence of a force which is capable in a particular instance of counteracting the action of those forces which would produce a contrary result if left to themselves. It is quite unnecessary for us to determine, in reference to the subject under consideration, whether the result may be brought about by a combination of forces which energize within the visible sphere of things, or by bringing into action some latent force, or one which only occasionally manifests itself, or by the immediate action of the divine mind, which, having in itself all the forces necessary to produce the universe, must possess those which are necessary to effect the miracle. [130]

It is a fact worthy of observation that in the case of the miracles recorded in the Bible, the materials out of which the new results were produced already existed in nature, as in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. No act of creation was necessary. All that was required was the presence of a force or forces, able to build up these materials into the forms in question. God does this in ordinary course by what we designate natural forces, by means of which corn is grown and flesh produced. Can it be pretended that no other forces are under the control of, or exist in God, which are able to produce these results in a different manner, even while the ordinary forces of nature continue in activity?

It has been further urged that a miracle involves a violation of the laws of nature, because as it cannot be effected by any of the forces of nature with which we are acquainted, the presence of an unknown force adequate to produce one must be a violation of the laws of nature.

I reply that any apparent force which this objection may [131]

possess is due to an ambiguous use of the word "law." It is here used to denote the order of the various occurrences in nature, and not its antecedents and invariable consequents. If there are forces in nature beyond those with which we are acquainted, how can their action be a violation of nature's order? If God is always present energizing in nature's forces, how can any fresh putting forth of his energy be a violation of nature's laws? In a certain sense of the words the order of nature may be said to be violated whenever one of its forces is modified by the action of another, that is to say, an order of events results from the modified action different from that which would have resulted from the unmodified one. In this sense man is daily violating the order of nature. But this has no bearing whatever on the question at issue.

It will perhaps be urged that the resurrection of a dead man, or the cure of a man born blind by a word is a violation of the laws of nature. Whether this be so can only be determined when we are acquainted with the means by which such an event may be brought about. The assertion itself is a mere general statement that, as far as human observation has gone, dead men have never returned to life; and that blindness has never been cured at any person's command.

But with respect to a resurrection it may be objected that it is an observed fact amounting to a complete induction, that all men die and that after death has taken place it is a fact no less universal that with the exception of a few alleged instances to the contrary no resurrection has ever taken place. It may therefore be said to be a law of nature that all men die, and that death is followed by no resurrection. This, however, if put into other language amounts to the following proposition. That it is a law of nature that these results must follow, as long as the present forces which we observe and no others are in energy. But it would cease to be so as soon as any others capable of producing such a result were brought into activity. The truth is that death is

a phenomenon which is caused by the joint action of a multitude of natural forces. But if these were overborne by any force of nature, or by the Author of nature calling any unknown force into activity, or even by the energy of his own creative will, it would be absurd to call such an event either a violation of the laws or of the order of nature, and therefore to affirm that it was incredible. Death is the result of the action of the natural forces which we observe around us. No natural force with which we are acquainted can effect a resurrection. If it be affirmed that in this sense a resurrection is contrary to the laws and order of nature, the expression is ambiguous and misleading, for it is intended to be inferred that such a violation would be contrary to reason and therefore incredible.

But the affirmation that a miracle is contrary to the order of nature requires further consideration. What do we intend to affirm when we speak of an order of nature or of an event being contrary to it?

In a scientific sense the order of nature can only mean the results of forces energizing in conformity with invariable law. Every event which occurs is the result of a combination of such forces and the product of their joint action. These results necessarily follow an orderly arrangement; *i.e.* the orderly result always occurs when precisely the same antecedents and no other are present, and is invariably altered whenever the antecedents are modified to the precise extent of the modification. As far then as the results in nature are the effect of known forces unmodified in their action by other forces, they follow a definite order. Thus all the motions of the heavenly bodies present themselves to the scientific mind as the perfection of order, because they are the results of the action of known forces acting in conformity with invariable law. Whenever a fact is observed which deviates from the order which these known forces would produce, the action of another force which has hitherto been unknown is inferred. The order of nature therefore means that the same forces always

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produce the same results. There is nothing inconsistent with this in the correct conception of a miracle. Viewed as a physical event only, it would be due to the action of a force which has hitherto been outside the sphere of our observation.

It is clear therefore that whenever a fresh combination of forces takes place, their combined action will modify the result, and a very different order of events will take place from that which would have resulted from their unmodified action. Such modification therefore must produce a different order of nature from that which would have otherwise resulted. But such modifications frequently take place through the agency of man. It therefore follows that man has the power of effecting modifications in the order of nature, without causing any violation of nature's laws.

But various other influences, and among them those usually designated as chances, exert a powerful influence in changing the order of nature. It is necessary that its forces should not only be combined, but combined at the right time and place, or the effect which is due to their combination will not take place; *i.e.* a different order of natural events would have happened. An illustration will make this clear. Let us take the case of a disintegrating rock; according as the different forces, which act on it, meet at the suitable time and place, the progress of disintegration is greatly lengthened or shortened. Such concurrences of events are what we view as pure contingencies. *E.g.* water penetrates into one of its fissures; this takes place in summer, and no appreciable result follows. But if in winter a frost happens immediately afterwards, it will produce an order of events widely different from that which would have happened if either no rain had fallen or frost occurred. By their joint agency the fissure is widened, or the rock split asunder. It follows therefore that the concurrence of these two forces is necessary at a particular time and place to produce the particular result. Such concurrences, though due to natural causes, are what we call fortuitous. Yet their occurrence

or non-occurrence occasions a different order of natural events.

Further, let us suppose that a bird with a seed in its mouth, in the course of its flight casually drops it into a fissure in the rock, which has been opened by the frost; and also that another concurrence of forces has supplied the conditions suitable for its taking root and growth. This produces a new series of events, which occasions a more rapid disintegration, and modifies the whole of the results which follow. If the casual act of the bird had taken place at any other time or place, the whole series would have been different, varying with the causes which produced the seed, and the contingencies which brought the bird to the spot, and induced it to drop it. Let us now suppose that man with his rational agency intervenes. He deliberately watches for the prospect of a frosty night, pours water into the fissures, and plants seeds in fissures where he knows that suitable material has been prepared for their growth. Here a new order of events has been introduced, which, originating in human agency, entirely [135] modify the order of the results.

It is important to observe that all theories which attempt to account for the production of living organisms by the principle of development are compelled at almost every step of the process to postulate the concurrence of forces of this description at the suitable time and place to render their production possible. These must have taken place in past time in numbers passing all comprehension. In the case of many vegetable structures the result has been entirely modified by the contingency of some insect choosing to enter one flower and not to enter another; and according as this takes place a wholly different order of events follows. Whether we choose to designate such concurrences of events at the suitable time and place fortuitous or not, the law which regulates them is wholly unknown, even if they are regulated by law. So far it is impossible to affirm that these results follow a known and definite order in nature. The concurrence of two or more such causes introduces a new series, and occasions

a break in the previously existing order of nature.

Still more completely has this happened when man with his reason and powers of volition is introduced on the scene. It will doubtless be objected by our materialistic philosophers, that the forces which energize in mind act with the same uniformity as those that energize in matter, and that volition exerts no appreciable influence on the results of our actions. These theories, however, contradict the experience of an overwhelming majority of mankind. Such as do so require that the strongest proof should be given before their truth can be considered as established. Such proof certainly yet remains to be given. Its advocates, however, tell us that it will be forthcoming at some future time. In the meanwhile the fact is sufficient for our purpose that man is capable of acting on nature and of producing most important changes in the results of the action of its forces. This being so, it is certain that an order of events takes place through the interference of man, quite different from that which would have taken place apart from his interference. But these interferences take place in conformity with no known law, and their results occasion a break in the previously existing series of events, by the introduction of a new one. Man, therefore, is capable of interfering with and effecting changes in the order of nature. It will be objected that all the agencies by which such results are brought about are forces energizing in nature in conformity with invariable law, and consequently that the order of nature is preserved intact. It is unquestionably true that the actual forces at work are forces in nature. But there is another principle at work which interferes with the regular course of their action, and brings out a series of results quite different to that which would have been produced if they had not been interfered with. This is man's reason and intelligent volition. It is impossible to reduce the action of this to any known law of invariable sequence. It follows therefore that man is a power either in or out of nature, which is capable of interfering with the order of the results of

its material forces, or, in the language of those with whom I am reasoning, of violating the order of nature.

But it will be further objected that man in his action on nature can only use or combine such natural forces as come within his knowledge; and this proves nothing about the possibility of the action of a power outside nature which is able to employ its known and unknown forces for the purpose of producing such results as miracles. I answer that this objection can have no validity unless it is first assumed that man is a portion of nature in the sense in which we are now speaking of it. But the proof of this has certainly yet to be given. By the word "nature," as it is used by this philosophy, is meant the sum total of known material forces, acting on matter in conformity with invariable laws; that is to say, of forces which are devoid of intelligence and volition. It is impossible in this sense of the word to include man in it, until his entire intellectual and moral being can be shown to be the result of material forces. Nor even if this could be done, would it avail for the present argument; for however it may have originated, man's power to modify the action of material forces is an existing fact, and produces results quite different in kind from the action of the unintelligent forces of nature. [137]

The fact that the mind acts through a material organism, and is incapable of calling into existence any new force, does not alter the position above taken. I am quite ready to take either of the following alternatives. Man is either in nature, or he is outside of it. If he is in it, then a power exists within it which is capable of compelling its unintelligent forces to effectuate the determinations of rational volition. If he is outside nature, then a power exists outside it which is capable of effectuating these results. It follows, therefore, that in either case a power exists which is capable of modifying the order of nature. Now it would be absurd to deny that whatever man can effect, God is able also to effect; and that He is so much the more able, in proportion as His knowledge is more perfect. Whether, therefore, God works

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in nature, or outside it, a power exists which is capable of varying the order of nature without interrupting the action of any of its forces, or violating its laws. He also must have other forces at His command beyond those which are known to man, and can combine them and thereby modify their action in conformity with His pleasure. He must also be the primary force everywhere underlying nature, which imparts to every other force its energy and power. It follows that He can work a miracle without even suspending any of the existing forces of nature, and that the allegation that miracles are contrary to reason, because they are contrary to nature, and a violation of its laws and order, is disproved.

I will now proceed to adduce examples of these contradictions to our reason which are said to be involved in the occurrence of a miracle, for the purpose of illustrating the confusion arising from the various senses in which the words "nature" and "natural law," and other similar expressions have been employed. Although the instances will be taken from the opponents of Revelation, I by no means wish to imply that they alone have been guilty of this ambiguous use of language. Its defenders are equally obnoxious to the charge.

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After quoting a brief passage from Dr. Newman, the author of "Supernatural Religion" urges the following objections: "Miracles are here described as 'beside, beyond, and above' nature, but a moment's consideration will show that in so far as these terms have any meaning at all, they are simply evasions, and not solutions of a difficulty. If the course of nature be interrupted in any way, whether the interruption be said to proceed from some cause which is said to be beyond, or beside, or above nature, it is certain that the interruption is not caused by nature itself; and every disturbance of the order of nature, call it by whatsoever name we may, is contrary to nature, whose chief characteristic is invariability of law. It is clearly unnatural for the ordinary course of nature to be disturbed, and indeed were this not the case, the

disturbance would be no miracle at all.”

It is by no means my purpose to defend Dr. Newman's use of the expressions, “natural,” “beside nature,” “beyond nature,” or “above nature.” But while the author criticises Dr. Newman, it is clear that in this passage he has fallen into a number of very singular confusions of thought.

First: The words “nature” and “natural,” are used as though they had one clear, simple, and invariable meaning, whereas in this passage they are used so as to include phenomena which widely differ from one another. We are not told what is included under the term “nature,” whether it is restricted to matter, its forces, and its laws, or whether it also includes mind and all its phenomena. When we speak of interruptions in the order of nature, we usually intend it to be assumed that volition is the cause of these interruptions. This being so, the author has included in nature phenomena which differ so widely from one another as those of mind and matter. He then speaks of the chief characteristic of nature being invariability of law. The laws and forces which regulate matter are distinguished by this invariability. But the action of mind is very different. All men habitually speak of some portions of it as capricious. Whether they are so or not, nothing is more certain than that many of our mental phenomena have not been reduced to the action of known laws.

When, therefore, such expressions as “beside, beyond, and above nature,” and “natural,” are used, I ask what nature is intended? Is it matter, its forces and laws; or mind, including the principle of volition; or both? If man is included in nature, then there is a power in nature which is capable of controlling other portions of nature, and even of acting on itself. If man is excluded from nature, then there must exist a power outside nature, which is “beyond and above nature,” and is capable of acting on it. But if by nature is meant the sum total of all the forces which exist, whether material or immaterial, then it

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is clear that a power must exist in nature which is capable of controlling the forces of material nature, and of compelling them to effectuate its purposes. Whichever point of view we take of it, the objection falls to the ground.

But, says the author, "If the course of nature be interrupted in any way, whether the interruption proceed from a cause beyond, beside, or above nature, such interruption cannot be caused by nature; and every disturbance in the order of nature is contrary to nature." This passage seems to imply that an interruption in the order of nature cannot proceed from nature itself. But this is certainly incorrect. Natural forces, that is to say, material ones, modify one another; and by their combined action, they produce a series of events quite different from what would be the result of their separate action. Such a new series of events is to all intents and purposes an interruption of the previous order of nature and the introduction of a new one. Such results are produced by fortuitous combinations taking place, in the manner which I have already illustrated, at the right time and place. The fortuitous combination of forces in nature is capable of producing a new order "contrary to" the previous order of nature.

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This, as I have shown, is still more evidently the case if we include the phenomena of mind in nature.

But it is affirmed, "if the interruption be due to a cause either beyond, beside, or above nature, the interruption cannot be caused by nature." This is of course a self-evident truth. But then it is inferred that such interruption is a disturbance of the order of nature; and that every disturbance of its order is contrary to nature. The inference which the reader is left to draw, and which is directly stated in other parts of the work, is, that what is contrary to nature is contrary to reason; that a miracle is thus contrary to nature, and therefore contrary to reason.

I observe that, although the interruption here referred to cannot be caused by nature (for it is contrary to the conditions of the case that it should be), yet it by no means follows that it is a

breach of the order of nature in any other sense than that which I have already discussed. Such disturbances occur every day. It is, therefore, misleading to designate them as contrary to nature, as they neither necessarily suspend any natural force nor violate any natural law. I have already proved that there is nothing in such disturbances, or, if we persist in so designating them violations of the order of nature, that is contrary to reason. Such a use of the terms “course and order of nature” is full of ambiguities and certain to betray us into fallacious reasonings.

But, adds the writer, “it is clearly unnatural that the ordinary course of nature should be disturbed.” Here the ambiguity of the expressions used, and the consequent fallacy of the reasonings, are brought to a culmination.

What, I ask, is intended by the ordinary course of nature? Is it the invariable action of its forces, or the invariable sequences of their results, or the orderly arrangement of its parts; or does it include mind and all its phenomena, of the precise nature of the forces, laws and order of which we are ignorant, and its action on the physical universe? What, again, is the precise meaning which can be attached to the word “unnatural” in such a context, where it is evident that its meaning must vary according as we include in nature one, several, or all of these phenomena? If by the word “unnatural” the meaning intended to be conveyed is unusual or impossible, it is then clearly not unnatural that the course of nature should be interrupted in the manner I have previously pointed out. Nor if man is included in nature, is it unnatural that the results produced by its physical forces should be greatly modified by his action? [142]

The remark of the author in connection with this subject is perfectly true, that a grain could never of itself, nor according to the law of natural development, issue in a loaf of bread; but it is wholly aside from the issue which he raises. It is unquestionable that forces purely physical could not effect this result; but does it follow from this that the production of a loaf of bread is an event

contrary to nature? The result can only be produced by the combination and controlling of a number of material forces by human reason. The grain of wheat must be planted by man at the proper season. It must be cared for by him. Various physical forces must contribute to the growth and development of the plant. The ears produced must be reaped in harvest-time. This process must be repeated until the grains are sufficient in number to produce our intended loaf. Then they must be threshed, ground, prepared for the oven, baked. In one word, the miller and the baker must be invoked to control, combine, modify and give a new direction to the forces of nature under the direction of intelligence. All this involves something more than the action of material forces. The forces of nature carry on the work to a certain point. Then man takes it up and interrupts their order, although he does so by compelling other forces to effectuate the purposes of his will. The ordinary course of material nature is disturbed in the production of a loaf of bread. A new order of events is introduced. Man is either within or without nature. In either case a power exists which is capable of producing innovations in its order.

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But how stands the case of the feeding of five thousand persons on seven loaves and two fishes? The seven loaves and two fishes had been previously produced, by the action of material forces out of materials already existing in the ground, in water, and in the air. Of such materials there was abundance at hand to produce the requisite amount of food for the feeding of the multitude. The only question was how to build them up into the forms of bread and fish. There was no occasion to create one single particle of matter. As to the nature of the forces employed to work the miracle the narrative says nothing. Nor does it imply that one of the ordinary forces of nature was suspended on the occasion. All that it asserts is the presence of a force adequate to build up the materials already existing into the forms of bread and fish, that force being God. In the manufacture of the loaves and in the catching of the fish, man had interfered with nature's

order by the blending of her powers. God interfered with nature's order at a higher stage by building up the particular forms of bread and fish out of materials already in existence, by means of forces differing from those which come under our cognisance. The act of man is evidence of the presence of a being who is able to control the forces of external nature for his own purposes. [144] The miracle would be evidence of the presence of a Being who is able to exert a mightier influence over them in order to effect his own.

Equal ambiguity prevails in the use of the term "law." What do we mean by law when we apply the term to nature? In physical philosophy, the Duke of Argyll tells us it is used in a great variety of senses. Its proper meaning is to denote an invariable sequence of phenomena. It is frequently made to include the conception of the forces at work which produce the phenomena. This ambiguous use of the word has been a source of endless confusion. The following quotation will furnish us with an example:—

"If in animated beings we have the solitary instance of an efficient cause acting among the forces of nature and possessing the power of initiation, this efficient cause produces no disturbance of physical law. Its existence is as much a recognised part of the infinite variety of form within the order of nature, as the existence of a crystal or a plant; and although the character of the force exercised by it may not be clearly understood, its effects are regulated by the same laws as govern all the other forces of nature. If the laws of matter are suspended by the laws of life, each time an animated being moves any part of its body, one physical law is suspended in precisely the same manner and to an equivalent degree, each time another physical law is called into action. The law of gravitation, for instance, is suspended by the law of magnetism each time a magnet suspends a weight in the air. In each case a law is successfully resisted precisely to the extent of the force employed.... No exercise of will can overcome the law of gravitation or any other law to a greater [145]

extent than the actual force exerted, any more than a magnetic current can do so beyond the action of the battery. Will has no power against exhaustion. Even Moses in the sublimest moments of faith could not hold up his arms to heaven after his physical force was consumed.” P. 44, vol. i.

First: it is alleged “that an efficient cause” (man for example) “acting among the forces of nature, and possessing the power of initiation, produces no disturbance of physical law.” What is here meant by disturbance of physical law? It is plain that physical forces would work out a wholly different result apart from the action of man upon them. Though he suspends no physical force, the action of man has produced an order of events in nature different from that which would have taken place without it, but by balancing one against the other he modifies their action. What is more, he possesses a power of self-determination. Other forces are unintelligent. Man is an intelligent force capable of introducing an order of nature quite different from that which the material forces of nature would have produced without his intervention.

Next: we are told that the existence of man “is as much a recognised part of the infinite variety of form within the order of nature as the existence of a plant or a crystal.” I again ask, what nature? Is the order spoken of that of blind unintelligent forces, or does it include intelligence and free agency? Unless man is a blind unintelligent force, although he be supposed to exist within nature, he belongs to an order wholly different from that of a plant or a crystal. To assert the contrary is to assume the whole question. The results produced by intelligent volition differ completely in character from those effected by the unintelligent forces of nature. The one follows an order of necessity: the other of freedom. The affirmation that the results of the latter belong to the same order as those of the former is directly contrary to facts.

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Again: “the laws of matter are suspended by the laws of life.”

If laws are the invariable sequences of phenomena how is it possible that one law can suspend another law? It is not even true that one force can suspend another force. All that it can do is to neutralize its action. Physical philosophy is constantly attributing to laws what can only be true of forces, and even frequently ascribes to them what is only true of intelligent forces. It must never be overlooked in this controversy that the laws of nature can effectuate nothing. Forces, not laws, produce results. The following sentence will be a correct expression of a truth, if we substitute “force” for “law:” “The law of gravitation is overcome by the law of magnetism each time a magnet suspends a weight in the air.” Immediately after, we are told that the arm falls in obedience to law. It falls by the force of gravitation. When theologians use metaphors of this description they are charged with anthropomorphism. Such a charge is equally valid against the language in which physical philosophy expresses itself.

Again: The author affirms “that the solitary instance of an efficient cause, if it be distinguished from the other forces of nature by the possession of an initiatory impulse, is from the moment when that power is exerted subject to physical laws like all other forces; and there is no instance producible, or even logically conceivable, of any power whose effects are opposed to the ultimate ruling of the laws of nature. The occurrence of anything opposed to these laws is incredible.” p. 48. [147]

What is meant, I ask, by “the intimate ruling of the laws of nature”? Even if we substitute forces for laws, the meaning is sufficiently obscure. Probably the expression is intended to mean the combined result effected by the energy of all the forces in nature. If these include all mental as well as all material forces, then the assertion is a simple truism, that nothing can be contrary to itself. But if they exclude mental force, then the results which they produce are clearly opposed to the ultimate ruling of the forces of unintelligent nature. Numerous instances are not only logically conceivable, but actually producible. The occurrence,

therefore, of anything opposed to the ultimate rulings of these unintelligent physical forces is not incredible. It is perfectly true that man can only produce results through the agency of these physical forces; but he can modify their results, and so use them as to make them the means of effectuating his purposes. It is quite true that nothing can occur opposed to the forces of nature; that is to say, that, while the force of gravitation is in energy, and no other force is present capable of overcoming its power, the ascension of a human body into heaven is impossible. But who has ever affirmed that it was possible? Those who affirm that an ascension has taken place, also assert that another force was in active energy, which was capable of counteracting the force of gravitation. This assertion, therefore, is totally irrelevant to the point at issue.

The consideration of the next question before us may very properly be introduced, by quoting the following passage of the same author:

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“Our highest attainable conception of infinite power and wisdom is based on the universality and invariability of law, and inexorably excludes as unworthy and anthropomorphic any idea of its fitful suspension.”

This at once raises the very important question, whether there is anything in the performance of a miracle inconsistent with the divine character and perfections. It has been often alleged by those who deny the possibility of miracles, that God energizes in the universe in conformity with invariable laws, which express the uniform mode of the divine working. From these, as the result of his wisdom, He will never deviate. To alter or vary from this mode of acting implies that the machinery of the universe, through which He acts, is imperfect. The supposition that He has worked a miracle therefore involves the assumption that He has ceased from one mode of action and adopted another; or, in other words, that the forces of the universe fail to effectuate his purposes; or that the whole machine has got out of order

and requires rectification. Any action of this kind in the case of a Being possessed of all power, is a reflection both on his wisdom and his immutability. Still further: it is affirmed by some that the love of order is an attribute so inherent in Deity, that it is inconceivable that any alteration in the existing order of the universe should take place under his government.

One objection raised in the above quotation I may dismiss summarily, viz. the idea that God interposes with any fitful interventions in the universe. The idea of fitful intervention is quite foreign to the conception of a miracle, which is described in the New Testament as one of the means by which he realizes his deliberate purposes. I shall elsewhere disprove the allegation that Revelation is an intervention of the Creator to rectify a miscarriage in his creative work.

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It will also be desirable in this place to answer the charge of anthropomorphism so frequently urged against the defenders of Christianity. When they speak of God as a person, they are charged with manufacturing a gigantic man. When they ascribe to Him a moral character, or describe Him as acting in nature, they are then accused of making a God out of a number of conceptions which are purely human. This fault, if it be one, must be shared alike by philosophers, men of science, and theologians. The plain fact is, that man has no conceptions but human ones. To abandon these is to cease to think altogether. When philosophers and men of science speak of nature, they are obliged to apply to it conceptions which are strictly true only of man. We are obliged to do precisely the same with respect to God. So far all thought, the most elevated and the most ordinary, is anthropomorphic. The term can be fairly used as a reproach only when certain material conceptions or degraded passions are directly affirmed to exist in the divine mind.

The author, in the following passage, places the objection before us in a still more striking light: "Being therefore limited to reason for our feeble conceptions of the divine Being of which

we are capable, and reason being totally opposed to an order of nature so imperfect as to require or permit repeated interference, and rejecting the supposition of arbitrary suspension of law, such a conception of the Deity as is proposed by theologians must be pronounced irrational, and derogatory to the wisdom and perfection which we recognize in the invariable order of nature. It is impossible for us to conceive the supreme Being acting otherwise than we actually see in nature; and if we recognize in the universe the operation of his infinite wisdom and power, it is in the immutable order and regularity of all phenomena, and the eternal prevalence of law that we see their highest manifestation.”

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It is asserted by this writer and a great number of others, that the most perfect conception of the universe is that of a machine, which when once set into action shall go on eternally grinding out its results without the smallest occasion for the intervention of its Maker. According to this view, all the He has to do for the future after the machine is once set into operation, is to retire from the scene of His creative work, and to contemplate the results of its wonderful operations. Any intervention on His part would imply a defect in the construction of the machine. It follows therefore that the most perfect conception of God (if there be one) is that of a perfect mechanist and chemist, who has originally formed matter with its properties and forces acting in conformity with invariable law, and that this has been done by Him with such perfection, that they have gone on ever since evolving whatever has existed, without the need of His intervention or supervision; or to put it in other words, after the original act of creation, His presence in the universe may be dispensed with as unnecessary. The universe is therefore a self-acting machine which goes on in an eternal series of self-evolutions.

Such a conception may be the most worthy one that we can form of a perfect mechanist or chemist, though it may be doubtful how far the idea of having his services dispensed with for the future would be wholly satisfactory to him. It is far from clear,

however, that it is the most perfect conception we can form of God. The creations of the mechanist and of the chemist are destitute alike of feeling, reason and volition, a moral nature, conscience, and spiritual affections. They may therefore when completed be left to themselves; and the more perfect the irrational machine may be, the more perfectly it will grind out its results. But many of the constructions of God possess attributes, which exhibit other qualities in their maker than those of a perfect mechanist or chemist. It follows, therefore, that this is not the most perfect nor the most worthy conception which we can form of God. [151]

But it will be objected that even if we concede that the Creator is ever present energizing in the works of nature, and even if the forces of nature are viewed as the expressions of His energy, His action in conformity with unchanging order is the worthiest conception of Him, and to assert that He ever has varied from this mode of action is to degrade Him. Such being the case, to affirm that miracles have been wrought by Him, is to introduce a degraded view of the character of God, one alike inconsistent with His wisdom, immutability and power.

I reply: that the objection overlooks the existence of purpose in the divine mind, and that it may not be confined to the realization of a mechanical result. The purpose or idea of creation in God includes the production of both the material and the moral worlds. If this be so, one harmonious purpose, including the divine manifestations, both in the material and moral universe, may be carried out by a succession of progressive manifestations, each forming a portion of one great divine plan. A miracle, therefore, as a part of such a moral intervention, would be no interruption of the orderly action of the divine mind, but a portion of it.

But further: if God exists, He must have other attributes besides those of a mechanist or a chemist. He has created not only the material universe, but a moral one. God, therefore, must

[152] be a moral being, and a person, for moral attributes can only be conceived of as belonging to a being who is possessed of personality. It follows, therefore, that manifestations of Himself, under aspects suitable to moral beings, are as much to be expected as manifestations of His power or of His wisdom addressed to an intellectual nature. The supposition, therefore, that all His manifestations can only be made through the laws of material nature, and in an unchanging series, and that it is not a portion of His purpose to manifest Himself as a moral being, is only valid on the denial that He is one. It involves the absurdity of denying to God that freedom from the trammels of necessary law which as matter of fact He has bestowed on man.

If therefore God be a moral being and not an impersonal force, it is perfectly consistent with the highest conceptions of Him, that He should manifest Himself in the moral as well as in the material universe. This is the more necessary, because philosophy is never wearied with telling us, that we can know little or nothing of His moral attributes from material nature. As a part of such manifestation a miracle is addressed to our highest reason.

[153] It is absurd to argue on the assumption that there is a God, and then to found our reasonings on principles which are inconsistent with it. If there is a God, He must be the creator of the universe. It must, therefore, have been consistent with His perfection and immutability to create. It follows, therefore, even on the assumption of the truth of the Darwinian theory of creation, that a new order must have been introduced, when God first breathed life into the lowest forms of matter. But if He introduced a new order then, that is to say, when He first deviated from the previous order of His existence, and performed His first creative act, how can it possibly be contrary to reason to affirm that He has repeated it. A miracle would be such a repetition, or, in other words, the introduction of a new series of events.

I fully admit that reason is opposed to the supposition of such

an order of nature as to require repeated interferences with it, assuming that what is intended is a frequent meddling with it to set it right, not constant presence and superintendence. Still more is it opposed to the idea of arbitrary interruption of law. The entire validity of these reasonings which we have been considering proceeds on the assumption that the argument requires this. I care not what some Christian apologists may have said on this subject. The New Testament affirms in the most unequivocal language that revelation is the steady carrying out of a pre-determined purpose in God to make a manifestation of Himself not only to man, but to other rational beings besides man. The objection therefore falls to the ground.

The assertion that it is impossible to conceive of the supreme Being acting otherwise than we see him act in nature, may be met by a direct denial. On the contrary the presence of evil, moral and physical, forms the greatest difficulty connected with the belief in theism. The elder Mill was so capable of conceiving that if a supreme Being existed, the order of the universe would have been so wholly different from its present order, that it led him to affirm that the proof of His existence was altogether wanting.<sup>3</sup> But intelligent Christians fully recognize in the immutable order and regularity of the universe and the eternal prevalence of law, the operation of His infinite wisdom and power. Unless there was such a general regularity and order in the universe, the evidential force of miracles would be deprived of all value. [154]

It follows therefore, whichever views we may take of the mode in which a miracle may be performed, that there is nothing in the idea of it which is contrary to our reason. Whenever it is affirmed to be so, the assertion originates in an ambiguity in the use of terms, or in partial views of nature, or of the mode of the divine working, or from confounding under a common name phenomena so different in character as those of mind and

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<sup>3</sup> J. S. Mill, in his recently published essays, considers this the most formidable objection against theism.

matter, or by making assumptions respecting the divine operations which contradict the laws of the universe, or respecting the divine character, which reason refuses to endorse. How far the known or unknown forces of nature may be employed in the performance of a miracle is an abstract question that we have no means of determining. The agency of some of the known forces of nature is unequivocally asserted in the Old Testament to have been the media employed in the performance of some of its miracles. No such affirmation is made in the New Testament. Still there is not one word to imply that any of the forces of material nature were for a single moment suspended in their action. The only assertion made is the presence and active energy of a force capable of producing them. That force is the Creator of the universe bearing witness to the divine mission of Jesus Christ. "The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me." "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (John v. 36, 37.)

## Chapter VII. The Allegation That No Testimony Can Prove The Truth Of A Supernatural Event.

Hume's position, which affirmed that it is impossible to prove the truth of a supernatural event by any amount of testimony however strong, is certainly one of the most plausible that have ever been assumed by unbelief. Stated briefly and in his own words, it is as follows: "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle from the nature of the fact is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." Again: "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony is of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." The fallacy of these positions, notwithstanding the plausible arguments by which they are supported, has already been pointed out by a multitude of writers. Mr. Mill himself has practically abandoned Hume's argument as either a harmless truism, or, in another point of view, one that requires to be modified to such an extent as to deprive it of any real cogency. Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, it might be passed over in silence.

But the author of "Supernatural Religion" has endeavoured to rehabilitate it even against Mr. Mill. He affirms that Christian "Apologists find it much more convenient to evade the simple but effective arguments of Hume, than to answer them; and where it is possible, they dismiss them with a sneer, and hasten on to less dangerous ground." He then endeavours to show that Mr.

Mill has been partly misapprehended, and is partly inaccurate; and he proceeds to address himself to Paley's argument against Hume, as though it was relied on by modern apologists as entirely conclusive. No other writer is even noticed by him. In the recent work of the late Mr. Warington, "Can I believe in miracles?" one chapter is devoted to the calm and dispassionate examination of Hume's argument. It is perhaps the ablest dissection of it in existence. Yet this writer, who charges Christian apologists with evasion, and even with getting rid of its force by a sneer, has left Mr. Warington's crushing reply to Hume completely unnoticed. The position taken by him renders a few general observations necessary. As it will be useless to repeat arguments that have been fully elaborated elsewhere, I shall content myself with briefly stating the positions which have been firmly established on this subject.

First: Experience consists of two kinds; 1st, That which has fallen under our own direct cognizance, which from the nature of the case must have been very limited. 2dly, The general experience of all other men, as far as we have the means of knowing it. This latter experience we become acquainted with exclusively by testimony, and it rests entirely on its validity. The two together constitute what we mean when we say that a thing is, or is not, contrary to experience.

Secondly: There is a sense in which miracles are contrary to our experience. They would be destitute of all evidential value, if they were not so. But while this is freely admitted, we must lay down clearly in what sense we use the words. They are not so, in the sense that we have had direct evidence of their non-occurrence. They are contrary to our experience only in the sense that we have never witnessed them, and that the order of events which we have witnessed is always different; for instance, we have witnessed as a matter of experience that men die, and that none return again to life; or that blind men, when cured, are never cured by a word or a touch. In this sense alone it is that

the resurrection of a dead man, and the cure of a blind man by a touch, is contrary to our experience.

Thirdly: It is not true that an occurrence which in this sense is contrary to our experience cannot be believed on adequate testimony. If it were so, all additions to our knowledge that lie beyond the limits of our past experience, ought to be rejected. Every extraordinary occurrence must be at once pronounced incredible.

Fourthly: The experience of one age differs from that of another. That which lies outside the experience of one century becomes within the experience of the next. The truth is that the sum of human experience is receiving continual additions, in proportion as the sphere of observation enlarges. If it is true that we ought to reject everything contrary to experience, it follows that if many of the inventions of the present age had been reported in a previous one, they ought to have been rejected as incredible. For example: if a century ago it had been affirmed that a message had actually been conveyed one thousand miles in five minutes, the assertion ought on this principle to have been rejected as contrary to the universal experience of mankind. In an earlier age, no miracle could have been more difficult to believe. Yet although contrary to prior experience, it has been established as a fact. The principle, therefore, as laid down by Hume, leads to an absurd conclusion. [158]

Fifthly: The experience of each individual is limited by his own observation and what he has learned respecting that of others. This constitutes as far as he is concerned the experience of mankind. Now, under the Equator the experience of man is that each day and night is twelve hours long. Neither he, nor his ancestors, nor any person whom he trusts, have ever had any other experience than this. To him, therefore, the affirmation that there is a place on the earth where each day and night is six months long, is contrary to experience, and ought to be rejected as a fable.

Sixthly: If we confine experience to scientific experience, extraordinary discoveries are made and facts established in one age which are contrary to that of a former one. On this principle, the ground on which Herodotus rejected the story of the Phœnician navigators that they had sailed round Africa was satisfactory. It was contrary to his experience that they should have seen the sun in the position in which they affirmed that they had seen it, though it is not contrary to ours.

Seventhly: Miracles viewed as mere *phenomena* stand on exactly the same ground as very unusual occurrences, or very wonderful discoveries. As far as they are contrary to past experience, they are alike credible or incredible. They are events of which the cause is unknown, but may or may not hereafter be discovered. It is quite true that any extraordinary phenomenon requires a stronger testimony to render it credible than an ordinary occurrence. But this involves no question of abstract possibility or impossibility, but is one purely of evidence, each case having to be decided on its own merits. It must be carefully observed that when we affirm that this or that matter lies within human knowledge, or is contrary to it, experience has to do with phenomena alone. All questions of causation lie entirely beyond its cognizance.

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Eighthly: The moment we view an event otherwise than as a mere phenomenon, and take into consideration the causes producing it, however unusual it may be, it is impossible to affirm that it is contrary to experience. When we take these into consideration the entire character of the event is at once changed, and the probability of the occurrence must be estimated on wholly different grounds. Under such circumstances, an extremely improbable event, which we might otherwise justly reject as contrary to experience, becomes simply one of which we have had no experience. Thus it is contrary to experience that men can live for one hour under water, but when we take into consideration and thoroughly understand the contrivance of

the diving-bell, the event becomes one of a different order from that of which we supposed that we had experience. Before this apparatus was invented, the assertion that men could live an hour under water would have been rejected as fabulous. The invention has introduced a fresh condition into the case. The event has now become a portion of our experience; but prior to the discovery of the apparatus it was merely an event lying outside our experience, and not to be rejected as being contrary to it. In a similar way, a miracle, as a mere phenomenon, may be said to be contrary to our experience; but the moment that we take into account its true character, viz. that its very conception implies the presence of a force of some kind with which we were previously unacquainted, then such an event is no longer one which we can pronounce contrary to our experience, but merely one which lies beyond or outside it. In the case of miracles, [160] therefore, the position of Hume is inapplicable.

Ninthly: It is not true that in estimating the truth of testimony, we simply balance probability, against probability, as stated in Hume's argument. The form in which it has been put by him is too abstract to admit of application to individual cases; nor does any man, in estimating the truth of testimony for practical purposes, set down and deliberately balance probabilities against probabilities. The whole process is of a far more instantaneous character, and a number of minute considerations are involved, which do not admit of statement in the form of general propositions. Thus, if an event lying outside my present experience is reported to me by a friend on whose veracity and powers of judgment I have implicit reliance, I accept the truth of his statement, notwithstanding a great degree of abstract improbability; it being assumed that the event was one in which it was impossible that he should be deceived. In estimating this latter point, we never balance the probabilities as to the truth or falsehood of human testimony, but we consider the individual circumstances of the case, whether they are of such a nature that our friend could be

deceived about them. If on consideration we are convinced that deception was impossible, we yield assent to his known veracity, although, as far as we know, the event reported by him has never before come within the range of human experience.

Let me remove the question from an abstract into a concrete form. There are numberless events in which it happens that men of unquestionable judgment and veracity are deceived. There are others in which no deception can be possible. An instance of one class is the alleged case of persons living a considerable time without food. Here astuteness may impose on the vigilance of the most wary. Take, on the other hand, the case of a man born blind. One informant, on whose veracity we have the fullest reliance, tells us that he has known the man from his birth; that, up to a certain day, his blindness was established beyond all reasonable doubt to every one who knew him, that on that day, he saw a person touch the eyes of the blind man, who not only instantly received his sight, but could use his eyes as perfectly as those who had enjoyed the use of them from birth. I admit that this case is a supposed one, and does not exactly represent any case recorded in the Gospels. But though an assumed one, it is perfectly valid for the purposes of argument. In it deception would be impossible. If all this was affirmed to have come under the direct knowledge of one, of whose veracity and judgment we were assured, we should accept his statement as true, without balancing the abstract probability of the truth of evidence against the probability of its falsity, although the event narrated lay outside the range of our experience. Our knowledge of the judgment and veracity of the informant is the essential element in judging of the truth of evidence. It is only when our means of forming this judgment are deficient that we attempt to balance abstract probabilities.

Tenthly: The question of the truth of testimony as against past experience and the alleged greater probability that testimony should be false, than that past experience should be unreliable,

is greatly modified by the consideration that an overwhelming amount of the sum total of past experience rests for its acceptance on the validity of testimony itself. That portion which is not the result of our own individual experience rests for its truth exclusively on the validity of human testimony, and must be unreliable in proportion as testimony is invalid. It must be observed, however, that I by no means deny that testimony is much more frequently invalid in its narrations of extraordinary events than of ordinary ones. [162]

Eleventhly: While it is freely conceded that the evidence to prove the truth of a very extraordinary occurrence must be far stronger than that which is required to prove an ordinary one, it must never be forgotten that the amount of evidence necessary to prove any particular fact always varies with the amount of the antecedent probability of its occurrence. The very same action may be credible or otherwise, just in proportion as we can discern an adequate purpose for its performance, or infer the presence of a particular motive. If, for example, it were reported that a man of the highest character had been seen during the hours of early morning issuing from one of the lowest haunts of vice in London, those who knew him well would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to establish the truth of the assertion. They would undoubtedly fall back on the question of abstract probability, and argue that it was more likely that it was either a case of mistaken identity (a very common error), or a deliberate falsehood, than that the statement should be true. But, if, on the contrary, it could be shown that he had been sent for to visit a dying person, and had gone at his particular request, the whole of the antecedent improbability would vanish, and the otherwise incredible testimony would become perfectly credible. It follows, therefore, that the credibility of testimony varies with our knowledge of the motive for the performance of the action.

This consideration ought to have due weight in considering the evidence of miracles. Viewed as mere phenomena, their abstract [163]

improbability is great. When they are viewed as deviations from the ordinary course of nature, their improbability becomes still greater. But those who believe in the existence of a personal God energizing in the universe at every moment, and in every place, postulate the presence of a force fully adequate to work them, for this is involved in the idea of God. But the question arises, Will He? Until a well-attested miracle has actually been performed, the antecedent probability derived from our experience of the order of nature is against the supposition that He will, and throws on the reporter the necessity of giving a stronger proof than we require for an ordinary fact. But in proportion as we can show that it is probable that God will make a revelation, the antecedent improbability of a miracle is diminished; and if it can be shown that it is very probable that He will do so, it wholly disappears.

It will be readily admitted that such an argument can only have weight with a believer in the existence of a God, who is the moral Governor of the Universe. To him, however, it is of the utmost value, for on the supposition in question, the probability of some higher manifestation of the divine character than that displayed in the material universe does not rest on theory, but on the facts of man and his condition. Looking at the past history of the world, it is matter of fact that God has made higher and higher manifestations of himself. So far it is antecedently probable that He will continue to do so. His last manifestation has been in the production of a being possessed of a moral nature, with powers capable of immense elevation. It is also no theory, but a fact, that this moral being now is, and ever has been within the historical periods in a state of great imperfection. It is therefore highly probable that the Creator will adopt means for elevating the moral being whom He has created, and that He will effect this by acting, not on matter, but on mind. Contemplating the actual state of man, the known law of the Creator's previous action, and the moral character of God, the antecedent probability that God will make a further manifestation of himself is established quite

independently of the facts or assertions in the Bible.

Twelfthly: Whatever be the supposed antecedent improbability of an occurrence, it is capable of being overcome by an amount of evidence which can leave no reasonable doubt in a mind endowed with common sense. Theoretical objections may be adduced against any evidence which can be brought in proof of particular facts, but the ultimate appeal must be, not to a multitude of abstract theories, but to the common sense of mankind. Of this character is all historical evidence. It rests on the same principles as those which guide us in the affairs of daily life. There is a certain amount of evidence which leaves no doubt on the common sense of mankind, although it may be open to many theoretical objections. Such evidence is capable of proving a fact against a very high degree of antecedent improbability. Mr. Mill may be considered as a witness whose predilections were all in favour of unbelief. Yet his clear logical mind has led him to state the case fairly as far as the *à priori* probability or improbability of miracles is concerned. His conclusions are adverse to the position assumed by the author of "Supernatural Religion." I will briefly state the most important of Mr. Mill's positions.

First. He points out that a miracle involves nothing contradictory to any law of causation. He well remarks that to prove such a contradiction, it is not only necessary that the cause should exist without producing the effect, but that no contravening cause should be present. But the very idea of a miracle presupposes an adequate contravening cause, *i.e.* God. The possibility of a miracle therefore cannot be denied on the ground that it does not presuppose the presence of a force adequate to produce it. Mr. Mill states, "Of the adequacy of that cause, if present, there can be no doubt, and the only antecedent improbability that can be objected to a miracle, is the improbability that any such cause existed," that is to say, the whole controversy resolves itself into the question between Pantheism and Atheism on the one hand,

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and Theism on the other.

Secondly. He observes: "All therefore that Hume has made out, and this he must be considered to have made out, is, that (at least in the imperfect state of our knowledge of natural agencies, which leaves it always possible that some of the physical antecedents may have been hidden from us) no evidence can prove a miracle to any one who did not previously believe in the existence of a being or beings with supernatural power, or who believes himself to have full proof that the character of the being whom he recognises is inconsistent with his having seen fit to interfere on the occasion in question. If we do not already believe in supernatural agencies, no miracle can prove to us their existence. The miracle itself, considered as an extraordinary fact, may be satisfactorily certified by our senses, or by testimony; but nothing can ever prove that it is a miracle: there is still another possible hypothesis, that of its being the result of some unknown cause; and this possibility cannot be so completely shut out, as to leave no alternative but that of admitting the existence of a being superior to nature. Those, however, who already believe in such a being have two hypotheses to choose from, a supernatural and an unknown natural agency; and they have to judge which of the two is the most probable in this particular case."

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It is impossible to deny that this is a correct statement of the question. Hume's position is a generalized statement, that no evidence can establish the reality of a miracle, on the ground that our experience of the uniformity of nature's laws is so firm and unalterable, that no amount of testimony can establish a fact in opposition to it; or as he elsewhere puts it, "unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." He affirms this to be equally true on the principles of Atheism, Pantheism, or Theism, for the only thing that he takes into account is the inadequacy of the testimony, and not the inadequacy of the cause. Mr. Mill therefore says correctly that all that this argument

avails to prove is, that it is impossible to prove a miracle, except to persons who are already convinced that a being or beings exist who are possessed of supernatural powers, and that it is in conformity with their character to work one. If this is the only intelligible meaning of Hume's position (and it is evident that it is), it reduces his argument against miracles to a very harmless one. The conception of a miracle as distinct from an unusual phenomenon implies purpose. Purpose is only conceivable of a being possessed of personality and will. To those therefore who either deny the existence of any such being higher than man, or who affirm that we have no evidence of his existence, it is impossible to prove a miracle *as a miracle*. The utmost that could be done would be to prove that an event had taken place in nature which in the present state of our knowledge could be assigned to no known cause. In such a case the Pantheist and the Atheist have always the alternative of believing that the event in question must be due to the operation of some unknown force in nature, but which in the gradual development of knowledge we may hereafter be able to detect. This is a position that no defender of revelation worthy of the name can be anxious to dispute. Let it further be observed that Mr. Mill does not deny, but affirms, that the occurrence of an extraordinary event analogous to a miracle viewed simply as a phenomenon, may be satisfactorily certified by our senses or by testimony. To affirm the contrary would be simply absurd, as involving the stereotyping of human thought, and making the wisdom of our ancestors the only standard of truth. There was a time when the earth was believed to be an extended plain. If at that time any one had asserted that by continually sailing westward he had at last arrived at the place from which he started, or, in other words, had circumnavigated the globe, this affirmation ought to have been rejected, not only as founded on testimony contrary to all previous experience, but as intrinsically impossible. Yet if Hume's dictum has any value as an argument against the possibility of a miracle, it must affirm the

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impossibility of establishing such an occurrence by any amount of evidence whatever. Mr. Mill's mind was far too logical not to perceive that such a position is altogether untenable.

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Mr. Mill, however, affirms that there is one ground on which the argument might be tenable against a theist, not because the evidence is insufficient to prove the occurrence of an extraordinary fact, as a mere phenomenon, but because it could not prove it to be a miracle. It is not only necessary, says he, in order to render this proof valid, that one should believe in the existence of a supernatural being who is able to bring about the occurrence, but also that "the character of this Being is not inconsistent with his having seen fit to interfere on the occasion in question." Thus a man may be a believer in the existence of God, and yet be persuaded that it was not consistent with his character to interfere with the course of natural phenomena at all, or in such a manner as the conception of a miracle pre-supposes. To such a theist the utmost that evidence could prove would be, that the extraordinary event had been brought about by the action of an unknown force. Again, the same principle acts, and acts reasonably, on the minds of multitudes of intelligent Christians, who summarily reject a certain class of reported miracles without inquiring into their evidence, on the ground that the working of such miracles is inconsistent with their conceptions of the divine character; that is to say, they think it more probable that the stories should be untrue, than that God should work in the way in question. But to give this argument any validity against the miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity, it must be proved that it is inconsistent with the divine character to make a revelation, or to introduce a deviation from what is to us the ordinary mode of His working; or that the miracles recorded in the Gospels are repugnant to the character of God.

Mr. Mill's general position is therefore incontrovertible, that those who believe in the existence of God "have two hypotheses to choose from, viz. a supernatural, or an unknown natural

agency;” and that they must judge which of these two is the more probable; and that, in forming their judgment, a most important consideration must be the character of God, and the conformity of the supposed event to that character. This position every intelligent Christian will readily accept. [169]

Mr. Mill adds: “But with the knowledge which we now possess of the general uniformity of the course of nature, religion, following in the wake of science, has been compelled to acknowledge the government of the universe, as being on the whole carried on by general laws, and not by special interpositions. To whosoever holds this belief, there is a general presumption against any supposition of divine agency, not operating through general laws; or, in other words, there is an antecedent improbability in every miracle, which in order to outweigh it, requires an extraordinary strength of antecedent probability derived from the special circumstances of the case.” These observations require consideration.

There is no doubt that the polytheistic religions postulated the existence of a vast number of superhuman beings by whose agency and caprice many natural occurrences were brought about. Such a belief indicates a very imperfect conception of “order” in nature. But these supposed interferences with it would by no means realize the notion of what we now designate a miracle, the very idea of which implies an order in nature to which the miracle forms an exception. If there is no order in nature, there can be no miracle.

The Hebrew monotheism involved conceptions directly opposite to this. It viewed the action of God as the foundation of all the forces in nature. Whilst above and outside nature, He was everywhere present in nature. Its forces were the expressions of the energy of His will. Its order (for the Hebrew recognised a high order in nature) was the result of His good pleasure, and due to His constant working. In the Old Testament the commonest events in nature are no less ascribed to God than those which we [170]

designate miraculous. A Hebrew never conceived of a miracle as a deviation from the divine order, but as a consistent carrying out of a divine purpose in the government of the world. A modern conception of theism differs from this in supposing that there are certain forces in material nature which, when once called into action, go on energizing without any direct intervention of God. But when this conception comes to be minutely analysed, if we believe in a God, it is impossible to conceive of force, at least in its ultimate form, except as a direct expression of the divine energy.

Science has so far modified religious thought on this subject, that while it still continues to hold that the various forces in nature are modes of the divine acting, it nevertheless believes that God does not deviate from his predetermined course for the purpose of meeting what we are pleased to call special contingencies. The divine action is, in fact, not altered to meet man's convenience, and His government is carried on as far as it lies within our cognisance by the general forces of nature. God acts in nature in conformity with a definite law, and from that He will not deviate, whatever consequences man's ignorance or disregard of his mode of action may bring upon him. Mr. Mill observes that to any person holding this belief, there is a general presumption against any supposition of divine agency, not operating through general laws. That is to say, we have had a constant experience of his acting through general laws; and no experience of his acting otherwise. But the idea of a revelation introduces a factor into the case, entirely different from anything of which we have had previous experience. It forms part of a great purpose existing in the divine mind, and is in its nature analogous to the first introduction of life, or the first creation of a free moral agent. Respecting the laws by which God regulates his creative acts, we are ignorant. Yet the theist firmly believes in creative acts of some kind, and that they are regulated by law. In this ignorance of God's law of creation, it is impossible to affirm that it is

antecedently improbable that in making a fresh manifestation of himself, he will operate only through those general laws, which are the ordinary manifestations of his will.

There is some want of clearness in Mr. Mill's expression, that in order to outweigh the antecedent improbability of miracles, arising from those modes of the divine action which fall within the limits of our experience, an extraordinary strength of antecedent probability, derived from the special circumstances of the case, is required. If by this antecedent probability he means something such as has been above referred to, there can be no objection to his statement. He ought to have observed, however, that the antecedent improbability which may be supposed to belong to miracles, only attaches to them while contemplated as phenomena, and that such an improbability readily yields to positive evidence. This is virtually admitted in a subsequent sentence. "According as this circumstance, viz. the unknown cause, not having previously manifested itself in action, or the falsity of the testimony, appears more improbable; that is, conflicts with an approximate generalization of a higher order, we believe the testimony or disbelieve it with a stronger or weaker degree of conviction, according to the preponderance, at least until we have sifted the matter further." "This," says the author of "Supernatural Religion," "is precisely Hume's argument, weakened by the introduction of reservations which have no cogency." We say, [172] this is precisely what Hume's argument is *not*, for, if it be valid, the whole question of miracles may be summarily dismissed without any inquiry into the evidence on which they rest.

Still, however, as the author affirms and endeavours to prove that Mr. Mill's position leave Hume's argument untouched, a few further observations will be necessary. Hume's statement is, "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle from the nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience which can possibly be imagined."

I reply, that the conception of a miracle does not involve any necessary violation of the laws of nature. All that it implies is the presence of another force different from those which have come under our cognisance: and this may act so as to produce the miracle without violating one of nature's laws. But, it is added, "uniform and unalterable experience has established these laws." What has this experience really established? It is this, and this only, Given the presence of certain forces, *and no others*, certain results invariably follow. But experience cannot tell us anything, as to what would be the law of nature, if some other force were in action; nor is it able to say one word as to the non-existence of any force which has not come under its observation. Abstractedly, it is true that the argument against a miracle is as entire as any argument from experience can be imagined, because experience really supplies us with no basis for argumentation in the case. Prior to the invention of railways and the discovery of the uses to which steam can be applied, the argument from experience was equally valid against the possibility of travelling in a carriage not propelled by animal force. In each case a new force enters into the conditions, of which experience is unable to take cognisance.

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"Why is it more probable that all men must die?" asks this writer, "or that lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air; or that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water, unless it be that these events are found agreeable to nature, and there is required a violation of its laws, or in other words, a miracle, to prevent them?" I answer that it is probable that all men must die, because we observe under the action of the known forces of nature that all men do die. But this says nothing as to what must take place if another force was present; or a combination of existing forces was discovered sufficiently potent to counteract the action of those which in the present state of things bring about the dissolution of man's frame. There is no necessity, for the purpose of effecting this, that one of the existing forces should be suspended. The time was, when certain forms of

disease invariably resulted in death. The advance of medical science has averted this result. Ought the discovery to have been rejected because it pretended to produce a fact contrary to prior experience? Are any of the laws of nature violated, or are its forces suspended in such a case? What has taken place? Man has discovered agencies which have neutralized the effect of other agencies. Our belief that all men must die rests on the assumption that no force can or will at any future time be brought into action which will counteract the forces now in operation by which that event is produced.

The same remark applies to the other three cases. To the second of them the author has himself supplied the answer: [174] “Lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air.” Doubtless, it cannot *of itself*. Who ever supposed that it could? But it can be suspended when a force adequate to counteract that of gravitation is present. So fire will always consume wood, or be extinguished by water, as long as no other forces but the usual ones are in operation. But man has already invented the means of producing combustion under water. No violation of nature's laws is required in any of these cases. Nor is there any required in a miracle. The fact is, that there is an assumption in all arguments of this kind, which for obvious reasons is not openly avowed, but which alone imparts to them an apparent validity. “No such force can exist,” which translated into other language is identical with the proposition, “There is no God.” To keep this assumption in the background, when the very basis of the argument for miracles is the assumption that there is one, is a course which can lead to no good result.

But the author remarks further: “There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event could not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is hence a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered

credible, by any opposite proof which is superior.”

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Here again we encounter the same faults of reasoning, which amount to a virtual assumption of the point at issue. “There must be a uniform experience against any miraculous event, otherwise it would not merit the appellation—doubtless.” But what is the nature of this uniform experience? Exactly this, that the ordinary forces acting around us being present, and none other, the event has not, and therefore cannot take place. But this is not involved in the idea of a miracle. It assumes the presence of another force, viz. God. But what then? The objector will urge that we have had no experience of the existence of any such force. Is it to be urged, that no force can exist, except those of which we have had experience, or any combination of forces now in action, different from the present? The men of a former century were equally entitled to make the same assumption. If they had done so, it would follow, that if the discoverers of America had found our present railway system in full operation, and reported it to be so, the contemporaries of Columbus would have been justified in treating him as an impostor.

But the author further observes: “Mr. Mill qualifies his admission respecting the effect of the alleged counteracting cause, by the all important words ‘*if present*,’ for in order to be valid, the reality of the alleged counteracting cause must be established, which is impossible; therefore the objection falls to the ground. No one knows better than Mr. Mill, that the assertion of a personal deity working miracles, upon which a miracle is allowed for a moment to come into court, cannot be proved; and therefore, that it cannot stand in opposition to a complete induction which Hume takes as his standard.”

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This passage strikes us as an extraordinary one to have been written by any one who possesses the logical powers of the author. We are dealing with a formal argument with a view of testing its validity, we have the fullest right to test it by a supposed case. That supposed case is the presence of an unknown cause,

or an unknown combination of known causes, or the presence of a personal deity. If the argument breaks down under the application of these tests, it is worthless. Does the author mean to say, that it is necessary to prove every assumption to be a fact, before it can be used in argument? How about the assumptions in Euclid? I submit that the reasoning is by no means vitiated by the assumption, and consequently that by the application of the same principles of reasoning, Hume's argument falls to pieces. In one sense the words "if present" are all important, yet it is not necessary to prove the fact in order to establish the validity of the reasoning, which is entirely independent of the truth of the assumption. Has the author never heard of contingent reasoning in which both antecedent and consequent may be false, but the proposition valid?

"No one knows," again says the author, "better than Mr. Mill, that the allegation of a personal God working miracles, upon which a miracle is for a moment allowed to come into court, cannot be proved." It seems then after all that we are reasoning with a person who rejects theism; although he has been dealing with the question on principles which assume its truth. In arguing a question of this kind it is necessary to be consistent, and take our stand either on the principles of theism, or on those of pantheism or atheism, and not to fall back on either as the exigencies of the case demand. Least of all should this be done by a writer who charges the defenders of Christianity with shifting their ground to suit the necessities of their argument.

But is the case correctly stated? No doubt that the conception of a personal God is essential to it. But that of a personal God actually working miracles forms no portion of it. If this were assumed, the entire reasoning would be a *petitio principii*. We are considering whether miracles are possible; or if, supposing one to be wrought, it can be established by evidence. All that we assume is, that God *can* work miracles, not that He has wrought them. Whether we can prove by good evidence that He has [177]

wrought miracles, is quite independent of the present question.

“No one knows better than Mr. Mill, that the assertion of a personal deity working miracles cannot be proved.” It is perfectly true that Mr. Mill believed that the evidence adduced to prove the being of a personal God was insufficient, and that respecting the origin of all things, nothing can be known. But yet it is impossible to treat the existence of a personal God as a bare assumption. “It is impossible to be proved,” says the author. But to whom? To minds constituted like Mr. Mill's. The evidence that a personal God exists has appeared irresistible to an overwhelming majority of mankind, including a great majority of minds gifted with equal, and even with greater powers than that of Mr. Mill. One might imagine from the mode in which this point is here represented, that the belief in the existence of a personal God was exploded among all men of intellect, and that the proofs adduced for it were unworthy of attention. Surely the question of miracles has a legitimate place in the court which tries the issue of their truth or falsehood.

One more point requires notice. Hume says, “Though the being, to whom the miracle is attributed be in this case Almighty, it does not on that account become a whit more probable, since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a being, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions in the usual course of nature.”

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This position involves an evident fallacy. It is also one which underlies one or two of the statements of Mr. Mill, whose philosophical theory of necessity was one almost certain to involve him in it. The statement is, that it is impossible to know either the attributes or the actions of such a being, except from our experience of his productions in the course of nature. What is the course of nature here intended? does it include mind as well as matter? If the former is included, and we attain our knowledge of God from that source—and every theist maintains that our chief knowledge of God is derived from it—then the

experience we have of man leads us to infer the presence of certain moral attributes in God; and there is nothing in that experience which renders the performance of a miracle inconceivable or impossible—but as far as that experience is concerned, it is rendered antecedently probable. What is included, I again ask, in nature? Are *we*, the percipient beings ourselves? Whether we are regarded as included or excluded from nature, it is evident that a considerable portion of our knowledge of the divine character is derived from the contemplation of our own being. God is more manifested in our rationality, “personality,” freedom, and conscience, than in the material forces and laws of nature. To perform a miracle therefore is consistent with what we know of His character.

These observations will render it unnecessary for me to examine in detail the writer's observations on Paley's arguments against Hume. Even if his arguments are not perfectly conclusive, their failure does not establish the truth of Hume's positions, or invalidate the refutation of them by others. As the object of this author is to re-establish the validity of Hume's argument, he ought not to have confined himself to Paley, whose mind was little adapted to the investigation of purely logical or metaphysical questions, but to have noticed the argument of the numerous subsequent writers who have more fully handled the subject. [179]

## Chapter VIII. The Objection That The Defenders Of Christianity Assume Certain Facts The Truth Of Which Can Only Be Known By Revelation, And Then Reason From Those Facts To The Truth Of The Bible, Considered.

It has been objected that the very idea of such a revelation as that of Christianity implies a defect on the part of the Creator in the original construction of the Universe, and that He has been under the necessity of interposing for the purpose of correcting this defect. It is affirmed that divines endeavour to prove that a revelation was probable by first assuming a number of the most irrational propositions, which, if true, can only be proved to be so by the authority of the Bible, and then arguing back again that it is highly probable that God would interfere to remedy the defects of his creative work by a supernatural revelation; in other words, that they assume a state of things which reason would pronounce to be incredible, unless their truth was asserted in the Bible, and then argue on the principles of that reason whose validity they deny, that it is probable that the Creator would interfere to remedy a state of things the existence of which reason pronounces to be incredible.

The author of "Supernatural Religion" has strongly urged this argument, and placed the difficulty clearly before us. Although

the entire passage is too long for quotation, yet as it is important [181]  
that we should have the question which he raises before us in his  
own words, I will cite a portion of it.

“Here again the argument is based on an assumption. The supposition of a divine design in a revelation is the result of a foregone conclusion in its favour, and not suggested by antecedent probability. Divines assume that a communication of this nature is in accordance with reason, and was necessary for the salvation of the human race simply because they believe that it took place, and no evidence worthy of the name is ever offered in support of the assumption. A revelation having, it is supposed, been made, that revelation is consequently supposed to have been contemplated, and to have justified any suspension of the order of nature. The proposition for which evidence is demanded is necessarily employed as evidence for itself. The considerations involved in the assumption of the necessity and reasonableness of such a revelation, however, are antecedently incredible and contrary to reason. We are asked to believe that God made man in His own image, pure and sinless, and intended him to continue so; but scarcely had His noblest work left the hand of his Creator, than man was tempted into sin by Satan, the all-powerful and persistent enemy of God, whose existence and antagonism to a being in whose eyes sin is an abomination, are not accounted for and are incredible. Adam's fall brought a curse upon the earth, and incurred the penalty of death for himself and for the whole of his posterity. The human race thus created perfect and without sin, thus disappointed the expectations of the Creator, and became daily more wicked, the evil spirit having succeeded in frustrating the designs of the Almighty, so that God repented that he had made man, and at length he [182]  
destroyed by a deluge all the inhabitants of the earth, with the exception of eight persons who feared him. This sweeping purification, however, was as futile as the original design, and the race of man soon became more wicked than ever.” Here follows a statement of

what may be regarded as a plan of salvation as held by some modern Churches, and the apparent contradiction of the whole to the divine character and perfections is elaborately pointed out. He then concludes as follows: "We are asked to believe in the frustration of the divine design of creation, and in the fall of man into a state of wickedness hateful to God, requiring and justifying the divine design of a revelation, and such a revelation as this, as a preliminary to the further proposition that on the supposition of such a design miracles would not be contrary to reason." To this follows an elaborate piece of reasoning, by which the author attempts to prove that every proposition in this so-called plan of salvation is thoroughly contrary to reason.

The general positions laid down in this passage (omitting points of detail) are as follows: Certain incredible occurrences in the past history of man are assumed by divines to be facts on the authority of the Bible. These include the complete breaking down of the divine plan in the creation of man through the agency of a being who has frustrated the purposes of the Almighty. Next it is asserted on the same authority that another series of events has taken place which are in the highest degree contrary to reason, for the purpose of remedying this failure of the original plan. Then it is alleged that the probability of a divine interference, in order to remedy a state of things which reason pronounces to be incredible, is argued on the authority of reason for the purpose of proving the occurrence of another state of things equally repugnant to reason. Such a line of argument is affirmed to begin in irrational assumptions, and to terminate in a vicious circle.

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I have before observed that the work from which the above passage is taken, although entitled "Supernatural Religion, or an inquiry into the reality of Divine Revelation," is really an attack on the central position of the New Testament, the historical value of the Gospels. In taking this course the author raises an intelligible issue instead of spreading the argument over an endless mass of controversial matter. If the historical character

of the Gospels cannot be maintained, the whole controversy as to whether Christianity is a divine revelation is ended. This forms the key of the Christian position, to which the other parts of the controversy stand in the relation of mere outworks. If the events recorded in the Gospels are historical, Christianity must be a divine revelation, notwithstanding the difficulties connected with certain statements of the Old Testament. The real point at issue between those who believe and those who deny that God has made a supernatural revelation of Himself, is confined to the following question: Are the contents of the Gospels historically credible? Is the character of Jesus Christ as depicted in them the delineation of an ideal conception or of an historical reality? The author discerns clearly that this is the turning point of the controversy, and has accordingly addressed himself to prove that the Gospels are valueless as historical documents. This line of argument is candid, and one which, if adhered to, will save an immense expenditure of reasoning power.

Now the question of the historical character of the Gospels is quite distinct from that of the truth or falsehood of any system of Ecclesiastical Christianity, which asserts that its theology is a deduction from the Gospels and the other portions of the New Testament. It is not revelation itself but a system erected by the application of reason to the facts of revelation. It is most important that this distinction should be kept in view. The truth is, that the facts of revelation stand in the same relation to theology as the facts of nature do to physical science. Incorrect reasonings respecting both the one and the other are alike possible. The Ptolemaic theory was propounded as an adequate solution of the facts and phenomena of the universe, and although utterly incorrect in all its parts, it for ages held unlimited sway over the human mind. In a similar manner various theories have been propounded as solutions of the facts of revelation, but it by no means follows because they have attained a wide acceptance that they afford the true solution. In examining the claims of the

Gospels to be viewed as historical, it is quite as much out of place to make them responsible for all the theories which Ecclesiastical Christianity has propounded respecting the plan of salvation, as it would be to make the facts and phenomena of the universe answerable for all the theories which have been propounded for their solution. In examining the claims of the Gospels to be accepted as historical documents, it is most unreasonable to make them responsible for theories which were not formulated in the Church until centuries after their publication.

Most of the positions affirmed in the above quotation were not formulated until a late period of the Church's history. Certainly they are nowhere directly laid down in the New Testament. The utmost which can be asserted of them is, that they are alleged to be derived inferentially from its teaching. They form no portion of the Apostles' or of the Nicene Creeds, which are the only formularies outside of the New Testament which can be represented as embodying the creed of the universal Church. Nor can they be found even in the Athanasian creed. In discussing the claims of the Gospels to be esteemed as historical, they can only be made fairly responsible for what they actually contain. To bring into such a controversy positions only affirmed in recent attempts to formulate a body of Christian doctrine, as though they had any bearing on the claims of the New Testament to be viewed as containing a divine revelation, can lead to no satisfactory result.

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I now return to the consideration of the difficulties above referred to. It is important to take a careful survey of the entire question, because they are not only put with great force in the passage which I have quoted, but I believe that in different forms they weigh heavily on the minds of many thoughtful men. I will first offer a few observations on the general principle.

Nothing is easier than to affirm that the introduction of moral evil into the universe is a marring of the Creator's plan in its formation. The argument is founded on the supposition that an Almighty God exists, who is wise, holy, and benevolent, and

who intended to manifest these attributes through the rational beings which he has created. It is affirmed that the existence of moral evil in man is a failure of this purpose on the part of God. But it is the most certain of facts that moral evil does exist in the world, and that it exists quite independently of Christianity. The objection therefore is not one directed solely against the Christianity of the New Testament, but bears with equal weight against every form of theism, which admits that the universe has been created, and is governed by a God who is almighty, wise, [186] holy, and benevolent.

If there be a God who is the Creator of the Universe, it is clear that He must have been the Creator of man, and that man could only have come into being in conformity with His pleasure. Now, if we decline to admit that man was created morally perfect, yet as he must have been created a moral agent, it is clear that the first man must have sprung into being either with the moral faculties of a savage, or in some intermediate condition between these and a state of moral perfection. It follows, therefore, that man must have been made capable of moral progress. This is affirmed by all those who assert that he was first produced in a savage state. But the possibility of moral progress involves also the possibility of retrogression. The truth of this is borne witness to by the most palpable facts of daily experience. Men of the highest mental powers are capable of abusing them to the worst purposes, and thus of sinking fearfully low in the moral scale. The case of a man like Fouché will illustrate my argument, a man gifted with high intellectual powers, but who sunk into the lowest condition of moral turpitude. Such a man is incomparably worse than the first original savage. I submit, therefore, that whatever view we may take of the condition in which man was originally created, even if he were created a savage, yet he was made a moral being capable of elevation or degradation; and that, to use a human metaphor, the purpose of a holy God must have been his elevation. Yet this involves the possibility of his

moral degradation. This degradation has also become a fact. It is clear, therefore, that the difficulty is one which is inseparable from every possible form of theistic belief, and is no peculiarity of Christianity.

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I shall not attempt to enter on so profound a question as the origin of evil, and how its existence is consistent with the perfection of a holy God. It is a subject quite beyond the issue before us, and lies not at the foundations of Christianity, but of theism, the truth of which is taken for granted in the objections which the author adduces against the popular view of the scriptural account; for if there is no God the objections are valueless. Still he ought to have informed his readers that it is urged as a partial explanation of those difficulties by the defenders of Christianity, that it is highly probable that the creation of a moral being possessed of free agency, but who at the same time is not capable of sinking into a state of moral degradation, involves as great a contradiction as the conception of a circle which should possess the property of concavity and not of convexity. No rational man believes that it is within the compass, even of omnipotence, to work contradictions. If this be so, it follows that the possibility of the existence of moral evil is a necessary condition of the existence of free agency. The production of a free moral agent capable of yielding a willing obedience to the moral law is a more glorious work than anything in the material universe, even than that universe itself. It might, therefore, have been the good pleasure of the wise, holy, and benevolent Creator to create free moral agents, even if it involved the existence of moral evil. I am far from propounding this as a complete solution of the difficulty, but when it is thus used unsparingly against Christianity, it would have been only candid to have told the reader that it bore with equal weight against every form of theism, and to have given the partial explanation which has been propounded by theologians.

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In reply to the definite statements before us, I affirm that nowhere in the Gospels, or in any other portion of the New Tes-

tament is it asserted or even implied that revelation was rendered necessary by the frustration of the divine purpose in creation, or that redemption was a kind of afterthought in the divine mind rendered necessary by such a failure. On the contrary, the synoptic Gospels make no affirmation whatever on the subject. The fourth Gospel contains several statements about the end and purposes of the Incarnation, but of a description totally different from those which are alleged in the above quotation to constitute the groundwork of Christianity. As I have already shown, the Gospel of St. John speaks of its great purpose as being a revelation of the moral character of God in the person of Jesus Christ. According to its theology God has already manifested himself in creation; in the Gospel He makes a still higher and nobler manifestation of His moral character in the person of our Lord. The author of the first Epistle ascribed to St. John, whom I must assume to have been the author of the Gospel, makes the following direct affirmation on the subject. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." In these words it is evidently the intention of the writer to set forth the divine purpose of the Incarnation. It is true that in other passages he assumes the existence of evil in the universe, and declares it to be the work of the devil, and that one of the purposes of this divine manifestation was its destruction. Still he drops no hint of any failure in the Creation, or that it was the purpose of the Incarnation to mend a marred scheme. On the contrary, the great truth set forth in the Epistle and in the Gospel is that Creation and Redemption form portions of one great whole; and that the latter is a manifestation of the

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divine glories beyond God's previous manifestations of himself, whether in creation or in history.

Similar are the views of the Apostle Paul. According to him, while many other purposes were effected by the Incarnation, there is one great purpose running through all divine revelation. In several passages he affirms that its influence extends far beyond that which it exerts on the race of man. He again and again asserts that it was the gradual unfolding of an idea or purpose which existed from eternity in the divine mind. Thus he writes: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. iii. and ix.) "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and in earth, even in Him." (Eph. i. 9, 10.) "And having made peace by the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself: by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven." (Col. i. 20.) I fully admit that the Apostle affirms that the design of bringing man into union with God was a portion of this purpose. Nothing however is more foreign to the ideas of St. Paul than that revelation is an afterthought adopted as a remedy for a marred plan.

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Nor are the views of the other writers of the New Testament different. St. Peter tells us that the angels desire to look into the redemption wrought by Christ. St. James assures us that, "known unto God are all His works from the foundation of the world." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks to the same effect: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers in (by) the prophets, hath in

these last days spoken unto us in His Son.” So far from its being the idea of the sacred writers that redemption is an afterthought designed to remedy the failure of the original purpose of creation, that both of them are viewed as parts of the same whole; both are purposes which have existed in the divine mind during the eternal ages, and have been gradually evolved in time. Nothing is further from their mind than that the divine mode of working is by fits or starts, or sudden interventions. Man was the last form of life which God has introduced into the world, and in that sense He is said to have rested from His creative work. But God is no less distinctly affirmed to be always working in nature and in providence, so that Sabbath days form no exception: “My Father worketh hitherto and I work.”

Such being the views of the writers of the New Testament on this subject, the whole of those objections, as far as they are founded on the assertion that revelation is intended to remedy the failure of God's creative purpose, fall to the ground. My present supposition is that I am reasoning with believers in theism. If God has gradually evolved creation, each successive stage of the evolution forms a part of one great and comprehensive whole. At each stage the work is incomplete, but its incompleteness is no proof of failure. A period has existed when the only beings in the world were devoid of rationality. If an objector could have contemplated it in this stage, he might have urged that the plan of creation was a failure, while in reality it was only incomplete. Man came in at the next stage of the great design. The next stage, according to the New Testament, is the Incarnation of the Son of God, intended as a higher manifestation of the moral glories of the Creator for the purpose of raising man to a higher moral and spiritual elevation. To the attainment of this purpose all the previous events in man's history have been made subservient. Surely those persons with whom I am reasoning ought to be the last to object that there is anything inconsistent with the divine character in such a gradual unfolding of the divine purposes. [191]

We might as well object that every advancing stage of the great design of Creation was introduced to remedy a preceding defect as assert that Christianity originated in this cause. The world was in a most unfinished state when it was only tenanted by the lower forms of life, and great fault might have been found with its construction. But a higher came, and a higher, then man, then Christ our Lord, the second Adam, as St. Paul designates him, "from heaven heavenly." Whatever may have been the assertions of certain classes of theologians who have attempted to fathom the divine mind by their own short sounding line, the sacred writers take no narrow view of the purposes of the Incarnation. It is declared that they will be realized in the yet distant future, towards which consummation they are gradually being carried out in time.

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It follows, therefore, that the New Testament affirms that a purpose is consistently carried out in the history of redemption far different from that which has been here placed before us as the assumptions of Ecclesiastical Christianity. The author has placed these in their most objectionable form; and if Christian apologists have affirmed on such premises as those above stated that a divine interposition was rendered probable, I shall not attempt to defend them. To establish the probability of a revelation additional to that afforded by creation we have no occasion to appeal to theories, but to facts.

The existing moral and spiritual condition of mankind is universally admitted to be imperfect. Both believers and unbelievers in revelation alike acknowledge that the attempt to improve it is desirable. No less certain is it that man possesses faculties which can only receive their perfect development in a higher condition of things than the present. These as much point to a higher development of man as the organization of the lower forms of animal life points to the higher and more perfect ones. If, therefore, God be the Creator and moral Governor of the world, a further manifestation of Him is rendered highly probable.

This probability may be reasoned out by analogies in the history of the past. Higher developments from lower forms have been the rule. Are they then to cease with man in his present state of imperfection? How man came to be thus imperfect, how his moral degradation has originated, is a question which does not fall within the present argument. It is a fact, by whatever theory it may be attempted to be accounted for. If a rational being had existed in those ages during which there was manifested nothing but the lower forms of life, and had come to the conclusion that the world as it then existed was the work of an intelligent Creator, he would have pronounced it highly probable that the resources of creative power would yet receive a more glorious manifestation. When vertebrate life was first introduced into the world, a careful examination of the state of things would have led to a similar conclusion. But the lower forms of vertebrate life are typical of the higher, and the higher point to man. Before man entered the world a being capable of comprehending the condition of things as then existing would have pronounced it highly probable that there would be yet a further manifestation of creative energy, and that the work required for its consummation the production of rationality. [193]

Such and far more numerous have been the actual stages of creative action. Are we entitled to call them a failure because they were relatively imperfect, or any fresh intervention of divine power an interference to remedy a previous failure? On the contrary, these so-called interventions are the persistent carrying out of a determined purpose. The acts of Deity are inaccurately designated interventions. He is always working with the most perfect knowledge of the means which He employs, and the most perfect controul over them. Failure with Him is impossible. The word "intervention" as applied to the operations of God conveys the idea of a machine which He originally constructed, and then left to its own operations. Such a machine will in course of time get out of order, or perform its work imperfectly, and require

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to be supplemented by additional contrivances. Thus when the clock ceases to go there arises a necessity for the intervention of the clockmaker. He constructs his clock and leaves it to itself. But creation is no mere machine; the Divine worker is always present in His works. The last idea which would have occurred to the authors of the Bible was that God was obliged to be making a number of special interventions to cure defects in the results of His operations. As the Bible cannot help using the language of man, expressions derived from the defects of human language are at times used in it, but the one prevalent idea is that God is always present working in the kingdoms of nature and of grace, that all His actions are the constant carrying out of a predetermined purpose, and that with Him is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

If the possibility of the introduction of moral evil into the universe is a necessary condition of the creation of a free moral agent, or in other words, if the contrary supposition involves a contradiction, the Creator must have viewed the production of such a free agent as so desirable, that it formed a part of His purpose to create him notwithstanding this possibility. If then moral evil became a fact, it involved no failure in the purposes of God. He must have viewed the existence of such beings as desirable, even if this contingency became a fact. Why, I ask, may not a further manifestation of Himself, by means of which moral evil might be reduced to the smallest dimensions, or even ultimately removed, while freedom is still preserved, form a portion of the same great purpose of the divine mind? If this be possible, the assertion that Redemption is a special intervention of God for the purpose of remedying the breaking down of his creative plan, is disproved, and with it all the other inferences of the numerous writers whose views I am considering.

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In affirming the probability of a revelation, the Christian apologist need not go beyond the region of actual facts. He has no occasion to rest his proof on any statement made by a supposed

revelation the truth of which is the point at issue. To do so would be to assume the thing which requires to be proved. But facts as they exist, independently of any statements in the Bible, are quite sufficient. Man exists. He is possessed of powers and aspirations which this state of things does not gratify. He is capable of moral action, and there is something within him which affirms that he ought to obey the moral law. Yet its realization by him is of the most imperfect character. Does the actual condition of man afford satisfaction even to the unbeliever, account for it as he may? Is there not a great amount of moral evil in the world? Do not considerable numbers of men, instead of progressing to higher degrees of moral perfection degenerate through various stages of moral corruption? Does not moral evil cause a great amount of physical suffering? Are not vast numbers of men the prey of ignorance and superstition—great evils doubtless, and of which unbelievers heavily complain? In one word, when we contemplate the present condition of mankind, does not the sternest reason affirm that it is inconceivable that this can be the final condition of God's creative work? Yet these things are no theories but obvious facts, and on the supposition on which we are reasoning, facts in the universe of God.

It follows therefore, that facts such as these, when contemplated by reason, establish the probability, nay almost the certainty of a further divine action. Of course this is based on the assumption that there is a wise and holy God who is the author of the universe, but both the opponents and believers in revelation can only argue this subject at all on the supposition that God exists. Any fresh mode of divine action will probably differ from the preceding ones, because man exists as a moral and spiritual being. It is therefore probable that such divine action will be moral rather than physical; or, in other words, the divine purpose of creation includes within it a yet further manifestation of the divine character and perfections. This is what the New Testament affirms to have taken place in the Incarnation. This is

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my position.

I shall only add one or two more brief remarks. Those who charge theologians with making unfounded assumptions should be guiltless of making them themselves. The warning against falling into this error may be profitably taken to heart by both parties to this controversy. It is affirmed that the constitution of nature bears everywhere the indications of systematic upward progression. I ask, is this systematic upward progression everywhere true of man? Are there no where indications of retrogression? Europeans generally during the last two thousand years have progressed, although even this is not universally true, for some of the fine arts attained to greater perfection in the ancient than in the modern world. But has the Hindoo race progressed during the last three thousand years? Have the Chinese? Is it not true that the progress of these two races has been one of considerable retrogression? Where is the progress made by the Negro races from the first dawns of their history? Yet these three races form more than half of the human family. Again, have the Arab races progressed since the days of Abraham? Are the Mahomedan races in a state of gradual improvement? These are questions to which a definite answer must be returned before the proposition above referred to can be esteemed a solution of all the problems of human history.

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It will perhaps be replied that nature is gradually extinguishing these unprogressive races, under the pressure of her inexorable laws. Yet they constitute an overwhelming majority of the human race, and it is strange to talk of this progressive improvement of the human race as a great law of nature, if the mode of improvement be the extinction of the great majority of mankind. But are the Hindoo, Chinese, Negro, and other unprogressive races less numerous than they were three thousand years ago? The evidence is all the other way. We want present facts and not theories of the future. It has been affirmed, that "The survival of the fittest is the stern law of nature. The invariable action

of law of itself eliminates the unfit. Progress is necessary to existence. Extinction is the doom of Retrogression." These assertions may receive their fulfilment in some period of the distant future, but they certainly do not agree with the past history of man. Whatever progress the European races may be capable of, certain conditions of climate form an inexorable barrier to their supplanting the Negro, the Hindoo, or the Chinese, and we know that European blood in certain climates has actually degenerated.

Again, it is stated "that the highest effect contemplated by the supposed revelation is to bring man into harmony with law; and this is insured by law acting on intelligence, and even on instinct." Where, I ask, is the proof of this derived from the history of man? Is the moral condition of the races above referred to higher than it was three thousand years ago? Did the moral condition of the Greek race progress or retrograde during the four centuries which preceded the Advent? Which was the more elevated condition of Roman morality, that of the century which preceded and followed the conquest of Italy, or that of the empire and its crumbling institutions? [198]

Again, we are told that "there is not in reality a gradation of breach of law that is not followed by an equivalent gradation of punishment." This may be the case in some Utopia in which the author lives, but it certainly neither is nor ever has been the condition of this world. Does villany, I ask, always receive adequate punishment in this world? It has been the all but universal opinion of mankind that it does not. Did not Fouché die quietly in his bed, possessed of wealth and honours, and a darkened conscience? Did not Philip II. of Spain, after all his crimes, die under the delusions of self-approbation? In a controversy like this the most confident assertions will not supply the want of facts on which to ground our reasonings.

It follows, therefore, that the assertion that the Christian argument involves reasoning in a circle, or else that it assumes the point at issue, is disproved.

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## Chapter IX. Demoniactal Miracles—General Considerations.

It has been objected that the admission which the New Testament is alleged to make as to the reality of demoniactal miracles weakens, if it does not destroy, the value of miracles as an attestation of a revelation. In order to do full justice to the force of this objection I will state it in the words of the author of “Supernatural Religion:”—

“The necessity of asserting the dependence of miracles on doctrines is thrust upon divines by the circumstance, that the Bible narrates so many cases of false miracles, and contains so many warnings against them.”

“The first thought which must occur to any unprejudiced mind is amazement that an Almighty God should select as a guarantee of his supposed communications signs and wonders which can be so easily imitated by others, that there must always be a doubt whether the message be from the kingdom of heaven, or from the kingdom of lies. It seems *à priori* absolutely incredible that a divine revelation which is so important, and which it is intended that man should believe, should be made in such obscure language, and with such doubtful attestation. That heaven should condescend to use the same arguments as hell, and with so little difference in the degree of the power exhibited, that man can scarcely, if at all, discriminate between them, is a theory of the most startling description.” [200]

“Does not the necessity of this theory of false miracles, of the power of God thus placed on a level with the power of Satan, in a matter where the distinct purpose is to authenticate by miraculous testimony a miraculous revelation, rather betray

the unreality of miracles altogether, and indicate that the idea of such supernatural intervention originates solely from the superstitious ignorance of men in ages when every phase of nature was attributed to direct supernatural interference, and ascribed with arbitrary promptness to God or to the devil? It is certain that as miracles are represented as being common both to God and Satan, they cannot be considered as a distinctive attestation of a divine revelation.”

After quoting Dr. Mozley to the effect that “Miraculous evidence cannot oblige us to accept any doctrine contrary to our moral nature”—an abstractly true statement, but quite inapplicable to the New Testament, which nowhere affirms that miracles have been wrought in attestation of doctrines—the author continues: “The assertion that evidence emanating from God is in some cases to be rejected is a monstrous proposition; and the evidential force of miracles is totally destroyed by the logical inference from it, and from the double character of miracles as Divine and Satanic; that God is not only capable of exerting supernatural power to attest what is true, but that Satan equally possesses and exercises the same power in opposition to God for purposes of deception. If miraculous evidence is indifferently employed to certify truth and error, it is at once degraded by such common service into contempt.”

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These passages put us in possession of the author's views, and perhaps it would be impossible to state the objections more strongly. I have quoted them thus fully, not only as embodying the views of this particular writer, but as placing before us in a clear and distinct light the chief objections which can be urged against the attestation that miracles give to the truth of the Christian revelation, on the assumption that demoniacal miracles have been performed, or even on the admission that they are possible.

Before I enter on the general question, I must briefly draw attention to the statements and assumptions contained in this remarkable passage.

1. The assertion that miracles are alleged in proof of doctrines, and that divines, when the necessities of their position compel them, affirm the direct converse of this, viz. that miracles are dependent for their truth on doctrines, is an entire misapprehension of the Christian argument. Its true position will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

2. The assertion that the miracles of Almighty God can be imitated by Satan is a gratuitous assumption. Nowhere is this affirmed in the New Testament. On the contrary, our Lord uniformly declares that His works were clearly distinguishable from the working of Satan, and could only maliciously be confounded with them.

3. While the Bible speaks of false miracles, its language is quite consistent with the fact that they were impositions practised on the senses, like the acts of jugglers.

4. The word “miracle” is here used to denote a supernatural fact in external nature devoid of all moral environment. I have already pointed out the inaccuracy of this position; and shall have much to say on this subject hereafter. To strip a superhuman occurrence of its moral aspect is simply to assume the question at issue. [202]

5. It is not correct that the essence of a miracle consists in the degree of power manifested in the performance of the outward act. The performance of a miracle does not necessarily involve a greater exertion of power than is manifested in the ordinary occurrences of nature. A miracle is not only an act of power, but it involves the elements of prediction and of purpose.

6. The affirmation that the Christian argument involves the position that heaven must condescend to use the same arguments as hell, if demoniacal possession is supposed to be possible, is altogether inaccurate.

7. The Christian argument nowhere involves the assumption that evidence emanating from God is under certain circumstances to be rejected. It is quite conceivable that a real miracle may

have been wrought, which was adequately attested when it was performed, but that the evidence has become imperfect by lapse of time.

8. Even if it be supposed that demoniacal miracles are possible, there is nothing in that assumption which renders it necessary to take for granted that Satan is allowed to ramble over the universe and work miracles at his pleasure, and to imitate the miracles of God. The New Testament uniformly asserts that whatever agency he can exert is a permitted one, which is confined within definite limits.

In considering the question of demoniacal miracles it must be kept in mind that the language employed by the writers of the Bible is invariably phenomenal. They describe events as they appeared to the eye of the beholder. Hence it by no means follows, when they refer to the arts of magic and other similar practices which were so prevalent in the ancient world, and say that the magicians did such and such things, that they meant to affirm the reality of their performance. Their language is always taken from the observer's point of view. As far as he saw, they did so. We frequently speak in the same way of modern feats of conjurers. Thus, when it is said that the magicians brought forth frogs, the language is quite consistent with the act being a delusion successfully practised on the senses.

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It is affirmed by the author that the Bible asserts the reality of such miracles. I reply that it makes no such assertion, but merely describes them as they appeared to the eye of the beholder. Its strong denunciations of such practices is no evidence that they were anything else than deceptions which the performers endeavoured to palm off for wicked purposes. The precept of Moses, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," has been urged as affording proof that the Bible in unqualified terms asserts the reality of witchcraft. Whether the art was real or simulated, the sentence of the lawgiver would have been equally just, for impostors who practise such arts for the purpose of delusion, are

far more injurious to society than many kinds of criminals who have undergone the severest punishment. In the New Testament “lying wonders” are occasionally referred to. The expression may legitimately mean one of two things, either a supernatural act performed for the attestation or propagation of a lie, or an apparent miracle, which is in itself a lie. It cannot be denied that the language of the New Testament will honestly bear this interpretation. I will quote the strongest passage to be found in it. St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, in speaking of the manifestation of a great anti-christian power, says, “Whose coming [204] is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all the deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish, because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” This language is quite consistent with the idea that the works here spoken of were not supernatural, but deceptions wrought for the propagation of a system of falsehood.

There can be no question that impositions of this kind have been systematically practised in later times in support of a great system of ecclesiastical power, and to attest doctrines in connection with it. But it is worthy of observation that the demoniacal supernaturalism which we read of in the New Testament, is not represented as having been employed for the attestation of any system of doctrine whatever. Elymas, the sorcerer, practised his art for the purpose of establishing an influence over Sergius Paulus, but for aught that appears he was a simple impostor. All the other cases of Satanic supernaturalism referred to in the Gospels resolve themselves into cases of possession, or the occasional production of a disease.

It is further to be observed that nowhere throughout the New Testament is a miracle, properly so called, ascribed to Satanic action. Possession is a phenomenon entirely different from a miracle. I admit that there is one apparent exception, namely in the history of our Lord's temptation. This if it is intended to be a description of an objective fact, is undoubtedly an instance of

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direct interference with the action of the forces of nature; Satan is here represented as possessing and exercising the power of counteracting the force of gravitation by transporting the body of our Lord from place to place. As this is the one solitary instance in the New Testament in which such power is ascribed to him, it demands especial consideration. We are told that during one period of his temptation our Lord was carried by Satan to an exceeding high mountain; and again, that he was placed on a pinnacle of the temple. These acts involve such an exercise of supernatural power as may justly be put in comparison with his walking on the water. It becomes therefore a very important question whether this account is intended to be taken as a literal narrative. The fact of its being the only recorded instance of its kind affords a contrary presumption, for if the writers had believed that there was nothing in such interference with the physical forces inconsistent with the ordinary course of Satanic action it is hardly possible that they could have viewed this as a solitary instance of the exercise of such power, especially when the case of the demoniacs afforded so many opportunities for its manifestation. It is clear from the narrative itself that the only source of information regarding the temptation must have been an account given by our Lord himself to his disciples, as it was an occurrence of which there could have been no witnesses. Otherwise it must be assumed to be a mere fiction. It is also clear that the three temptations into which the narrative is divided are intended to describe three great crises through which our Lord's mind passed. According to Mark's account he is represented as undergoing temptations during the whole period of forty days. Matthew and Luke present us with the general results of the entire temptation. If our Lord gave an account of it to his disciples, there can be no reason why he should not have embodied its results in a narrative form, as is the course which he adopted in his parables. If the parables were not usually introduced with the formula "he spake a parable," we might easily mistake them

also for narratives of actual occurrences. But although this is the usual form, it is not the only one, as appears in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. It is therefore quite conceivable that on giving his disciples an account of the crises through which his mind passed during the period of the temptation he may have put it into a parabolic form, of which himself was the centre, as one which would be most adapted to the level of their apprehensions; otherwise it would have assumed the character of a number of abstract disquisitions. [206]

But we are not left to infer from mere probabilities that the narrative was not intended to be understood literally. One portion of it places it beyond doubt that it was intended to contain a visionary or parabolic element of some kind. In the account of the temptation to fall down and worship Satan, it is expressly stated that the Devil transported our Lord to an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. The narrative of Luke adds that all this was done in a moment of time, which shows clearly that it was not intended to be from one end to the other a literal statement of facts. It is therefore absolutely necessary to assume the presence of a visionary element somewhere; the only question is, where, and to what extent? If we attach the meaning usually assigned by the writers in the New Testament to the word "world," it is impossible to imagine that any amount of credulity can have believed that there was any mountain from whose top such a view could have been attained by the unaided power of the human eye. But further, it is asserted not only that the kingdoms of the world were rendered visible, but *their glory*; that is to say, the spectator was able to see their great cities, their buildings, and all their signs of outward magnificence, for the sight of their glory was obviously intended to add force to the temptation. Yet even the most credulous people possess some moderately correct idea as to the extent of view which the eye can reach and would feel quite certain that without the interposition of a miracle such a [207]

survey in a moment of time would be impossible.

It may probably be urged by some that the first part of the account only is intended to be a description of an objective fact, and that the last temptation was visionary. To this I reply that the entire narrative is couched in language of fact, and the latter portion quite as much so as the former. Besides, if the sight of the kingdoms of the world and their glory was a visionary representation, then the reason for conveying Jesus to a lofty mountain ceases, for such a vision might equally well have been presented to him in a plain; whereas if we take it as an account of a literal fact, it is clear that the reason for conveying him to the mountain was to afford him an extensive view. It is therefore impossible to draw a distinction between the two portions of the narrative.

Every consideration therefore proves that the entire narrative is either parabolic or an account of a visionary transaction, precisely similar to many of those described in the Old Testament, and not of an actual occurrence. This being so, we arrive at the inference that nowhere in the New Testament is Satanic influence described as interfering with the ordinary action of the forces of nature, by a direct exertion of power.

It may however be objected that there were probably reasons why he was permitted to do so on this particular occasion; but on such a question I shall not enter. I shall only repeat that it is impossible to view the latter portion of the narrative as an account of an objective fact; and this being the case it is far more probable that the whole partakes of the same character. At any rate it is the single instance in the New Testament in which the possession of such power is ascribed to Satan.

This has a very important bearing on the argument. The author affirms that the writers of the New Testament attributed to Satan a general power of interfering with the forces of nature, and of working miracles which may fairly be contrasted with the miracles of God. But whatever may have been the opinions

of others on this subject, it is clear that such opinions were not held by them. If they had believed that Satanic agency was constantly exerted in the affairs of the visible universe, there is every reason why they should have invented numerous stories of this description, and ascribed them to Satanic intervention. The writer to whom I am referring, urges in the strongest manner, that the belief in magic, and in frequent exertions of demoniacal power over the external universe, was universal among the Jews at the time of the Advent. To prove this, he has adduced a number of opinions entertained by the writers of the Talmud and others, involving the most grovelling superstitions, and asserts that indications of the same are to be found in the Gospels. As an instance, he favours us with the following story told by Josephus, who declares that he was an eye-witness of the fact.

“Josephus had seen a countryman of his own, named Eliezer, release people possessed of devils in the presence of the Emperor Vespasian and his sons, and of his army. He put a ring containing one of the roots prescribed by Solomon, into the nose of a demoniac, and drew the demon out of his nostrils, and in the name of Solomon, and reciting one of his incantations, he adjured him to return no more. In order to demonstrate to the spectators that he had power to cast out demons, Eliezer was accustomed to set a pitcher of water a little way off, and he commanded the demon, as he left the body of the man, to overturn it, by which means the skill and wisdom of Solomon was made very manifest.” [209]

The object for which this and kindred stories are referred to, is to prove that the Jewish mind was so intensely credulous and superstitious on the subject of demoniacal action at the time of our Lord, that there was nothing so monstrous, which it was not in the habit of accepting as fact. We are also repeatedly informed that the followers of Jesus shared in this unbounded credulity. It may be even inferred from the assertion before us, that they were far more credulous. The argument which this writer adduces is plausible, and it may be stated thus. If a writer like Josephus,

who was extensively acquainted with Greek literature, and the Talmudists who belonged to the *élite* of the nation, could narrate such follies as facts, what must have been the beliefs of the vulgar herd? We must not forget that the followers of Jesus were chiefly from the lower orders. "The common people heard him gladly." The inference which the reader is allowed to draw is that they must have been addicted to yet more gross credulity.

What were the reasons which induced Josephus, a man who had seen the wide world, to relate this monstrous story I shall not inquire. One can hardly believe that he was a dupe; his reporting it, however, no more proves that such beliefs were universal when he wrote, than the existence of a wide-spread spiritualistic literature proves that a belief in spirit-rapping prevails generally among all classes of society at the present day, although many of the believers in spiritualism belong to the educated classes, and readily accept absurdities which the sound sense of multitudes of artisans would immediately repudiate.

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The argument before me tells in a direction precisely opposite to that which is intended by those who have invoked it, and it is marvellous that they do not perceive that it is destructive of their own case. I put it as follows: If the authors of the Gospels entertained the views of demoniacal agency which this author represents them to have held, their narratives, which directly lead them to refer to that subject, would have contained numerous references to stories of the type of that quoted from Josephus. Let me illustrate this argument by an example. The Arabs and other Orientals believe in the power of demons and magicians over external nature. They consider this action to be of frequent occurrence. Their literature therefore abounds with accounts of such monstrous interventions. But the Gospels, with the exception of the history of the Temptation, do not contain an account of a single marvel wrought by the agency of demons on external nature. Demoniacal agency is repeatedly mentioned by them; but it belongs to an order of phenomena of an entirely different

character. What, I ask, is the only legitimate inference? That the authors of the Gospels were free from the superstitions in question.

Before going further it will be necessary to ascertain what is the precise nature and character of that demoniacal supernaturalism which is apparently asserted in the pages of the New Testament. Without doing so, it will be impossible to form a correct opinion on the subject under consideration.

The New Testament apparently ascribes to Satanic agency not only a power of suggesting temptations to the minds of men, but also in certain cases of depriving them of the supremacy of their wills, of enslaving their intellectual and moral powers, of interfering with the use of their bodily organs, and, in one instance, of imparting an unusual strength. These phenomena constitute what is designated as "possession," and bear no inconsiderable resemblance to different forms of insanity. [211]

But the New Testament also makes mention of lunacy as well as possession. How far they were distinguishable from each other we have no sufficient data to enable us to determine. At one time they are spoken of as the same disease; at others they are clearly distinguished from each other.

The language of the Gospels seems to imply that some maladies were believed to be produced by the influence of possession. In one or two instances language is used which may imply that a bodily disease was brought on by Satanic agency without actual possession. Whatever may have been the belief of the Jews on this subject, it is certain that the cases referred to in the Gospels are very few; and although the mention of diseases is very common, nothing is said about their being due to demoniacal influence. Not a single case occurs in which ordinary accidents are referred to this influence, although such is affirmed to have been the common belief of the Jews. In the Acts of the Apostles only two cases of possession are mentioned, one that of the damsel at Philippi, and the other the occasion when certain

Jewish exorcists undertook to exorcise demoniacs at Ephesus in the name of Jesus.

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The former case is of some importance. The girl is described as possessed by a spirit of Pytho, *i.e.* she pretended to practise the art of divination by the inspiration of the god Apollo, and in many respects she practised the arts of the modern fortune-teller. Such persons were not uncommon at the time. The Pythia at Delphi professed to prophesy under the influence of a similar inspiration. Whatever may have been the real causes by which this mental condition was brought about, the paroxysms were so real that one is recorded to have died under their influence. Her state when under prophetic influence, is described as one of phrensied excitement. St. Paul is represented by the historian as addressing himself to the spirit, and commanding him to come out in the name of Jesus Christ. The powers of such persons were confined to diving into the secrets of the future; but to other kinds of supernatural power they made no claims.

If the language here employed be other than phenomenal, it seems to imply that in St. Paul's opinion certain practices of the ancient world which were far from uncommon, were connected with demoniacal agency. These were usually combined with certain forms of religious phrensy, such as even in the present day manifest themselves in connection with the more degraded forms of religion. At no period was this class of phenomena more prevalent than during the century which preceded, and that which followed the Advent, when human nature was stirred to its profoundest depths.

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There are also a few passages in St. Paul's writings which seem to affirm a connection between demoniacal agency and pagan worship. Whatever may have been his own opinions on this subject, it is evident that the action which he supposed to have been exerted was entirely mental. Not one word is uttered by him which implies that he regarded this mode of demoniacal action as involving a power of interfering with the forces of the

material universe.

Such is a general statement of the facts as they appear in the New Testament in connection with possession, and demoniacal action. It has been necessary thus distinctly to state them, in order that we may keep the subject clear of all adventitious issues with which it has been attempted to obscure it. That form of demoniacal action involved in the supposed power possessed by demons of tempting men to evil does not fall within the limits of the present controversy.

But the opponents of Christianity are not content to reason on the facts respecting demoniacal action as they are presented to us in the pages of the New Testament. They charge its writers with a number of the most grotesque beliefs on this subject, for which the book itself furnishes us with no evidence. This course has been taken for the purpose of fastening on them a boundless credulity, and thereby destroying their claim to be accepted as credible reporters of historical facts. I will cite one or two examples of this mode of reasoning, in order that we may be able to form a correct estimate of its value.

After having given a detailed account of a number of monstrous beliefs gleaned from the Talmud and other sources respecting angels, the author of "Supernatural Religion" then proceeds: "The belief in demons at the time of Jesus was equally emphatic and comprehensive, and we need not mention also that the New Testament is full of it. They are in the air, on earth, in the bodies of men and animals, and even at the bottom of the sea. They are the offspring of the fallen angels who loved the daughters of men. They have wings like angels, and can fly from one place in the earth to another. They attain a knowledge of the future by listening behind the veil of the temple of God. Their numbers are infinite. The earth is so full of them, that if man had the power to see, he could not exist on account of them; there are more demons than men, and they are about as close as the earth thrown up out of a new made grave. It is stated that each man

had 10,000 demons on his right hand, and 1000 on his left.... The crush on the Sabbath in the synagogue arises from them; also the dresses of the Rabbins become so soon worn through their rubbing; in like manner also they cause the tottering of the feet. He who wishes to discover these spirits must take sifted ashes, and strew them about his bed, and he will perceive their footprints upon them like a cock's tread." Here follow a number of the most ineffable absurdities, unsurpassed by anything contained in the Arabian Nights, which I need not cite. The author then proceeds: "Demons, however, take more especial delight in foul and offensive places, and an evil spirit inhabits every private closet in the world. Demons haunt deserted places, ruins, graves, and certain kinds of trees. We find indications of these superstitions throughout the Gospels. The possessed are represented as dwelling among the tombs, and being driven by unclean spirits into the wilderness, and the demons can find no rest in clean places. Demons also frequented springs and fountains. The episode of the angel who was said to descend at certain times and trouble the water of the pool of Bethesda, so that he that first stepped in was healed of whatsoever disease he had, may be mentioned here in passing, although the passage is not found in the older manuscripts of the fourth Gospel, and was certainly a late addition." Here follow further citations of Rabbinical absurdities. The author then proceeds: "The Talmud and other Rabbinical writings are full of references to demoniacal possession, but we need not enter into details on this point, as the New Testament itself presents sufficient evidence respecting it. Not only could one spirit enter into a body, but many took possession of the same individual. There are many instances mentioned in the Gospels, such as Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons (ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια), and the man whose name was legion, because many demons (πολλὰ δαιμόνια) had entered into him. Demons likewise entered into the bodies of animals, and in the narrative to which we have just referred,

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the demons, on being expelled from the man, requested to be allowed to enter into the herd of swine, which being permitted, 'the demons went out of the man into the swine, and the herd ran violently down the cliff into the lake and were drowned,' the evil spirits, as usual, taking pleasure only in the destruction and injury of man and beast. Besides possession, all the diseases of men and animals are ascribed to the action of the devil and demons. In the Gospel, for instance, the woman with a spirit of infirmity is described as bound by Satan, although the case was not one of demoniacal possession." The author then proceeds to enumerate a large number of grotesque beliefs as held by the Jews at the time of the Advent.

I regret the necessity which has compelled me to cite so lengthy a passage, but it is absolutely necessary that the reader should be enabled to see, beyond the possibility of misapprehension, the nature of the objections which are urged against the historical credibility of the Gospels, and the reasonings by which they are attempted to be supported. The general principle that underlies them may be stated in a few words, that the followers of Jesus and the authors of the Gospels were a prey to such a multitude of degrading superstitions on the subject of demonology as wholly to destroy the value of their historical testimony. [216]

The effect of this passage with its context is to produce the impression on the mind of the reader, not only that these absurd beliefs were generally entertained by the Jews at the time of the Advent, but that they constituted the form of thought of the followers of Jesus. It may be urged that the object of the author is to prove the general superstition of the times; and that he does not intend to affirm that it was shared in by every one of the followers of Jesus. This may be correct; but if it is not intended to be asserted that the followers of Jesus were the prey of equal superstitions, the reference to this mass of credulity can have no bearing on the present argument, and is simply misleading. To what purpose, I ask, is it made, unless it is intended to implicate

our Lord's followers in these beliefs? Unless it were so, the fact that others entertained them would not in the smallest degree affect the value of their historical testimony. But on this point we are not left to inferences; not only are passages in the Gospels referred to, but we are repeatedly informed that the followers of Jesus did share in these popular delusions.

The position, therefore, which is taken by the author is clear. His readers are invited to believe that the followers of our Lord were a prey to the belief in a number of ineffable absurdities respecting demons such as he has enumerated. If this can be established, the conclusion is inevitable, that their historical testimony is valueless.

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Let us now consider the mode in which the proof of this is attempted to be established. The authorities quoted are chiefly the Talmudical writers; that is to say, persons who wrote as late as from A.D. 200 to A.D. 500, are cited as the proof that such opinions were universally entertained by the Jews in the time of Jesus Christ. Equally valid would it be to quote the writers of modern spiritualism to prove that such opinions were held by our ancestors in the time of the Stuarts or the Plantagenets. On the strength of this and kindred evidence, such opinions are ascribed to the original propagators of Christianity, and to the authors of the Gospels.

But this is not all. The only correct method of ascertaining the superstition and credulity of any particular writer is carefully to examine the contents of his book, and to note the various instances which we find in it of what we consider to be superstitions; and then proceed to estimate their value, and, if needful, to compare them with other contemporary authorities. This course, however, is not that pursued by this writer. On the contrary, he quotes the absurdities which we have seen from the Talmudical writers, and refers in the midst of them to nearly every passage in the Gospels which can be made to bear even a remote reference to the views in question. I submit that such a mode of reasoning

is not conducive to the interests of truth.

A few examples of this mode of conducting the argument require notice.

After referring to a number of monstrous superstitions, he tells us that the Jews believed that “demons took especial delight in foul and offensive places, and that an evil spirit inhabits every private closet in the world. Demons haunted deserted places, ruins, graves, and certain kinds of trees. We find indications of these superstitions throughout the Gospels. The possessed are represented as dwelling among the tombs, and as being driven by unclean spirits into the wilderness, and demons can find no rest in clean places.” [218]

“We find indications of these superstitions throughout the Gospels.” To this observation I invite the reader's attention. Is it meant to be affirmed that any indication can be found in the Gospels that the writers believed that a demon inhabited every private closet in the world? Two instances only are referred to in the text, in one of which the demoniac of Gadara is represented as dwelling among the tombs, and as having been driven into the wilderness; and the other the parable of the unclean spirit going out of the man, and finding no rest when walking through dry places. Do these two cases prove the truth of the sweeping assertions above referred to? Does the parabolic representation that the expelled demon found no rest in dry or clean places prove that the disciples of Jesus believed that they took especial delight in foul or offensive ones? Does the fact that the demoniac of Gadara had been driven by the evil spirit into the wilderness prove that it was a universal belief that deserts and graves were haunted by demons?

In proof also of these assertions we are referred in a note to five passages in the Gospels, viz. Matt. viii. 28; xii. 43; Mark v. 3-5; Luke viii. 27-29; xi. 24. Five passages are very few to justify the assertion that we find indications of these superstitions throughout the Gospels. On examining them, however, the five

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references are reduced to two, three belong to the account of the demoniac at Gadara, reported by each of the Synoptics; and two to the twofold report of the same parable as given by Matthew and Luke! This is a very slender foundation on which to ground the assertion that the followers of Jesus believed that “demons took especial delight in foul and offensive places, that they inhabited every private closet in the world, and that they haunted deserted places, graves, ruins, and certain kinds of trees, and that we find indications of these superstitions *throughout the Gospels.*”

Still more extraordinary is the next reference. “Demons haunted springs and fountains,” says the author. To this he adds, “the episode of the angel who was said to descend at certain seasons and trouble the water of the pool of Bethesda, so that he who first stepped in was cured of whatsoever disease he had, may be mentioned in passing.”

Why, I ask, mention it at all? Is the visit of an angel to this particular pool for the purpose of working a miracle, a proof that the followers of our Lord believed that demons inhabited springs and fountains?

But our astonishment at the author's reference to it is increased when we read the following words: “*Although the passage is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the Fourth Gospel, and it is certainly a late interpolation.*”

I must put the question again in real earnestness. This being so, why mention it here? The author admits that it formed no portion of the original Gospel of St. John, and that it is certainly a late interpolation. Now the Gospel of St. John, according to the opinion of the most eminent unbelievers, was not published before A.D. 170. If this was the case (the author himself evidently assigns to its composition a very late date) a late interpolation could not have found its way into its pages until about the year 250, at the earliest 200. What then is the nature of the reasoning before us? We are referred for proof that the followers of Jesus held these opinions to an authority which the author himself admits to have

been a late interpolation, which could not have been introduced [220] into this Gospel earlier than 180 years after the ministry of our Lord, as a proof that his original followers believed that demons inhabited springs and fountains. Such reasonings furnish their own refutation.

The exposure of one more fallacy of this description will be sufficient. We are told that, "Not only one evil spirit entered into a body, but many took possession of the same individual. There are *many instances mentioned in the Gospels*, such as Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons, and the man whose name was legion, because many demons had entered into him."

I ask, where are these "many instances"? The plain fact must be stated, that the two here referred to, constitute the only ones which are mentioned as facts by the Evangelists. Besides these there is the parable of the unclean spirit going out of the man above alluded to, who, when he could find no rest returned to his former habitation in company with seven other spirits more wicked than himself. It should be observed that in two of the cases the number given is the mystical number "Seven"; and that one of them occurs in a parable, the moral of which is, to warn the Jews, that although they had got rid of the evil spirit of idolatry, they were in danger of falling into the greater evil of Phariseeism and hypocrisy.

But to return to the argument. The great mass of the author's citations for the purpose of proving that the Jews at the time of the Advent, and among them the followers of Jesus, were a prey to these grotesque beliefs respecting the action of demons, are made from authors who are separated by an interval of centuries from the ministry of our Lord. I submit, therefore, that such authorities are utterly valueless to prove that His disciples and early followers were a prey to these gross delusions. Nor has he [221] adduced an atom of valid proof from the New Testament itself. The references above referred to have either been made in a

most careless manner, or have been used to assist in proving a foregone conclusion.

But let us suppose for the sake of argument that the Jews at the time of our Lord did generally entertain these monstrous demoniacal beliefs: to what conclusion, I ask, would such a fact, if true, indubitably point? Credulous and superstitious people, invariably invent stories that are the counterparts of their own credulity. This is proved by the whole mass of existing mythology. Mythological inventions give us the precise measure of the beliefs of those who have originated them. If then the demonology of those who have elaborated these portions of the Gospels was of the character that this writer and others assert it to have been, the Gospels would have contained an embodiment of such demoniacal beliefs as those which the author has so industriously collected, and has endeavoured to fasten upon their writers.

Now the idea of demonology having been present in the minds of the writers, it is obvious that they did not omit all reference to these absurd beliefs, merely because they were outside the subject on which they were writing. But while demoniacal action is repeatedly alluded to, it is an undeniable fact that no stories of the description given by this writer are to be found in them. The author therefore has furnished the most conclusive proof, without intending to do so, that these forms of thought, to whomsoever else they may have appertained, were neither those of the original followers of Jesus, nor of the authors of the Gospels.

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It follows therefore that this attempt to prove that the followers of our Lord and the authors of the Gospels were a prey to such a mass of grotesque beliefs respecting demons, as to invalidate their historical testimony, falls to the ground, and that the data on which this has been attempted to be established, afford proof on the contrary that they did not entertain the beliefs in question.

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## Chapter X. The Existence And Miracles Of Satan.

I fully admit that a difficulty is involved in the idea that a being like Satan is permitted to perform actions which bear even a remote analogy to divine miracles. I have already shown that the New Testament only apparently ascribes to him a supernatural action of a very limited and special kind, differing widely from our usual conception of a miracle. I now proceed to inquire how far this limited action, thus attributed to him, if we suppose that possession was an objective fact, and not a form of madness, interferes with the validity of the attestation of miracles to the Christian revelation.

The existence of a being like Satan is alleged as constituting an enormous difficulty against the statements of the New Testament. A numerous class of writers dismiss the idea of his existence as unworthy of serious argument, and endeavour to dispose of it with a sneer. This world however contains numerous analogous cases of very evil men endowed with the highest mental powers, who have exerted the most injurious influences on others. Their existence is a fact; and the difficulties attending it cannot be got rid of by any kind of evasion. The objections that have been urged in connection with this subject are not founded on the facts of the moral universe as they exist; but on *à priori* principles alone. It has been affirmed to be incredible that Almighty God should have permitted the existence of such a being as Satan; or if his existence is permitted, that he can be allowed to interfere in the affairs of men. [224]

In dealing with this question it is evident that I must proceed on the supposition that I am reasoning with theists only. The

whole question is irrelevant on the principles of Pantheism or Atheism, or, to put the case more distinctly, on such principles there is no greater difficulty in supposing that nature has evolved evil beings superior to men in their faculties and powers in some other part of the universe, than that it has evolved evil men, who are gifted with high forms of intelligence in this; or even that such beings should be capable of interfering in human affairs. If Pantheism or Atheism is a correct account of the facts of the universe, it is impossible to say what kind of beings nature may have evolved in the past, or may evolve in the future from her prolific womb.

But if it is once conceded that a personal God exists, who is the moral Governor of the Universe, the affirmation that the existence of such beings is inconsistent with his attributes, is only another form of asserting that the existence of moral evil is incompatible with them. The ground of its existence has been a problem, into which the human mind has striven to penetrate from the earliest dawn of thought, without ever approaching to its solution; but into this question it is useless to enter. In the present argument we are dealing with facts, and the existence of aggravated forms of moral evil in the universe is a fact. If there be a God, it must be consistent with his attributes. The real difficulty lies in its existence at all in the universe of a God who is all-powerful and good.

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But since it does exist, the existence of a being like Satan is a mere question of degree. It is an unquestionable fact, whether we can explain it or not, that many men of the worst moral principles have been gifted with the highest intellectual powers, and have been placed in positions in society which have enabled them to inflict the greatest evil on others. History is full of such cases. The most extreme forms of human corruption have been not inaptly designated as "Satanic." If therefore under the moral government of God it is a fact that such forms of human wickedness exist; and if it is supposable, that there are other

rational beings in the universe endowed with higher powers than man, how can it be inconceivable that they may differ in moral character, precisely in the same way as men do; and that some may be eminently virtuous, and others fearfully corrupt? It is clear that the difficulty centres in the existence of moral evil in the universe of a God who is possessed of almighty power, and perfect holiness and goodness. Why has He permitted it? Is its existence a necessary condition of the creation of a free moral agent? If so, might not the amount of it have been greatly diminished? The utmost light that reason can throw on these questions consists of a few very imperfect glimmerings. The fact is undeniable, that a large mass of moral evil exists, and in very fearful forms. If there be a Creator of the universe, it is plain that the present state of things must be consistent with his attributes. The only mode of escaping from this difficulty is by taking refuge in the vastly greater ones of pantheism or atheism.

Many theists, pressed by these difficulties, have attempted to evade them by endeavouring to reduce the amount of moral evil in the universe, the existence of which they cannot deny, to indefinitely small proportions, and then affirming that it will be ultimately swallowed up in the ocean of universal good. But the mere diminishing of its amount by no means solves the difficulty. The real question is, how has it come even into temporary existence? But there is also a still more grave objection to this course of reasoning. It renders it necessary that we should close our eyes to the most obvious facts. So far is it from being the case that the amount of moral evil in the world is small, that it is very large. This fact is indisputable. The whole course of history tells us that it has existed in all past ages and in very aggravated forms. To try to get rid of the difficulty in this manner is simply to close our eyes, and refuse to see it.

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But not only does moral, but physical evil exist. This is another unquestionable fact, and its existence bears directly on my argument. Many and vain have been the attempts to explain

it away. It has been affirmed that pain after all is no such great matter. I strongly suspect that those who have asserted this, have experienced but little of it. It is true that it may ultimately result in good under God's government, but taken by itself, it is undeniably an evil. Do not frightful sufferings abound? Do not most painful diseases afflict our frames? Is it not possible to suffer terribly from causes quite independent of our own conduct? Is not a great earthquake a terrible calamity to those who suffer from its effects, although it may be attended with beneficial results to those who do not? Pains may be said to be useful warnings; but surely the warning might have been given without the extremity of the suffering. They are also affirmed to be the penalties of ignorance, and this may be partially true: but the ignorance is in a vast majority of cases unavoidable. It is a simple fact, that a great amount of physical suffering exists, the reason of which we are wholly unable to explain.

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But further: moral evil propagates itself, and inflicts calamities on those who are not implicated in its guilt. Is it not true that men have existed both in the ancient and modern world, whose actions have inflicted the greatest evils on mankind for generation after generation? Can any one doubt that descendants suffer for the sins of remote ancestors, and children for those of their parents? Facts are facts, and they will not become less so by our refusing to look at them. The evil wrought by such a man as Philip II. of Spain, is a fact, and it has extended its baneful influence to our own times. Is not a large portion of the evils under which France has groaned, traceable to the misdeeds of two of her sovereigns? These were quietly sleeping in their graves, when the evils they had occasioned burst on the head of their guiltless successor. But it is needless to quote examples. History is one long succession of them. Whether we like it or not, the old saying is an accurate account of the moral order of the universe as it exists, "Visiting the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that

hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” These are facts which the theist equally with the Christian must face, for they exist in the universe of that God, in whose moral perfections both believe. I repeat, therefore, that the only way of escaping from them is by rushing into the far greater difficulties of pantheism or atheism.

These reasonings might be indefinitely extended. The result which follows from them is clear, that if we attempt to reason from abstract principles to the constitution of a universe, we shall produce one utterly unlike that which actually exists. It follows, that as they cannot account for the facts of the universe, as they come under our observation, they are unsafe guides on all similar questions. Consequently they are unable to show that the existence of evil beings possessed of superhuman powers, is inconsistent with the perfections of God. [228]

Nor is there any greater force in the objection, that if such beings exist at all, it is inconsistent with our conceptions of the divine government, that they should be allowed to interfere in the affairs of men. I reply, that it is equally inconceivable, that God should have allowed a man, to whom he has imparted the greatest mental endowments, and whom he has placed in an elevated position in society, who lived centuries ago, to exert an evil influence on the present generation. The difficulty that a powerful influence for evil can be exerted by men on those who have never seen them, and of whose existence they have never heard, is just as great as the one under consideration. Yet it is one of the most undeniable of facts, that men do exert the most powerful influence on one another, and that such influence can be exerted by generations long since passed away on those who live ages afterwards; and that it can be exerted unconsciously.

I am far from wishing to deny, that the difficulty is a real one. On the contrary, I fully admit it; and that it is one which our present faculties are unable to explain. But it is one which is not peculiar to Christianity, nor has it originated in it. The interfer-

ence of superhuman beings in human affairs for the purposes of evil, would be only another form of the same difficulty.

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Precisely similar reasonings to those which have been employed to prove that the existence of a being like Satan is impossible, when they are applied to other subjects, bring us into direct collision with realities. There can be no doubt, that if the constitution of the universe had been placed in our hands, its phenomena would have been very different. But our function is a far humbler one. It is not to erect a universe according to our conceptions of what is best, but to learn the order of that in which we live, and to accept facts on sufficient evidence, however strongly they may conflict with abstract theories.

I now proceed to consider the real difficulty connected with this subject, and which has been very strongly urged by the author of "Supernatural Religion." It is this. "If it is conceivable that beings exist who possess superhuman knowledge and power; and that they are capable of interfering as the New Testament affirms, in the affairs of men, how can the performance of a miracle be the guarantee of a divine commission? May not inferior agents, who possess superhuman knowledge and power, be able to produce results which would to all outward appearance be miraculous? Might not an evil being, who was possessed of the highest intelligence like Satan, perform such actions as would be equivalent to miracles, for the purpose of authenticating falsehoods? All that such actions prove is the presence of superhuman knowledge and power; but they would leave it quite uncertain whether the power was divine or Satanic." Such is the objection, and it demands an adequate solution.

I reply, that if we view the question merely as an abstract one, it is quite possible, if a superhuman being of high intelligence is permitted to interfere in the affairs of men, that he should be able to perform actions which might have all the appearance of being supernatural. Such results might be even brought about by a superior acquaintance with the existing forces of nature, and by

a successful combination of them, without the introduction of any new force whatever. For such results we need not invoke the aid of a supernatural being. They have been frequently effected by a superior human intelligence acting on an inferior one. We all know how Columbus used his superior knowledge of astronomy, to predict an eclipse, and the ignorant natives of America mistook this as denoting the presence of a superhuman being. Such results may be always produced, when superior knowledge acts on ignorance; and such is the origin of no inconsiderable number of impositions which have been practised on mankind. It is therefore quite conceivable, as an abstract question, that as men who possess a very superior intelligence, are capable of producing results which to an inferior intelligence would have the appearance of being supernatural, without really being so, in the same manner, if Satan is supposed to possess an intelligence greater than that of the wisest of mankind, and if his interference in human affairs is permitted, he may be able to perform actions which would have the appearance of being supernatural, by a skilful use of the existing forces of nature. [230]

But to such power there must be a limit. There are certain results which plainly lie beyond the power of any mere combination of the forces of nature to produce. Of these, many of the miracles recorded in the Gospels are instances, such as the cure of blind or leprous men by no other visible instrumentality than a word or a touch. Actions of this kind differ wholly in character from those which we are now considering. If a miracle was a more objective fact taking place in external nature, and nothing more, it might be open to question whether its performance was owing to supernatural agency, or to some combination of known or unknown forces. But the miracles with which we are concerned in this controversy, involve a great deal more than more objective facts in material nature. [231]

But assuming, as I cannot help doing in an argument like the present, the existence of a God, who is the Creator and Governor

of the universe, the question is not a mere abstract one, what a Being like Satan, if he is supposed to exist, might be capable of doing; but it becomes entirely one of permitted agency. It is plain, that if there is a God, every being in the universe, however powerful or intelligent, can only act within a certain definite sphere of operation, which the Governor of the universe has assigned to him. Within what limits then is he allowed act? Are subordinate agents permitted to interfere with the material forces of external nature? and if so, within what bounds? Can they wander over the universe at their mere will and pleasure, and interfere with its operations? How far is their interference permitted in the moral and spiritual worlds? The question before as is even reduced to one of far narrower limits. Our only direct knowledge of the existence of such an agency is derived from Revelation. The real point therefore which concerns us is, to what extent is such permitted agency affirmed in the New Testament. Do the Satanic interventions there described interfere with divine miracles as attestations of a divine commission? We have nothing whatever to do with abstract propositions or with what Rabbinical writers may have affirmed on this subject, but with the assertions of the New Testament alone.

If there is a God, it is certain that the present order of nature must be a manifestation of His will. So must be the energy of its forces in conformity with invariable law. Whatever power He has delegated to subordinate agents, must form a portion of this universal order, and be exercised in conformity with the divine purposes. It is inconceivable that subordinate agents can be allowed to break in upon it at their will and pleasure, for the general permanence of its order forms an essential condition for the exercise of moral agency. If they are allowed to do so, it must be only within clear and definite limits, which ultimately effectuate the purposes of the Creator. Such is the nature of the power which man can exert over material nature. It can only modify results, by giving a new direction to its forces. In the

case of man this power is limited to the world in which he lives. In a similar manner, if beings superior to him in power and intelligence exist, their interference must be subject to definite limitations. Such is the uniform affirmation of the writers of the New Testament. Even if we take their language in the most literal sense, the supernatural interventions which they attribute to Satan, are confined to a very definite order of phenomena. In one word, the sacred writers have described Satanic intervention as limited to the world of mind; and as capable, through its action on the mind, of producing certain results on the bodily organization. To this there is one exception, the apparent ascription of a few diseases to Satanic agency. This I shall consider hereafter.

It is a remarkable fact, and one worthy of particular attention, that the supernatural action attributed to Satan in the New Testament, with the exception above referred to, is a mental one. It is through the action on men's minds alone, that demoniacal agency produces any results on their bodily frame. No direct action on the material forces of nature is ever attributed to it. We find nothing in the smallest degree resembling the act of a demon overturning a pitcher of water. The kind of influence attributed to Satan is of a similar character, though much higher in degree, to that which one man can exert over another. One man of superior mental power is capable of exerting an influence over a weaker mind to such a degree, as almost to enthral it. We call this a species of fascination. In the New Testament the similar but mightier Satanic influence is Possession. One mind, by getting a powerful hold on another, can exert an influence on the body, as in mesmerism. The Satanic influence exerted in possession is only a more powerful one. [233]

It is certain that the extent to which one human mind can act on another is bounded by no narrow limits; what is more, it is one which is frequently exerted for evil. It is evidently within the purposes of the Creator to permit this. Why it is allowed to the extent to which it is, is beyond our powers to discover. But the

wide extent to which it not only can be, but actually is exerted, is a fact that cannot be denied. It is also an influence that can be exerted secretly. The difference between this power and that which is supposed to be attributed to Satan in the New Testament is far more one of degree than of kind; and the latter is one which is bounded by clear and definite limits. Between a Satanic possession and a miracle performed by Jesus the distinction is unmistakable.

It follows from the foregoing considerations, that the Satanic supernaturalism, which we have to consider, as far as it stands in opposition to the miracles of God, is reduced to very narrow limits. It consists almost exclusively of possession and its phenomena. No other kind of action bearing even a remote analogy to a miracle, with the single exception of the history of the temptation, is anywhere attributed to Satan in the New Testament.

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In estimating the evidential character of miracles, it has been a far too common practice with those who deny the historical character of the Gospels, to keep out of view their moral aspect as an important portion of their evidential value. It has been affirmed that a miracle must be estimated as an act of power quite apart from its moral impress. The author before me even goes the length of supposing, that, if Satan is as cunning as he is represented in the New Testament, he may even turn himself into an angel of light and perform works bearing the impress of holiness for the purpose of furthering the interests of the kingdom of lies.

Such an idea receives no countenance from anything which is affirmed by St. Paul. The passage in which allusion is made to Satan transforming himself into an angel of light is as follows: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers should be transformed as the ministers

of righteousness.” It is quite clear that nothing was further from the Apostle's mind than the idea of Satanic miracles bearing the impress of holiness as wrought in support of the kingdom of falsehood. He is simply speaking of Judaizing teachers, who claimed the support of apostolical authority, for the purpose of disseminating their unchristian views.

The idea is absurd and ridiculous, but we know that it occurred to the opponents of our Lord, who charged him with working miracles by Satanic agency. The special instance in which they made this charge was that of his supposed expulsion of demons. Our Lord met it by the decisive argument, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If Satan be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?” In a word, he appealed to the moral aspect of his miracles as a convincing proof that their accusation could only have been instigated by deliberate malice. [235]

The same objection was doubtless urged against his other miracles, although it is nowhere stated in express terms in the Gospels. But whatever absurd beliefs may have been entertained by the learned Rabbis, they were easily met by the common sense of the people. “We know,” said the Rabbis, “that this man is a sinner.” “How can a man that is a sinner perform such miracles?” is the reply. “Whether he be a sinner, I know not, but one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” “Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” It is evident that the difficulties suggested by the author of “Supernatural Religion” as to the evidential value of miracles being nullified by the views which prevailed respecting demoniacal action were not appreciated when the fourth Gospel was composed, although according to this theory they ought to have been at that time in full force. But apart from the peculiar character ascribed to Satanic supernaturalism in the New Testament, the entire idea that there could have been any danger of confounding Satanic miracles with the miracles of God, rests on the fallacy of confounding a mere objective fact with an action of a moral agent. A miracle does not consist merely in the outward

event, which is caused by him, but in the occurrence united with the character and purpose of the agent. The actions of holy beings must bear the impress of their holiness; those of evil ones, of the contrary. If, therefore, evil moral agents are capable of performing actions which are analogous to miracles, they cannot fail to be stamped with the evil of their characters. Such would always form a discriminating mark between Divine and Satanic miracles, even on the supposition that the latter are possible.

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This precisely represents the case as it stands in the New Testament. All the miracles alleged to have been wrought by God, bear a definite impress of character and purpose. The supernaturalism ascribed to Satan is no less definitely marked. The one clearly comes from above. The indications that the other, if real, must have come from below, are equally distinct. The moral impress which the two series of events bear, is fully sufficient to discriminate the one from the other.

The attempt to distinguish between the miraculous act and its moral environment, is absurd. It has been affirmed that one miraculous act is as good as another, quite apart from the circumstances with which they are attended. Such a principle would destroy the distinction between a highly meritorious act and the foulest crime. A, for example, has killed B. The outward act may be the same; but the accompanying circumstances make all the distinction between a justifiable homicide, and a most atrocious murder. It is ridiculous to affirm that principles which are legitimate in common life become invalid only when they are applied to the evidences of Christianity. Why, in the name of common sense, may not one miracle be as clearly distinguishable from another by its moral environment, as an event in ordinary life is similarly distinguished? The affirmation, therefore, that the supposition of the possibility of Satanic miracles must invalidate the miracles of God is absurd.

Our Lord, therefore, was right in appealing to the character of his works as affording a conclusive proof of the source whence

they originated, and in contrasting them with the species of supernaturalism which was popularly attributed to Satan. “How can Satan cast out Satan? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may see and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him.” [237]

This is conclusive reasoning. It is only possible to darken the question by treating it as one of bare possibilities, as to what kind of actions a being like Satan might be capable of performing, if he is allowed to interfere with the arrangements of the universe at his pleasure. Such a supposition is foreign to the question at issue, which is whether the supernaturalism which the New Testament is supposed to attribute to him can interfere with the evidential value of the miracles wrought by Jesus. My reply is, Examine and compare the two. When this has been done, no doubt can remain on any reasonable mind that the latter, if real, are from above; and the former from below. The affirmation therefore that if Satanic miracles, such as possession, are possible, it invalidates the evidence of those wrought by God in attestation of the truth of a divine commission is disproved.

Equally invalid is the objection against a miraculous attestation to a divine commission, on the ground that such testimony can be easily imitated. I reply, that the great mass of the miracles recorded in the New Testament do not easily admit of a fraudulent imitation. I by no means deny that the art of legerdemain is capable of producing results which to an ignorant observer have the appearance of being supernatural. But this class of actions bears not the smallest analogy to the miracles recorded in the New Testament. No art of legerdemain can persuade a man who has been for many years blind to believe that he has recovered his sight, and enable him to act accordingly. [238]

But it has been argued; if God is the moral Governor of the universe, is He not bound to prevent a being like Satan from acting for the purposes of evil in the affairs of men? This

question may be best answered by asking another. Is He not equally bound to hinder evil men from exerting such terrible influences on others, even long after they are dead? Is He not bound to hinder the possibility of the bringing up of children by their parents in various forms of vice, so as to render them in after life, more wicked than themselves? Yet it is an indubitable fact that such an influence is exerted under the moral government of God. Human life abounds with such cases, which bear a close analogy to Satanic action exerted in the affairs of men. When we can fully fathom the reason for the permission of the one, we shall have made considerable progress in understanding those of the other. The case may be simply stated. There are difficulties in the moral government of the universe, into the grounds of which we cannot penetrate. These press equally on every form of theism. The Satanic supernaturalism described in the New Testament presents a precisely analogous difficulty. This therefore can form no reason why one who believes that God is the moral Governor of the universe, as it now exists, should reject Christianity because the difficulties are of a similar order, and press equally on both. The only escape from them, as I have already said, is the inevitable position assumed by atheism, or pantheism, and the dreary prospect which they afford to the aspirations of the human mind.

# Chapter XI. Possession: Is The Theory That It Was Madness Subversive Of The Historical Value Of The Gospels Or Inconsistent With The Veracity Of Christ?

There can be no doubt that the subject of possession is attended with real difficulties, whichever view we may take of its actual character.

The symptoms which are alleged to have accompanied it present many of the usual phenomena of madness. No possession is believed to take place now, but such phenomena are attributed to causes purely natural. The supposed possessions therefore which are mentioned in the New Testament or in other ancient writings are said to be due only to ignorance of natural causes. Many very eminent defenders of Christianity have been so deeply impressed by these and other reasons that they have admitted that possession is only a form of madness, and that the language respecting it in the New Testament is based on the current ideas of the day.

It is desirable that the difficulty should be put in the strongest light. I will therefore state it in the words of the author of "Supernatural Religion." "It would be an insult to the understanding of those who are considering this question, to pause here to prove that the historical books of the New Testament, speak in the clearest and most unmistakable terms of actual demoniacal possession." Now what has become of this theory of disease?

The Archbishop of Dublin is probably the only one who asserts [240] the reality of demoniacal possession formerly, and in the present day; and in this way we must say that he is consistent. Dean Milman, on the other hand, who spoke with the enlightenment of the 19th century, “has no scruple in averring his opinion on the subject of demoniacal possession to be that of Joseph Mede, Lardner, Dr. Mead, Paley, and all the learned modern writers. It was a kind of insanity, and nothing is more probable than that lunacy would take the turn, and speak the language of the prevailing superstition of the times.” The Dean, as well as “all the learned modern writers” to whom he refers, felt the difficulty, but in seeking to evade it, they sacrifice the Gospels. They overlook the fact, that the writers of these narratives, not only themselves adopt “the prevailing superstition of the times,” but represent Jesus as doing so with equal completeness. There is no possibility, for instance, of evading such statements as those in the miracle of the country of the Gadarenes, where the objectivity of the demons is so fully recognised, that on being cast out of the man, they are represented as requesting to be allowed to go into the herd of swine, and being permitted by Jesus to do so, the entry of the demons into the swine is at once signalled by the herd running violently down the cliff into the lake and being drowned. (p. 131.) The author might have strengthened his case, as far as modern authorities are concerned, by drawing attention to the fact, that even Dr. Farrar, who seems to maintain the objective reality of demoniacal possessions in his recently published “Life of Christ,” admits that in the statement that the demons locally passed from the man into the swine, some inaccuracy has crept into the narrative of the Evangelists.

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It will be at once seen that the all-important point in this objection is the apparent acceptance by our Lord of demoniacal possession, as being a correct account of an objective fact. I fully agree with this writer, that those who affirm that it was madness and nothing else are bound, when they propose this solution of

the difficulty, to point out distinctly how it affects the question of our Lord's veracity, and the historical character of the Gospels.

In approaching this question, let me at once observe that while I entertain a definite opinion as to the nature of the inspiration of the New Testament derived not from *à priori* assumptions, but from a careful study of its facts and phenomena, yet the question at issue is not what is the nature or the extent of the inspiration, but the reality of the supernatural events recorded in the Gospels. This issue is one which is purely historical, and therefore I have simply to examine it on historical grounds, and not to defend any particular theory of inspiration. Our business is first to ascertain what are the facts of the New Testament which are supported by historical evidence; when we have ascertained these, we shall be in a position to propound a theory of inspiration in accordance with the facts and assertions; still, however, it will be necessary to find out how a certain state of the facts will affect the character which the Gospels attribute to our Lord.

The following facts are plain on the surface of the Gospels. First, that the followers of our Lord believed that the demoniacal possessions there recorded were objective facts, and not mere forms of disease.

Secondly, that our Lord himself, if the words attributed to Him are correctly reported, used language which seems to imply that He shared in this belief.

Thirdly, that in a particular instance, not only do the Evangelists affirm that our Lord addressed a demoniac, but also the demons who possessed him, and that He permitted their departure into a herd of swine, thereby apparently confirming the objective reality of the possession. [242]

The question is a far more serious one, as it affects our Lord, than those on whose reports the statements of the Gospels are founded. He is represented as being a divine person, and as possessed in His human nature, not of infinite but of superhuman knowledge. His apparent sanction of an erroneous view is

therefore a very different thing from the apparent sanction of it by an author of a Gospel, or from the mistaken views which his followers might have entertained as to the causes of a bodily disease.

I should find no difficulty in adopting the theory of the eminent writers above named, that the demoniacal possessions mentioned in the New Testament, were nothing but forms of insanity, if it were not that our Lord has apparently recognised their reality. It has been urged that if possession was nothing but insanity, there is an end of the miracle. But this is not the case, for the cure of a madman is quite as much a supernatural act as the expulsion of a demon.

Let me now assume for argument's sake, that possession was simple madness. How does such a supposition affect the veracity of the authors of the Gospels, and their judgment as credible historians of the events of our Lord's life?

If we assume that possession was madness, it is evident from the language which the Evangelists have employed that they must have shared in the ignorance of the times in which they lived as to the true causes of the complaint. When however we speak of the ignorance of any particular period, it should be observed that the expression is an indefinite one. We have no right to impute to any body of authors opinions on particular subjects of which their writings contain no traces. It has been affirmed, as we have seen, that the Jews of the apostolic age held a number of opinions on the subject of possession of the most grotesque and monstrous description. I have already shown that to impute these opinions to them, when no trace of them can be found in their writings is a most unfair mode of reasoning.

When, therefore, I use the expression that they must have shared in the ignorance of the age respecting the causes of this disease, I must guard against the danger of ascribing to them a greater degree of ignorance than that which they have actually shown. The expression, "ignorance of the age," denotes

no uniform quantity of ignorance shared in by every individual alike. In an ignorant or superstitious age, one person may be far more so than another. It is quite conceivable that two thousand years hence human improvement may have become so great, that those who live in the present century may be designated as ignorant. It may be hereafter asserted that such writers as Huxley, Tyndall, Herbert Spencer, and Mill shared in the ignorance of the age in which they lived on some important physical facts. But from this it would be absurd to draw the conclusion that they were believers in the alleged facts of spiritualism because large numbers of their contemporaries were known to have believed in them, and spiritualistic publications enjoy a large circulation both in Europe and America in this nineteenth century.

As far as the Evangelists are concerned, the supposition that I am now considering involves nothing more than that they held a false theory as to the cause of a particular form of disease, and that they have used language respecting it that embodies this theory. In this point of view they would not differ from writers of every age who have entertained false theories as to the causes of physical phenomena. In such cases it is easy to separate the fact from the incorrect view as to what were the causes of that fact. Ancient philosophical writers held many false theories as to the place of the local habitation in our bodies of certain affections of our moral nature. These can be traced very distinctly in the language of the present day. Thus we say that a man is devoid of heart, and talk of making appeals to the heart. These, and multitudes of similar expressions which occur both in ancient and modern writings, involve false philosophical theories; but it is easy to separate the facts intended from the theories. Thus, if the authors of the Gospels inform us that our Lord cured a demoniac, and give an account of the demoniac's outcries, as though they were the utterances of a demon, we have only to substitute madman for demoniac, and the correct state of the case is easily discovered. [244]

[245] The real difficulty which is felt on this subject, arises not from the narratives as ordinary histories, but on the supposition that the writers possessed an inspiration which ought to have guarded them from such errors. Popular theories of inspiration unquestionably render such an assumption necessary, but I can see no ground for it, either in the statements of the Gospels, or any other portion of the New Testament. Nowhere is it affirmed that its writers were to be guided into all truth, scientific, philosophical, or even historical. All that is affirmed is that they possessed a degree of supernatural enlightenment adequate to communicate the Christian revelation to mankind. Neither is there a hint given, nor can a fact be adduced, to show that their supernatural illumination extended beyond this. The spiritual gifts bestowed no enlightenment beyond the special function of those gifts. This the affirmation of St. Paul in the Epistles to the Corinthians makes clear. A person having the gift of tongues, if he had not also that of interpretation was unable to interpret his own utterances, and the possession of the high gift of prophecy by no means exempted the possessor from the danger of using it in a manner to create confusion in the Church. Even the highest apostolic gifts conferred no infallibility, but were strictly limited to their proper functions of communicating the great truths of the Christian revelation. The idea that they conferred a general infallibility is no statement of the New Testament, but a pure figment of the imagination.

It therefore by no means follows because the writers of the New Testament had an illumination sufficient for their functions that they had any other than their ordinary enlightenment beyond that limit. They might have been good teachers of religious truth, and yet utterly ignorant of physical science. The assertion may be correct that St. Luke possessed a supernatural guidance sufficient to enable him to compose the third Gospel, and yet it may be no less true, that as a physician he had no medical knowledge beyond that of his time, and that he shared in all its errors as

to the causes and cure of physical disease. A man may be a good physician of the soul, and at the same time a very ignorant physician of the body. It is quite conceivable, therefore, even if the Evangelists or those followers of Christ from whom they derived their accounts possessed various degrees of supernatural enlightenment on matters directly affecting Christianity, that they possessed none whatever as to the causes of disease, and that they may have viewed madness as a result of demoniacal action, and described it accordingly. The facts would remain the same; the symptoms might have been exhibited, and the cure actually effected. [246]

But the New Testament likewise affirms that our Lord imparted to His followers the power of expelling demons, as well as that of healing diseases. Now, on the supposition that these demoniacs were simple maniacs, how does this affect the credibility of the narrative?

I reply that during the mission of the Apostles and the Seventy (for these are the cases alluded to) there is no promise made them of supernatural enlightenment. They were simply sent out to announce a specific fact, the near approach and setting up of the kingdom of heaven, and to work miracles in confirmation of it. It is true that in His address to them, our Lord told them that a time was coming when they would have to testify to Him before princes and kings, and that He promises them, that they should receive supernatural assistance, suitable to the emergency. But this never arose during the mission in question. They were commanded to cure the reputed demoniac in confirmation of their mission. This would be an equally miraculous sign whether he was one possessed or a simple maniac. In this case, therefore, there was no reason why they should be supernaturally enlightened as to the causes of this disease, more than of any other. No doubt the theories then prevalent as to the causes of disease generally were very faulty. It could not be otherwise in the state of medical science at that period. So they must always

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have been while such a truth as the circulation of the blood was unknown. But the object of Christianity was not to communicate scientific knowledge, or to teach the true causes of disease, but to discover truths mightily operative in the moral and spiritual worlds. It follows, therefore, that the ignorance of the disciples as to the actual causes of mania no more affects the credibility of the narrative than their ignorance of the causes of paralysis or leprosy.

It is also evident from the statements of the Gospels, that there were a considerable number of persons who practised exorcisms of various kinds, and who fully believed that the persons on whom they operated were possessed by demons. It seems also probable from the allusions made to them, that these exorcisms were occasionally successful in effecting a cure; and it may be, more frequently, in mitigating the symptoms. This, however, was not always the case; for the Evangelists describe the disciples as entirely unsuccessful in the case of the child, out of whom they invoked the demon to depart in the name of Jesus. It is worthy of observation, that in this instance, the father of the demoniac describes his son's case as a combination of lunacy and possession, "He is lunatic and sore vexed." Their failure is directly attributed to want of faith, *i.e.* that there was something wanting in their mental state which prevented them from exerting the requisite influence over the lunatic youth. The want of success with which exorcists were not unfrequently attended is strikingly set before us in the account given in the Acts of the Apostles, of the attempt made by certain Jewish exorcists to cure the demoniac at Ephesus. In this case it not only ended in a complete failure, but in an aggravation of the malady.

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Now when we consider the various forms which mania assumes, it is quite credible that exorcisms may have exerted a favourable influence on it, altogether apart from any supernatural power possessed by the operator. It is clear that the supposed maniacs imagined themselves under the influence of demoniacal

possession. When we consider the powerful influence that one mind is capable of exerting over another under these circumstances we can see that the presence of superior mental power was an influence exactly suited to produce a favourable result. In our modern treatment of mania (whatever may be the opinions as to its physical origin) it is now universally admitted that moral means are the most efficacious. Some obvious physical causes can be dealt with and removed, while others cannot. But the most successful operator on these forms of lunacy is he who applies to them the most effective moral treatment, under which in many cases its symptoms have gradually disappeared. One of these modes of treatment is never to cross the patient on the subject of his delusions. Nothing is more remarkable than the influence which the efficient practitioner can exert over persons suffering from these forms of madness, by the mere energy of his will; a display of mental power analogous to that of strong faith. This will often produce a calm among maniacs which persons of inferior endowments utterly fail to excite. It is an unquestionable fact that high mental and moral power is capable of producing striking results on different forms of maniacal disease.

This being so, it follows that exorcists might be capable of exerting upon maniacs a powerful influence favourable to cure. In the ancient world the usual treatment was that of extreme harshness. The demoniac of Gadara had been bound with chains and fetters. This is now known to have a direct tendency to aggravate the disease, rather than to cure it. It is no wonder, therefore, if the exorcist, by adopting an opposite mode of treatment, and even by sympathizing with the sufferer's delusions, was capable of alleviating the symptoms of the complaint, if not of effecting a cure. The whole result may have been due to moral influence and spiritual power, which may have been taken for the expulsion of a demon. In whatever way it was effected, the cure or the alleviation was no less real. [249]

It follows, therefore, that the exorcists of the ancient world

were far from necessarily being a set of impostors, even on the supposition that possession was simple mania. They may have been able to effect real alleviations or even cures of the complaint, although they were ignorant as to its cause, or how their exertions produced a successful result. There is nothing inconsistent with their general honesty, if they themselves were under the belief that they were expelling demons, while they were really curing ordinary mania. It should also be observed, that a real power of exerting an influence on madmen was one which in those times of ignorance, both of mental and physical science, admitted of fearful abuse, and if exercised for evil purposes, was capable of producing many of the worst results with which the practice of witchcraft and sorcery have been attended. A large portion of these latter operations no doubt resulted from the successful practice of ocular deception, but another portion of them unquestionably resulted from the mighty influences that a powerful mind can exert over a weak, imaginative, and superstitious one. There are many depths of human nature into which science has as yet failed to penetrate; and among these are the entire phenomena of mania and religious frenzy.

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These facts and considerations are sufficient to vindicate the credibility of the writers of the New Testament in their statement, that a power of exorcism was known and exercised in their time, and that its exercise was at times attended with favourable results. The statement on this subject attributed to our Lord, "If I by Satan cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges," is plainly an *ad hominem* argument. It amounts to no more than this; You Pharisees accuse me of casting out demons through Beelzebub. You assert that your disciples exercise a power of exorcism; and that they do this in virtue of a divine power communicated to them. On what principle of common sense can you affirm that the power which I exercise is demoniacal, and that which your disciples exercise is divine?—There is no assertion made one way or the other as

to the reality of the acts in question; nor is there any difficulty in supposing that our Lord recognised that some of the influences thus exerted were genuine.

I have hitherto, in treating this part of the subject, been dealing with the supposition that our Lord's disciples mistook maniacs for demoniacs, and the consequences of such a mistake on the authenticity of the Gospel narratives. I must now address myself to the far more important question as to the consequences which follow from our Lord's apparent recognition of the existence of demoniacal possession on the supposition that it was simple mania.

The facts as they appear in the Gospels are unmistakable. It was the distinct opinion of their authors that our Lord recognised the phenomena which they have reported as the results of demoniacal possession and not of simple mania. In proof of this it will be needless to refer to every instance they have recorded. The account of the demoniac at Gadara and that of the lunatic youth are among the most remarkable, and on them the case may be allowed to rest. In the former case the words of St. Mark, whose description of the scene abounds in those details which are rarely seen except in narratives derived from direct ocular testimony, are: "And all the demons besought him, saying, Send us into the swine that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out and entered into the swine, &c." In the case of the demoniac child the Evangelist describes the Apostles as asking Jesus, "Why could not we cast him out?" The following words are ascribed to our Lord: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." It is undeniable, therefore, that the Evangelists have ascribed to Jesus a belief in the reality of demoniacal possession. [251]

I am not concerned in the present argument with the words and actions which they have attributed to the demoniacs; but with the words and actions attributed to Jesus. We know that some madmen labour under the delusion, not only that they are

emperors and kings, but even in a few instances that they are God himself. This being so, it is quite possible that a maniac may confuse his personality with one or more demons; and speak and act consistently with the delusion. The maniacs may have given utterance to exclamations resulting from mere delusions; but the Evangelists in recording these utterances gave simple statements of facts. It is quite possible, that the demoniac of Gadara may have imagined himself possessed by a legion of demons, and have spoken and acted accordingly, whilst he was at the same time labouring under simple mania.

[252] Now, on the assumption that possession was simple mania and nothing more, the following suppositions are the only possible ones.

First, that our Lord really distinguished between mania and possession; but that the Evangelists have inaccurately reported his words and actions, through the media of their own subjective impressions, or, in short, have attributed to Him language that He did not really utter.

Second, that our Lord knew that possession was a form of mania, and adopted the current notions of the time in speaking of it, and that the words were really uttered by Him.

Third, that with similar knowledge, He adopted the language in question as part of the curative process.

Fourth, that He accepted the validity of the distinction, and that it was a real one during those times.

These alternatives demand our careful consideration, not for the purpose of determining which is the correct one, but of estimating the results which flow from either of them on the central character of the Gospels. The position which I take must be clearly stated. It is this: If possession be mania, there is nothing in the language which the Evangelists have attributed to our Lord which compromises the truthfulness of his character. If, on the other hand, we assume that possession was an objective fact, there is nothing in our existing scientific knowledge of the human

mind which proves that the possessions of the New Testament were impossible.

Let us consider the first alternative.

A careful examination of the phenomena presented by the synoptic Gospels leads to the irresistible conclusion that they largely consist of accounts which had been handed down by oral tradition, for a considerable time prior to their being committed to writing, and that these have been in various degrees supplemented by information derived from other sources. Assuming this to have been the case it gives an adequate account of the differences of form which they present, their variations in minor circumstances, and that most remarkable of all their phenomena, the samenesses of expression interwoven with considerable diversities, which is presented alike by the parallel narratives and discourses. The threefold and more frequently twofold form in which several of the discourses have been handed down to us, prevent us from believing that these discourses were intended to be rigid reproductions of the verbal utterances of our Lord. All they can be is an accurate account of the sense and very frequently of his words. The important question for our present consideration is, Have the Evangelists, in reporting the discourses of Jesus, imparted to them a colouring derived from their own subjective impressions or do they accurately convey to us his meaning and his meaning only? Or with respect to the point before us, Have the Evangelists in reporting the utterances of Jesus to the demoniacs and his observations on possession to his disciples given us the substance of what He actually said, or their own impressions of what He might have said?

I reply, the internal grounds for assuming their accuracy are strong. This is vouched for by the fact that while we have a three or twofold report of the same discourse, varying very considerably in words and arrangement, and while we have whole sentences in one Evangelist which materially aid in determining the meaning, either omitted in one or inserted in another, still

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with all these variations in expression, the variations in sense are of the smallest possible importance. This being the case the whole aspect of the discourses leads us to infer that they are altogether unaffected by the subjective impressions of those who reported them. They are indelibly stamped with the mind of Jesus himself and with his alone. There are many points on which his teaching ran strongly counter to the subjective impressions of those who reported it. Here then if such impressions had intruded themselves we should be certain to find indications of such intrusion, and that in no doubtful form. But there are none. The theory therefore of the introduction of the subjective impressions of the followers of our Lord into the discourses has no foundation in their contents, and therefore it is wholly illegitimate to assume it for the solution of a difficulty.

The phenomena which distinguish St. Mark's Gospel strongly display the marks of autoptic testimony. This greatly increases the difficulty of the supposition in question, for these expressions are found in that Gospel, and in it we also find the remarkable saying, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." It seems therefore impossible to doubt the Evangelist's assertion that such words were uttered by our Lord.

But I must now inquire whether Dr. Farrar's supposition is tenable, that some misapprehension has crept into the narrative when it affirms that the demons in objective reality left the body of the man and entered into the swine.

I answer that there is nothing in the Evangelists which requires us to consider their words as an accurately scientific statement of the mode in which the demon acted on the mind of the possessed.

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It is true that they repeatedly say that they entered in and out of the man, but this may well be in conformity with popular ideas on the subject, without intending to assert as a scientific fact, that the demons made either the body or the spirit of the man their local habitation. The New Testament attempts to determine nothing respecting the *modus operandi* of spirits. God is said

to dwell in a holy man, but it is ridiculous to affirm that the omnipresent Spirit makes the man his local habitation. There is a case in point as to the use of such language in the narrative of the woman who was healed of the issue of blood. The effect produced on her is described by our Lord and the Evangelists by the words "Power (δύναμις) has gone out of me." Yet no one who considers the mode in which the Gospels are composed, will affirm that our Lord by using these words intended to convey a scientific truth as to his *modus operandi* in performing the miracle, or that it was actually performed by some subtle emanation called "Power," which issued from his person. With those who assume that neither our Lord nor his Apostles could use popular expressions of this kind, but were bound to use terms of strict scientific accuracy all reasoning is thrown away. If the strictest verbal accuracy must be observed on every occasion it would be incorrect to say that a physician has cured a lunatic, for the idea on which the term lunacy is founded is scientifically inaccurate. It follows therefore that the terms which are so constantly applied to demons in the New Testament, that they entered into, departed out of, or possessed a man may well be popular expressions, denoting that they exerted a mighty, nay, an overwhelming influence upon him, which in the shattered state of his physical or moral condition he was unable to shake off, without determining anything as to the mode in which that influence was exerted. Thus, in St. John's Gospel, the devil is described as having put it (βεβληκότος) *into the heart* of Judas Iscariot to betray our Lord. After the giving of the sop, Satan is said to have entered into him. Surely the only fact which these words are intended to convey is that Judas allowed his whole moral and spiritual being to be overpowered by the influence of the evil one. It is quite possible that the Evangelists might have thought that the influence was exerted by actually going in or coming out of a man. But this is a mere physical theory as to the mode of action, and certainly is not a point on which the writings of the New

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Testament anywhere affirm that a supernatural knowledge was imparted to their authors.

It follows therefore that the expressions “going out from the man,” and “entering into the swine,” may only denote the cessation of the influence of the demons over the man, and its exertion on the swine, without determining the mode in which that influence was exerted. Surely when our Lord promised that He would come to the man who loved him and make his abode with him, that did not imply a local indwelling of his person but an indwelling of influence.

With such expressions in abundance before us, in which it is obvious that they were never intended to denote anything local, it is absurd to fix it on the sacred writers in this particular case. They nowhere assert that the demons were seen to pass from the man and enter the swine. It was simply a matter of inference from the facts which they witnessed that they had done so. The man ceased to rave and became a rational creature. The swine rushed down into the lake and perished. They also affirm that the result took place by the permission of Jesus. Yet it is somewhat remarkable that it is only Matthew who attributes to him the word “Go.” Mark and Luke only mention the request of the demons, and the result which followed. There is nothing therefore derogatory to the character of the Evangelists as historians in supposing that the facts received a colouring from their own subjective impressions, though it would be so if under such circumstances they had allowed those impressions to assign a different meaning to our Lord's words from that which he actually conveyed.

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This conclusion at which we have arrived, that our Lord's meaning is accurately reported by the Evangelists, disposes of the first alternative. We will now proceed to examine the second, viz., that our Lord knew that possession was mania, and that He adopted the current notions of the times in speaking of it. The all important question is, how far does this affect his veracity?

On this point Archbishop Trench has laid down the following

position broadly: “If Jesus knew that the Jewish belief in demoniacal possession was baseless and that Satan did not exercise such power over the bodies or spirits of men there would be in such language that absence of agreement between thoughts and words in which the essence of a lie consists.”

If this position is correct it involves a principle far more extensive than the case immediately before us. It is nothing less than that our Lord neither in his formal teaching nor in his conversation should have used language which was other than scientifically correct. It might be argued, that if He had done so He would have lent his sanction to the error which it involved. Even if the principle thus laid down could be confined to religious truth (which it cannot), it would then have been necessary that whenever the current ideas, or the mode of conception of the day contained an assumption involving an incorrect theory or endangering a religious error, our Lord ought to have corrected it in the course of his teaching. If we admit that demoniacal possession [258] was a real agency there can be no doubt that the Jews would confound many cases of ordinary mania with it. This being so, if the principle is correct, our Lord ought to have pointed out the distinction. Again, even if it is assumed that demoniacal agency was sometimes manifested in the phenomena of witchcraft, there can be no doubt that much of it was due to human imposture. On the principle laid down by the Archbishop our Lord ought to have corrected every error that was prevalent on that subject. On the same principle it would have been impossible for him to have used an *ad hominem* argument or in fact any form of expression founded on an erroneous conception. It is therefore evident that the principle, if accepted at all, can only be accepted under very considerable qualifications, or we shall convert our Lord from the revealer of truth and teacher of Christianity into one whose duty it was to combat every erroneous opinion of the day. On such a theory it is difficult to see how our Lord was not bound to correct every erroneous opinion then current respecting the

first and second chapters of Genesis, and to point out their true relation to the modern discoveries of geology, for He expressly referred to the second chapter in his teaching. He also referred to the flood, respecting which many erroneous opinions were undoubtedly current. If the principle is good it might be urged that He sanctioned those errors by his silence.

The same principle must also have been applicable to many other erroneous opinions which the Jews entertained respecting the interpretation of the Old Testament. In fact it would be difficult to assign any limits to our Lord's duty of correcting popular errors which had any kind of bearing on religious truth.

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But to return to the demoniacs. Is there any thing inconsistent with our Lord's truthfulness, if we suppose that they were lunatics and nothing more, in his using the current language of the day respecting them? Let it be observed that two considerations are really involved; first, our Lord is represented as conversing directly with the demoniac. Secondly, He also occasionally speaks of demoniacal possession in his ordinary teaching in the current language of the day. Now if it be admitted to be consistent with his truthfulness to address such language to the maniac, is it equally so to employ such language in his discourses to others?

I observe first, that if possession was mania, the real ground of the popular error was an erroneous opinion as to the cause of a natural disorder. The popular belief in fact ascribed it to supernatural instead of natural causes. So far, but no farther, it touched religious questions. To correct the error involved not merely the teaching of religious truth, but in this particular case the enunciation of sounder principles of mental philosophy. I think that I may fearlessly affirm that the teaching of scientific truth, either mental or material, did not come within the scope of our Lord's divine mission. Political truth is a part of moral truth, and moral truth is closely allied to religious truth. Now although Christianity is a power which will ultimately reform the political world, our Lord expressly affirmed that it was no part of his

mission to enunciate political truth.

In the same manner it may have formed no direct portion of his mission to teach correct views respecting the origin of mania, or to counteract the opinions which ascribed it to supernatural causes.

If this principle is correct, there is nothing inconsistent with his truthfulness if when our Lord conversed with a supposed demoniac, He addressed him in language which took for granted the truth of his delusions. Even if it is supposed that truthfulness [260] required that He should have exposed a popular delusion, surely it was no occasion for doing so, when He was addressing a madman. Who would affirm that a physician is wanting in truthfulness if he addresses his patient in terms of his own delusions, or imagines that it is his duty to enter into a discussion with a madman as to the causes of his malady?

On these principles it is quite consistent with our Lord's truthfulness to suppose that the dialogue with the demoniac of Gadara actually occurred, while He himself knew that possession was nothing but mania. Let us suppose that the man was a raving madman. He had been treated cruelly. He rushed towards Jesus and was awed by the greatness of his character. The dialogue takes place, as it is described by the Evangelist. I see no want of truthfulness on our Lord's part, nor can I conceive any necessity for explaining to the man that he was not possessed by a multitude of demons; or if the madman requested that the demons by whom he imagined himself possessed might be allowed to go into the swine, that our Lord should explain to him that it was impossible that they should do so because the idea of the demoniac was a delusion. The case would be one of confused or double personality, and accordingly the narrator has described the demons and the man as alternately speaking, and our Lord as addressing them. In such a case the form of the narrative would be modified by the subjective impressions of the narrator.

But the words which our Lord is described as addressing to

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the demoniac lad also require consideration. St. Mark describes them as follows. Jesus rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, "Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him; and the spirit cried, and rent him sore and came out of him." Let us suppose that the disease was mania, and that our Lord knew it to be so, but that the father, as well as the maniac and the others who were present believed that it was caused by the action of an evil spirit. What was there inconsistent with veracity in addressing the maniac in terms of his own delusions? If it is urged that the belief in possession was a superstition, and that to use such language tended to confirm the belief, I reply that if we assume that our Lord was bound not to use the language which was common among his hearers in speaking of such diseases, or that He ought to have given explanations of their true causes, then we assume that his character as a revealer of Christianity rendered it necessary that in the course of his public ministry He should correct all the errors which He encountered, and never use language which had originated in them.

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The words which are ascribed to our Lord by the Evangelist when He stilled the tempest will throw light on this subject. St. Mark gives them as follows: "He rebuked the winds and said to the sea, Peace, be still." The word here rendered "Be still" is in the Greek far more emphatic, *Be gagged* (πεφίμωσο). In the case of the demoniac our Lord is represented as rebuking the evil spirit. Here He rebukes the waves. Now it is only possible to rebuke rational agents. Such an expression would therefore be only accurate if addressed to a being who was capable of hearing it, and who was uttering loud cries. It may be objected that the expression favours the notion that the speaker supposed the roaring of the waves to be the voice of an evil spirit, who was exciting the tempest, or, in other words, that He gave countenance to the heathen belief, that it was the voice of Æolus, the spirit of the storm. Whatever amount of superstition may be attributed

to the Jews at the time of the Advent, it will scarcely be urged that the followers of Jesus attributed the roaring of the gale to the voice of a demon. Still it may be urged on the principles above referred to that the words uttered by our Lord tended to confirm superstitious notions as to the nature and origin of storms. I argue, on the other hand, that these expressions prove indisputably that the language used by Him was not always intended to be a literal description of fact, any more than the numerous similar addresses to the inanimate creation which we find in the Psalms.

But in the case of the demoniac, the real difficulty consists in the results which are alleged to have happened to the swine. I have already obviated some portion of this as far as the form of the narrative is concerned. But there remains the fact that the swine are stated to have rushed into the lake and perished. As to the reality of such an occurrence there can have been no mistake. The mere mode of expression offers no explanation, nor can a mistake respecting such an occurrence have originated in any possible deception of the imagination. *If it was not a fact it must have been a fictitious invention.* Can any explanation of it be given? It has been suggested that the swine were driven down the cliff by the madman. Against this supposition, it has been urged that no animals are less easily driven than swine. How then could it have been possible to drive two thousand of them into the water? But there is no necessity to assume that they were driven at all. The scene as it is described by the Evangelists was well calculated to inspire animals with fright. It would however have been impossible to frighten two thousand of them. Granted: but large herds of animals follow their leaders implicitly. When under excitement one makes a leap, the others will follow. All that would have been necessary, if we suppose that the herd was near the edge of the cliff, was that the leaders should have received the requisite impulse from the madman, and under its influence rushed wildly down the cliff, and been followed by their companions. [263]

But the case is different when our Lord speaks to others, and not to the demoniacs themselves. His observations to the Pharisees on this subject I have already considered. There remains the striking one addressed to the disciples: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." The circumstances of the case are these. The disciples had failed to cure the youth, whether a demoniac or a simple lunatic. They ask our Lord why it was that they had failed. He tells them that it was because of their unbelief. Now it is impossible for us to say what was the nature of the influence of faith in affecting miraculous cures, and why the want of it prevented success. It is sufficient to draw attention to the fact that it is uniformly laid down in the New Testament, that in the case of subordinate agents working miracles faith was necessary for their accomplishment. Our Lord also usually required faith in the recipients of his cures, but not always. But to his disciples when they attempted to perform a miracle faith was indispensable to their success. The question was not what was the nature of the disease, but why in this particular case they had failed to cure it. Our Lord replied that in this instance not only was faith necessary to effect the cure, but a very unusual degree of it. If the question had been what was the cause of the child's disease, and if our Lord knew that it was not possession, but mania, it is quite possible that He would have refused to answer it, as He did on other occasions when curious questions were put to him, and would have deduced some moral lesson from the fact. This it will be remembered was the course which He pursued when He was asked whether only a few would be saved. But the inquiry was not what caused the disease, but why the attempt to cure it had proved a failure. Such being the question, there is nothing inconsistent with truthfulness in our Lord's answer. He avoided entering into an explanation as to what was a physical cause of the disease, which was quite foreign to his divine mission. He therefore simply told them that their failure was owing to their unbelief, and then added, in language

couched in their own forms of thought, and which would not therefore open a discussion on subjects foreign to the purposes of his mission, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

Those who lay stress on difficulties of this kind are in the habit of overlooking the plain fact, that our Lord's teaching was specifically addressed to the living characters of the day, and to their existing lines of thought, and cannot without reference to them be directly translated into our own. This remark is no less true of the moral teaching contained in the Gospels, than of their historical statements. It is even more so, for a great number of the moral precepts of Christ cannot be applied as practical guides until they have been adapted to the altered conditions of thought and of society.<sup>4</sup> They are in fact principles given in the form of precepts. If our Lord's words had been reported so as to make them square with the lines of thought of every age, they would have given us, not his actual teaching but a modification of it. It is our duty by a careful study of the great principles on which it is based to apply it to our present wants. It may appear to some far more desirable that it should have been capable of a direct instead of an indirect application, yet the fact is as I have stated it. Want of attention to this has occasioned no inconsiderable number of the difficulties of the New Testament. [265]

One or two remarks will be all that is necessary for illustrating the position which some have adopted that our Lord's mode of dealing with demoniacs was intended by Him as part of the process of cure. I should not have alluded to this subject at all unless the view in question had been propounded by a very eminent writer. I have already considered its main principles under the previous head.

It ought to be observed that the care of demoniacs, whatever view we may take of possession, belongs to a class of our Lord's miracles which are distinct from all others. All the others are

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Matt. v. 39-42, Luke vi. 20, 21, 24-26, and various others of a similar description.

described as wrought on the human body, or on external nature. The Evangelists do not record a single miracle beside these that was wrought on the human mind. This is a remarkable fact. In the course of his ministry He encountered every form of moral and spiritual disease, from the weaknesses of his disciples and attached friends to the opposition of his most avowed enemies. Now, although He emphatically asserted that He was the physician of the soul, and although for the spiritual diseases of men He felt the most profound sympathy, never once is Jesus represented as exerting his supernatural power for their care. On the contrary, He is uniformly represented as having recourse to moral and spiritual means and not to miracles to effect it. Physical diseases He cures instantaneously, moral ones slowly and with effort. This fact is worthy of deep attention as showing that our Lord uniformly acted in conformity with the laws of the moral universe. If the Gospels are fictions, why is the Great Physician of Souls never represented as performing a sudden or miraculous cure in the moral and spiritual worlds, in the same manner as He does in the material? The need of miraculous intervention to secure Simon Peter from the moral and spiritual danger which surrounded him was as great as to prevent him from sinking in the water. Yet no other than moral and spiritual influences were called into action.

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The following is the bearing of this fact on the question before us. If the cure of a demoniac was the expulsion of a demon, it involved the liberation of a moral nature from its thralldom, and at the same time the cure of the bodily organisation as far as its disordered condition enabled the demon to exert his power. If, on the other hand, it was the cure of simple mania, still the act had a direct bearing on the moral nature of the sufferer. In either case the use of moral means as well as supernatural agency would be especially appropriate. If demoniacs were madmen, our Lord was fully justified in displaying towards them the highest degree of sympathy, and in bringing to bear on them the mighty moral

and spiritual forces which abode in his lofty personality. The same remark would be equally true if the sufferer was held in thrall by demoniacal power. Each class of miracles in the mode of their performance is exactly suited to the condition of those on whom our Lord was operating. On either supposition He was dealing not merely with physical forces, but with moral agency, and He dealt with it accordingly.

I conclude, therefore, that if it may be taken as established that possession involved nothing but simple mania, there is nothing in the facts as they are recorded in the New Testament inconsistent with that supposition, or which affects the credit of the Gospels as historical narratives. Nor are they inconsistent with the idea that their writers were favoured with such supernatural assistance in composing them as was adequate for the purpose of giving us such an account of the actions and teachings of Jesus as was necessary for communicating all the great truths of the Christian revelation. Nor is the supposition inconsistent, as it has been alleged to be, with His divine character and truthfulness. [267]

I will examine in the next chapter the supposition that possession was not mania, but an actual objective fact.

## Chapter XII. Possession, If An Objective Reality, Neither Incredible Nor Contrary To The Ascertained Truths Of Mental Science.

I now proceed to the consideration of the remaining alternative, the truth of which the form of the narrative seems most to favour, viz., that our Lord accepted the distinction between possession and mania; and that during those times possessions were actual occurrences.

In considering this subject, it will be necessary to pay attention to the distinction to which I have referred in the previous chapter, that even if many of the phenomena that accompanied possession were due to superhuman agency, the Gospels are by no means pledged to any particular theory of the *modus operandi* by which the phenomena were brought about. What I mean is that these phenomena might have been due to a superhuman agency, without involving the fact that the demon had a local habitation either in the body or the spirit of the man. All that the Gospels can be taken to affirm is, that the evil spirit in some way or other, of which we are ignorant, held the man in a state of thralldom, made his mental powers the subject of a divided consciousness, overpowered the functions of his reason and his will, and through his action on the mind used for his own purposes the organs of his body. The writers of the New Testament are pledged to no theory as to how such results were effected. They have simply reported the phenomena as they presented themselves to their observation. In doing this, the language which they have

employed denotes local habitation; but the words used in stilling the storm make it quite clear that the literal meaning cannot be pressed. Considering the general character of these narratives, it is impossible to pledge them to the particular mode in which these results were brought about.

One circumstance seems to militate against the supposition that possession involved nothing but simple mania, namely, the numbers of those who are spoken of as possessed. If the Gospel narratives are historical, it would appear that such cases were numerous. Not only are several miracles of this description definitely recorded, but the Evangelists several times affirm that our Lord cured demoniacs in considerable numbers, without furnishing us with the details. Now it is difficult to believe that maniacs existed in such large numbers in a country of the size and population of Judæa. Yet all the phenomena of possession point to maniacal, and not to harmless lunacy. The number of the cases of mania that occur bears but a small proportion to those of the latter form of derangement. It is true that at times of popular excitement various forms and numerous cases of frenzy manifest themselves; but these differ from mania, though they not unfrequently terminate in it. I have made these observations, because, in discussing such a subject, it is only right to state fully the difficulties with which particular theories are attended. It is very probable, however, that as the symptoms so closely resembled each other, many cases of actual mania would be confounded in popular estimation with possession, and, therefore, that cases of actual possession may not have been so numerous as at first sight would appear. [270]

On the supposition that possession was a reality, we have no means of determining what moral or physical preconditions were necessary for its manifestation. It is clear that the authors of the Gospels must have considered that it was owing to some predisposing causes, physical or moral, though they have not described them. Unless this was the case, the evil, instead of

being partial, would have been universal. Various moral causes would naturally form a suitable precondition for its manifestation. There can be no doubt that a number of vices, when indulged in beyond a certain point, reduce man's moral being to a wreck and render him obnoxious to the action of external agency. The power of self-control may be indefinitely weakened. If vice is carried to its extreme forms, it produces phenomena hardly, if at all, distinguishable from madness. Such a state of man's moral nature would form a suitable precondition to enable a superhuman being to overpower the reason and the will, the supremacy of which was already impaired by an influence from within. In such cases possession would have been rendered possible by a man's self-induced moral corruption.

The testimony of history proves that during the century which preceded and that which followed the Advent, the state of moral corruption was extreme. Men were sated with the old, and craving for new and unheard of forms of sensual gratification. The old class of ideas, moral and religious, were gradually dying out, and men were eagerly seeking for something to fill the void. There consequently never was a time when a greater number of abnormal forms of thought burst on the human mind, which was shaken to its utmost depths. The outbreak of fanaticism combined with moral wickedness, which displayed itself forty years after in the Jewish war of independence, is probably without a parallel in the history of man. For this there must have been years of preparation. A somewhat similar state of things existed in the Pagan world, which led to the production of numerous religious charlatans and impostors. The times were characterised by an extravagance of thought on almost every subject, philosophy itself forming no exception. Such an abnormal mental condition was peculiarly suited to the reception of external mental influences, if we suppose them possible.

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But I am bound to admit that the facts recorded in the Gospels prove that possession was not always the result of moral degra-

dition. This is proved by the case of the youth, whose possession the father directly connects with lunacy, and says that it had seized him from a child. In this case the cause which rendered the possession possible must have been physical, probably a derangement of the nervous system.

If I understand rightly the position which is taken by those who affirm that possession was mania, and nothing else, it is as follows. It is alleged that at certain periods of history, the belief in possession has been widely spread. Possessions are unknown in modern times; and all the instances which have been alleged are either cases of mania or delusion. The belief in it has gradually died away as knowledge has advanced. In former times it generated a number of grotesque stories, which were pure inventions of the imagination heated by enthusiasm. Such facts as were real may be referred to madness as their cause. The others are simply disbelieved. Under the influence of increasing knowledge, there has arisen a widespread belief in modern times, that there is nothing superhuman in the causes of such phenomena, but that they are due to influences existing within the mind itself. This, as it is affirmed, being true of all the alleged instances of possession in the modern world, it is inferred that similar ones in the ancient world are equally unreal; and if we had the requisite data before us, we should be able to refer them all to ordinary human causes. [272]

With respect to the general fact, there can be no doubt that advancing knowledge has caused a general disbelief in the reality of any modern form of possession, or of witchcraft. The supreme grotesqueness of the phenomena of the latter has caused the belief in it to perish under the influence of common sense, aided by an increased acquaintance with sound principles of causation, and the stability of the operations of nature. Still it is incorrect to affirm that the prevalence of such beliefs has been due to no other cause than universal ignorance. The belief in witchcraft produced its most unhappy results during the reigns of

Elizabeth and the Stuarts, in the very age of Bacon, Shakespeare, and Raleigh. Such beliefs originate in certain principles of our minds whose gratification consists in the contemplation of the marvellous, the action of which I shall consider hereafter. They have existed in every condition of society, and only changed the form of their manifestation. Those who boast of our freedom from such delusions, owing to the superior light of the nineteenth century, seem to have forgotten the existence at the present day of a belief in spiritualism, which is little, if at all, less absurd than witchcraft, though the former has encountered a less severe treatment than the latter. This has been more due to the improvement of our humanity than to our knowledge of physical science. It is a fact that spiritualism is believed in by multitudes; and its votaries belong far more to the cultivated class of society than to the ignorant and the vulgar. What the witch mania was to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, spiritualism is to the nineteenth. It is the peculiar form rather than the possibility of such delusions that has passed away.

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It should be observed also that the demoniacal supernaturalism of the monastic writers, and of the middle ages, differs from that of the New Testament to such a degree that they cannot fairly be compared. In the former the apparition of demons and departed spirits was a thing of constant occurrence; in the latter, never. To the monks the devil was continually appearing in the most phantastic forms, and performing the most grotesque miracles. To this form of demonology modern spiritualism can put in very strong claims to be esteemed the genuine successor. The heated imagination of even such a man as Luther suggested to him that he saw Satan in visible reality. It is worthy of remark that St. Paul knew nothing of visible Satanic manifestations. With him they were invariably spiritual.

It is important to keep steadily in view the fact, that the New Testament invariably represents possession as consisting in the action of a stronger mind on a weaker one. The influence which

the demon exerted on the bodily organs might have been effected through the agency of the man himself. It is never described as involving a visible manifestation of the demon, but his action is one which is purely mental and spiritual. His presence and his departure were simply judged of by their effects.

It follows, therefore, that the denial of the possibility of an influence of this kind must rest on a very wide principle. It cannot be confined to such action alone, but must go to the extent of denying the possibility of the action of all spiritual beings on the mind of man. The only principle on which the denial can rest is, that our mental science has so far succeeded in analyzing all the past and present operations of the human mind, that it is justified in affirming that they all originate entirely within the mind itself; and are never brought about by an action on it from without by any invisible agent. If this is the principle on which the denial rests, it will be equally valid to exclude the action of God on our minds, as well as that of all other invisible beings. It will doubtless be urged that it is only intended to deny the action of invisible evil beings. But if it is true that our mental philosophy has ascertained that all our thoughts originate either in the mind itself, or in the mind acted on by external nature, or by other men, the principle must be valid for proving that all other spiritual agency exerted on the mind is impossible, and that all supposed instances of it are delusions. It is impossible on this principle to exclude the evil agency, and not to exclude the good also. [274]

It is evident that this principle is far too broad to be used for the purpose of affirming the impossibility of the action of external evil agents only. It is based on the supposition that our mental philosophy is so complete as to be able to assign even the most abnormal portions of our mental action to definite and known forces, all of which originate within the mind itself, and are never due to external influences. If mental philosophy could establish this as a fact, it would doubtless prove that possession was impossible; but it could prove a great deal more, even that

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God never acted on or influenced the spirit of man. But if there is any one phenomenon of the mind, of the origin of which we are ignorant, the whole principle is vitiated, for that very phenomenon may be caused by the action of an external power. The real point of the controversy therefore is, Is our mental science thus complete? Has it been able to reduce all our mental phenomena, including the most abnormal of them, to the action of known forces? Has it analyzed our mental powers to their inmost depths? Until it has done this, it is impossible to affirm that the abnormal actions of the mind may not be occasioned by an external agency.

It will probably be urged, that although our philosophy has not yet succeeded in assigning all our mental phenomena to the action of known forces, it hopes to accomplish this hereafter; and that its past conquests ought to be accepted as a pledge of its future performances; and that the time will certainly come, when it will be able to refer every mental phenomenon to a cause originating in the mind itself, and acting in conformity with invariable law. Promises, however, are not performances; what is requisite to impart validity to wide affirmations is present actual knowledge, not the hope that future scientific conquests will be extended over the entire regions of the unknown. Science professes to walk by sight and not by faith. In a subject of this kind it is most unphilosophical to assume that the possibilities of the future are the realities of the present; and to enunciate propositions whose validity rests solely on the fact that they are so.

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I will now definitely state the principle which can alone give any scientific value to the assertion, that such demoniacal action as that which is described in the New Testament, is unbelievable. It is as follows: that we have so completely ascertained the nature of the forces which act on our minds, and the laws which regulate them, that we know as a scientifically established truth, that they all originate either in our own mental organization, or in the

action of other men on our minds. The statement of the principle in this distinct form at once shows that it is invalid.

It is impossible for one moment to affirm that our knowledge is so complete, that we have a scientific acquaintance with the causes of all our varied mental phenomena, and the laws which regulate them. We have ascertained the nature of several of our mental processes; but how small a portion of man's mental activity do they embrace. I need only particularize a few of which we are in complete ignorance, as to the forces which generate them, and the laws which regulate their action.

First, with respect to Genius. Genius is a mental power which manifests itself only on rare occasions. Who can affirm that we have ascertained the law which regulates its birth? We may judge from analogy that this, as other things, follows a law of some kind; but respecting the causes which give it birth our philosophy is profoundly ignorant. Nor have we any knowledge of its mode of action. It manifests itself in various forms. There is the genius which makes the poet, the philosopher, the scientific discoverer, the orator, the politician, and many others. How those who are possessed of this power effectuate their mental operations, or how their great ideas originate in their minds is a subject which exceeds the limits of our scientific knowledge. Take for example the genius of the poet. Whence came, and what was the nature of that intuitive power with which Shakespeare was endowed, or how was it called into exercise? We call such powers intuitions. We say that a great poet is endowed with a species of inspiration. What is this but to confess our entire ignorance both of the origin and the mode of his mental operations. Probably the poet himself would be unable to give us any analysis of the origin of his own thoughts, or of the laws that regulate them. How then can we venture to affirm that they must all originate in the mind itself, and not be due to the action of some external power? The habit of speaking of his inspirations, from which scientific men are not exempt, proves our complete ignorance both of its nature

and origin.

But to descend to a humbler sphere—our own minds. We are all conscious that thoughts rush into them in a most unbidden manner, and that we pass through mental states which our analysis is unable to explain. Can any man affirm, however deep may be his philosophy, that the known laws of association of ideas are adequate to account for all the mental phenomena of which he has been conscious? Who has not had experience of severe efforts to realize something in thought, which have ended in failure, and that the right thing has suddenly come into his mind uncalled and unbidden? Not unfrequently has a sudden thought entered the mind (we know not whence it came) which has entirely changed the whole current of a previous life. Still more frequently has a happy idea occurred to us, the origin of which it is impossible to trace. Who again has not had experience of the sudden rushing of a temptation into his mind with an all but overwhelming force, even while his thoughts were occupied with subjects in no way allied to the suggestion? Many of our mental phenomena may be explained by the principle of association of ideas and other known mental powers; but who can venture to affirm that they are adequate to account for all the various states of which he has been conscious, or that some of them have not originated in suggestions from without? Scientific knowledge is certainly able to make no such affirmation.

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Next: there are numerous abnormal conditions to which the mind is unquestionably subject. Who will venture to affirm that he has penetrated to their depths, or ascertained the laws which regulate their action? These have a most important bearing on the present subject. They are best designated by the term phrenzy. Their aspect is very varied. They differ in many respects from mania, though they are closely allied to it. They are confined to no one race of men, but are co-extensive with human nature. They were prevalent in the ancient world, and connected with various forms of religious belief. They display themselves with

peculiar violence in the religious rites of savages. In Oriental countries at the present day, they frequently manifest themselves and assume a great variety of aspects. Examples might be easily adduced. The phrenzied fanatic often presents indications of his mind being acted on by an overwhelming external influence; and when under the influence of the rites of a degraded religion, the symptoms present no little resemblance to those which accompanied demoniacal possession.

I have no wish to affirm that such phenomena must be due to an action of this kind, but to draw attention to the fact that we are ignorant of the power in which they originate, and that such being the case, it is quite possible that their most violent and terrible forms may be aroused by the influence of a power external to the mind itself. Equally ignorant are we of the causes of even their milder manifestations. Whatever may be the hopes which are entertained of the future triumphs of science, it is not too much to assert, that it has not yet reduced these abnormal conditions of the mind to any thing like a scientific law, and that it has not succeeded in tracing the phenomena to the exclusive operation of a force acting within the mind itself. In truth our mental science is ignorant of their causes: and for aught that it can affirm to the contrary, many of them may be due to causes human, superhuman, or a combination of the two. In cases where we are profoundly ignorant, dogmatical assertions should be carefully avoided. While such phenomena are incapable of explanation by the action of known mental forces, the students of mental science are not justified in affirming that possession contradicts its known truths. [279]

I fully admit, however, that there is a system of professed mental science, which, if its truth could be proved, would establish the fact that possession was impossible. I need hardly say that I allude to that which affirms that thought is the result of a function of the brain, and nothing else. According to the views of these philosophers, the brain secretes thought as a gland secretes

its own peculiar secretion. Until this philosophy has succeeded in proving the truth of its first principles, it is useless to consider its bearing on this particular question.

There is another abnormal mental condition, the existence of which is unquestionable, and which has a close connection with the present question, namely, the ecstatic state. The forms in which this has manifested itself have been extremely various, and it is impossible for any one to assert that our mental philosophy has fully fathomed them, and has succeeded in assigning them to forces originating within the mind itself. On the contrary it is not too much to affirm that it has as yet wholly failed to analyze its nature, or to account for the abnormal powers displayed by the mind when in this condition. In the ancient world this state of mind was closely connected with the manifestations of the prophetic power, the reality of which was recognized by many of its philosophers. It will of course be observed that I am not speaking of this power as it existed in the Jewish church, but of its supposed manifestations in the heathen world. Similar ecstatic states have frequently displayed themselves in modern times. When in this condition the mind is especially liable to be acted on by external influences. Is it possible, I ask, in the present state of our mental philosophy, to assert that we know their nature, or the forces which produce them? The ecstatic in union with a phrenzied state of the mind was apparently the condition of the Delphian priestess when she delivered oracles to those who consulted her. According to all the accounts that we possess, she presented the appearance of being subject to an overpowering external influence. Every other description which we possess of the manifestation of this prophetic power, (and we have several) describes it as presenting phenomena closely allied to raving madness, an influence of some kind apparently overpowering the prophet's personality. Until the forces which produced these phenomena in the ancient world, and the somewhat similar ones which have been manifested in modern times, can be shown to

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owe their origin to forces originating in the mind itself, and to nothing else, it is absurd to affirm that such a phenomenon as possession is in contradiction to our scientific knowledge of the human mind.

There is another point which demands our attention, namely, the close connection between the extreme forms of moral wickedness, and madness. It is an unquestionable fact that nothing is more difficult than to draw the precise line where moral wickedness ends, and madness begins. In their great outlines they are easily distinguishable, but in the more advanced stages of moral evil, the one passes into the other by insensible degrees. So difficult is it to lay down the precise line which separates them, that scientific men are not wanting, who affirm that every extreme case of moral wickedness is a species of mania. Consistently with this theory frequent efforts are made to save the most abandoned criminals from the consequences of their crimes. If the principle is correct, it is impossible not to assign lesser degrees of moral evil to the same cause. Such a principle logically leads to the denial of any distinction between moral and physical action. Happily however, although this conclusion is one which has been arrived at by a considerable number of physicists, it is one which the common sense of mankind steadily refuses to accept. It is sufficient for the present purpose, that extreme forms of moral evil shade off into mania by insensible degrees; and that ultimately they are capable of producing insanity. If insanity can be produced by moral causes, it follows that a superhuman influence powerful for evil, acting on a degraded moral nature, may be attended with a similar result, and produce such a phenomenon as possession. [281]

But further: while madness is produced by physical causes, it is a certain fact that it is frequently occasioned by causes purely mental. Of this the instances are innumerable. These mental causes react on the brain and the nervous system; and thus they superinduce disease on those parts of our bodily organization by

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means of which the mind exercises its powers. Still the disease itself originates in causes that are not seated in the body, but in the mind. The mind is therefore capable of acting powerfully on our bodily frame. If therefore possession be viewed as the action of one mind on another, there is no reason why it should not be able to superinduce those forms of bodily derangement which exhibited themselves in the demoniacs by the simple action of the mind upon the body. The mental causes capable of producing mania are, as we know, of a varied description; and among them is the action and influence which one mind is capable of exerting on another. As, therefore, in certain states of our minds, or of our nervous system, mania with all its results can be produced by the simple action of mind on mind, and through the action of the mind disorder may be produced in our bodily organization, there can be no reason why possession with all its attendant phenomena should not originate in similar causes. There is nothing to imply that the superhuman agency manifested in possession was directly exerted on the body of the possessed. An agency which was entirely mental was fully adequate to produce all the phenomena with which it was accompanied.

In cases of mania produced by mental action the removal of the exciting cause is the precondition of its cure, and in many cases effects it. Similarly, in cases of possession the removal of the exciting cause would produce similar results.

It follows, therefore, from the foregoing considerations, that the allegation that the possessions described in the New Testament are incredible, because they contradict the known truths of mental science, is disproved.

The question really resolves itself into the following one: Do evil beings, other than men, exist in the universe? Or, if they exist, is it credible that they are allowed to interfere in the affairs of men? This question we have already considered in a former chapter, and we have arrived at the conclusion that if we free ourselves from the trammels of *à priori* theories, and judge only

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by the facts of the universe as it exists, neither their existence nor their intervention in human affairs is contrary to our reason.

Two things, however, must be steadily kept in mind. First: that if such interventions in human affairs are facts, the agency which can be exerted is only a permitted agency, and only capable of being exerted in subordination to the divine purposes in the government of the universe. A large number of the difficulties with which the subject is attended have originated in the wholly inaccurate idea that a power is attributed in the New Testament to Satan, of interfering both in the material and the moral universe at his own will and pleasure. This, however, is altogether contrary to the fact. Whatever power is attributed to him is an entirely permitted one, and exercised in subordination to the general purposes of God. Secondly, that although the disorder in the moral world might lead us to suspect the presence of an evil agency, different from that of man; yet as it is not a visible one, but confined to the regions of the mind, it is one which cannot come under our distinct observation, and could therefore only become known to us by revelation.

One more difficulty has to be considered. It is alleged that possession never takes place now. It is therefore inferred that it never took place at all.

I reply first, if we grant that demoniacal action, in the form of possession has now ceased, it by no means follows that it was not once real. The objection overlooks the fact that its action was a permitted one; and could only be exercised within the limits assigned to it. There may have been reasons at the time of the Advent why the exercise of a Satanic agency should be permitted at that particular period to a greater extent than it ever has been before or since.

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Secondly: certain moral and physical conditions were necessary for its exercise. These may be no longer in existence, but they may have passed away with many other abnormal conditions of human nature which existed in the ancient world.

Thirdly: it is not possible to affirm with certainty that, even at the present day, no supernatural agencies bearing an analogy to possession, are exerted on the mind. This will be only possible, when all those abnormal phenomena which manifest themselves in connection with various debased forms of religion and other cases of phrenzied excitement can be traced to known forces, originating solely in the mind itself.

There is one further objection which requires a brief consideration. It is urged that the writers of the New Testament entertained the belief, that diseases were generally occasioned by demoniacal action, quite independently of possession; and that this belief has received the sanction of our Lord. One case only is alleged in proof of this, that of the woman with the spirit of infirmity. She was no demoniac, but an ordinary diseased person, and the disease is asserted to have been occasioned by demoniacal action.

I reply, that considering the large number of diseases of various kinds mentioned in the New Testament, in none of which is there any allusion to demoniacal agency as their cause, a single example is a narrow foundation on which to build the affirmation that the followers of our Lord held such a theory as to the origin of disease in general. I admit that disorganization of the bodily functions is mentioned among the phenomena of possession. But this differs widely from a bodily evil superinduced without the agency of possession. Let us inquire whether the special instance affords any justification for this wide assertion.

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The Evangelist states that the woman was bowed down by a spirit of infirmity, and could in no wise lift herself up. Here it is just as absurd to fasten on him the intention to describe a scientific fact, as when on another occasion it is said that "*power*" went out of our Lord "and healed them all." The one stands on the same ground as the other.

In effecting the cure, our Lord uses the words, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." Here there is no reference to

Satanic agency whatever. The only mention of it occurs in his argument with the ruler of the synagogue on the lawfulness of effecting such cures on the Sabbath day. The words are, "Thou hypocrite, ought not this woman, who is a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

These words are addressed to the ruler in answer to the objection that our Lord was no prophet, because he effected his cures on the Sabbath. If so, as the reality of the miracle was not denied, it was intended to be implied that it had been wrought by the power of Satan, of which the violation of the Sabbath was the proof. The real point of controversy therefore was the lawfulness of effecting cures on this day, not the Satanic origin of the complaint. Was there any conceivable reason why our Lord should not discuss the point with the ruler on his own principles? Why was it necessary to raise a wholly different issue, viz. the Satanic or non-Satanic origin of the disease, instead of confining it strictly to the point, which was the all-important one, that His curing this woman on the Sabbath day was so far from being a proof that He did not come from God, that it was a strong reason for believing that He did so? To have entered on a discussion as to what was the cause of the complaint, would not only have diverted attention from the real question, but would have introduced one wholly foreign to the purposes of His divine mission. [286]

Two suppositions only are possible respecting possession. It must have been either a form of madness produced by natural causes, or a manifestation of superhuman power. As the facts on which a judgment can be formed are meagre, I have not ventured to determine which of these two theories is alone consistent with the facts and phenomena of the New Testament. I have therefore taken either alternative, and shown, that neither does the theory that it was mania interfere with the claims of the Gospels to be accepted as historical documents, nor is the language attributed

to our Lord contrary to the truthfulness of His character; nor does the supposition that it was due to superhuman causes contradict the established truths of mental science.

## Chapter XIII. The Alleged Credulity Of The Followers Of Jesus.

The allegation that the followers of Jesus, and the early Christians generally, were a body of intensely credulous and superstitious people, may be considered as not only the stronghold of those who impugn the historical character of the Gospels, but also as the arsenal from which they draw no small number of their weapons of attack. A credulity which knew no limits is liberally ascribed to them as showing how every miraculous narrative might have been invented. They have even been credited with a facility of inventing fictions, and then deluding themselves into the belief that they were facts which they had actually witnessed. Thus it has been asserted that it was their firm belief that the Messiah ought to have wrought miracles; that Jesus himself may not even have professed to perform them; but that the fervid imaginations of His followers invented a set of miracles, attributed them to Him, and ended with the belief that they had seen Him perform them. On the other hand, whenever these objectors are pressed by a difficulty in accounting for the origin of particular phenomena in the Gospels, they retire on the credulity of the followers of Jesus as into a kind of citadel, in which they consider themselves so strongly entrenched that they may defy every attack. There is also another important purpose which it is made to serve. It is asserted that it renders worthless the testimony of the followers of Jesus as to the actual occurrence of miracles. [288]

The allegation takes two forms:

1st. That the followers of Jesus were the prey of a credulity and superstition which greatly exceeded the limits of the ordinary credulity of mankind; and that therefore the value of their

historical testimony is destroyed.

2nd. That the ordinary credulity of mankind with respect to the occurrence of supernatural events is so great and widespread, as to render the invention of miraculous narratives easy, and to destroy the credit of all narratives containing them.

I propose to consider these subjects in this and the following chapter.

Nothing is easier than to charge a body of men with intense credulity and superstition. Before, however, such charges deserve to have any notice taken of them, they should be substantiated by direct proof. It is impossible to meet them if urged in a mere general form. Fortunately, the author of "Supernatural Religion" makes a number of specific and definite charges, in which he endeavours to fasten an unspeakable degree of credulity and superstition on the immediate followers of Jesus and the authors of the Gospels, and refers to authorities in support of his assertions. I will state his general position in his own words.

"We have given a most imperfect sketch of some of the opinions and superstitions prevalent at the time of Jesus, and when the books of the New Testament were written. These, as we have seen, are continued with little or no modification throughout the first centuries of our era. It must however be remembered that the few details that we have given, omitting much of the grosser particulars, are the views absolutely expressed by the most educated and intelligent part of the community; and that it would have required infinitely darker colours adequately to have portrayed the dense ignorance and superstition of the mass of the Jews. It is impossible to receive the report of supposed marvellous occurrences from an age and people like this, without the gravest suspicion. Miracles which spring from such a hot-bed of superstition are too natural in such a soil to be the object of surprise; and in losing their exceptional character, their claims on attention are proportionally weakened, if not altogether destroyed. Preternatural interference with the affairs of life

and with the phenomena of nature was the rule in those days, not the exception, and miracles in fact had apparently lost all novelty, and through familiarity had become degraded into mere commonplace.”

“There can be no doubt that the writers of the New Testament shared in the popular superstitions of the Jews.”

Before proceeding further, I must draw the reader's attention to three affirmations in this important passage.

1st. That the educated Jews of the time of Jesus were a prey to the superstitions in question.

2nd. That the common class of Jews were a prey to yet grosser superstitious.

3rd. That the followers of Jesus, who were chiefly Jews of the lower classes, and the authors of the Gospels, shared in these superstitions.

The author devotes not less than fifty pages to a minute description of the superstitions of the educated classes. These are alleged to have been of so gross a nature, that the reader will get but a very imperfect conception of the point at issue, unless I give a brief sketch of some of them.

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I. The Jews are affirmed to have believed in an innumerable multitude of angels, whose agency was continually displayed in the ordinary phenomena of nature. They presided over and energized in its ordinary operations, as for instance, in thunder, lightning, the winds, the seas, frost, hail, rain, mists, heat, light, &c.; heaven and earth in fact are filled with them, and they are also continually busying themselves in human affairs, of which minute details are given.

II. They are alleged to have believed in a demonology of the most phantastic description. To this I have elsewhere sufficiently alluded.

III. They are likewise affirmed to have believed that the sun, moon and stars are rational beings, and traces of this belief are distinctly affirmed to exist in the New Testament.

IV. The belief in sorcery, witchcraft and magic is affirmed to have been universal among them. To give the reader an idea of the grossness of these beliefs, to which even the educated classes are affirmed to have been a prey, I must quote the following passage:

“Amulets consisting of seals, or pieces of paper, with charms written upon them, were hung round the necks of the sick, and considered efficacious for their cure. Charms, spells and mutterings were constantly said over wounds, against unlucky meetings, to make people sleep, to heal diseases, and to avert enchantments; against mad dogs for instance, against the demon of blindness and the like, as well as formulæ for averting the evil eye, and mutterings over diseases.” Here follow several pages of unutterable absurdities. It is not too much to say, that there was hardly an occurrence in nature, and hardly an event of daily life, which was not influenced by these supernatural powers, and very frequently in a manner unspeakably grotesque. If such were the beliefs of educated people, urges the author (and he tells us that he has omitted the grosser forms of them), what must have been those of the lower orders, and the extent of their degraded superstition? It must be kept constantly in mind that the followers of Jesus chiefly consisted of persons taken from the lower strata of society. But the author in express words charges them with sharing in such beliefs. If they did not, the reference to them would have no bearing on the argument.

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We have therefore in this portion of the work a definite issue raised for our consideration. It is no vague charge of general boundless credulity and superstition, such as is generally urged against the followers of Jesus and the authors of the Gospels. It is presented to us in a clear and definite form. I fully allow that if this charge could be substantiated, it would deprive the Evangelists of all historical credit.

The issue which is thus raised is consequently one of the highest importance. It will be necessary therefore for us carefully

to examine the mode in which it is attempted to establish the truth of these charges. The process is an extremely singular one.

When we have a set of writings before us and endeavour to estimate the amount of credulity and superstition to which their authors were a prey, the only legitimate mode of proceeding is to subject these writings to a thorough and minute examination as to the indications of credulity and superstition contained in them. Having done this, it then becomes our duty to ascertain the amount of general good sense or the want of it which is displayed by them in these or in other subjects, and then to form a general conclusion by fairly balancing the indications of credulity and good sense against each other. The author, however, seems not to have had the smallest idea that it is the duty of the critic to ascertain what are the facts of the case as presented by the writings, and to form a general conclusion by a careful review of the entire evidence. On the contrary, his mode of reasoning is to quote a number of opinions held by various writers, widely separated from each other in time, to charge them on the contemporaries of our Lord, and refer to nearly every passage in the New Testament which has even the remotest bearing on the subject, for the purpose of fastening these superstitions on the followers of Jesus. Such a mode of reasoning can only avail to establish a foregone conclusion. [292]

Again: In forming a judgment on such a subject, it also behoves us most carefully to consider whether the subject-matter of the writings is or is not of such a character, that if their authors had been addicted to such gross superstitions, there would not of necessity have been frequent examples of them in their pages? Also whether the absence of such references, when the subject on which they were writing was certain to have suggested them to their minds, does not constitute a strong proof that these superstitions were not held by them? In one word, it is absurd to attempt to charge writers with boundless credulity and superstition, on the ground that a multitude of grotesque beliefs were prevalent in

their day. No author can be held responsible for beliefs other than those which appear in his pages, especially when subject-matter of his writings would have been certain to call them into activity if he had entertained them.

The course pursued by the author is directly opposite to this. He has been compelled to adopt it, because it is the only method by which extreme credulity and superstition can be fastened on the writers of the Gospels. The available contemporary literature, besides that contained in the New Testament, which can throw light on the opinions of the followers of Jesus, is very small. The point which requires proof is that the entire Jewish nation, *without any exception*, was a prey to the basest superstition and credulity. Unless this can be established, the charge against the authors of the Gospels falls to the ground, except so far as it can be proved by the Gospels themselves. The contemporary proof of it, however, failing, he endeavours to substantiate his position by quoting the opinions of writers separated from the times of Jesus by several centuries, and affirming that they were held by the entire body of His contemporaries. Such a mode of reasoning is useless to support anything but a foregone conclusion.

A brief reference to the authorities relied upon will at once expose the fallacy of the argument. First, certain differences existing between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Scriptures are pressed into the service, which are no instances of either credulity or superstition. Then the frequent idolatries which prevailed among the Jews prior to the captivity are adduced as a proof of the superstitious tendencies of the Jewish mind, as if superstitions prevalent at the time of Becket were any evidence of the condition of English thought at the present day. Next the absurdities in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit are put in as evidence, although the contrary evidence afforded by the other books of the Apocrypha, which contain no traces of such superstitions, is left without mention. The writings of an Assyrian Jew who lived about three hundred and fifty years before the Christian

era are about as valid to prove the opinions held by Christ and his followers as the opinions of Cicero would be in evidence of the beliefs of Constantine. Then reference is made to the angelology and demonology contained in the writings of Philo, who was unquestionably a contemporary of our Lord; but not the smallest hint is given to the reader that he was deeply tinged with the principles of the Neo-Platonic philosophy, a mode of thought wholly alien from that of the Palestinian Jews, or that Philo was himself an Alexandrian Jew. Next the book of Enoch is quoted, which (whenever it was written, for its date is uncertain) is unquestionably not the work of a Palestinian Jew. This book, which is an Apocalypse, contains a monstrous angelology and demonology, and abounds with extravagances. Although part of it was written prior to the Advent, other portions are clearly subsequent to it. Its author is unknown; but it is highly probable from certain resemblances of expression between it and the New Testament, that he was acquainted with portions of the latter; or, to state the theory of unbelievers, that the authors of the New Testament borrowed from it. If this view is true, then it is evident that they must have rejected its angelology and demonology, for that contained in the New Testament is utterly dissimilar in character to that which we read in the book of Enoch. As far, therefore, as the evidence of this book is concerned, it affords a distinct proof that they were not a prey to its monstrous superstitions. This remark is equally applicable to the book of Tobit, and the writings of Philo. [294]

But there is a reference made to Philo which deserves particular notice as an exemplification of the mode adopted by those who endeavour to fix the charge of unbounded credulity on the authors of the Gospels. I cite the author.

“The belief that the sun, moon and stars were living entities possessed of souls was generally held by the Jews at the beginning of our era, along with Greek philosophers, and we shall presently see it expressed by the fathers. Philo Judæus considers [295]

the stars spiritual beings full of virtue and perfection, and that to them is granted lordship over other heavenly bodies, not absolute, but as viceroys under the Supreme Being. We find a similar view expressed regarding the nature of the stars in the Apocalypse, and it constantly occurs in the Talmud and Targums.”

“We find,” says the author, “a similar view expressed regarding the nature of the stars in the Apocalypse,” *i.e.* that the stars are spiritual beings full of virtue and perfection, and that they hold lordship over other heavenly bodies. No quotation is made from this book, but four passages are referred to in a note as proving this. They are as follows: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” (Rev. i. 20.) With as good reason may it be said that the book of Revelation teaches the rationality of candlesticks.

“These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” (Rev. iii. 1.) It is difficult to see how this proves that the author of the Revelation was of opinion that the stars were rational entities. The next passage referred to (Rev. iv. 5) makes no mention of stars at all, but of “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” The last reference is: “I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth; and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.” (Rev. ix. 1.) Here a star is spoken of as a living agent; but to refer in proof of this to a book which is full of symbols and is an avowed vision is ridiculous and misleading. On the contrary, the New Testament supplies the most unquestionable evidence that its writers were free from this superstition, into which even philosophers had fallen.

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The next writer referred to, to prove that the followers of Jesus were a prey to credulity and superstition, is Josephus, in his narrative of the signs which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem.

To what extent Josephus embellished these signs may be a question. Most of them have a very heathen aspect, and it is unquestionable that he was much disposed to conciliate his heathen readers. It is sufficient to observe that the pages of the New Testament contain nothing resembling them.

But the chief source whence these ineffable puerilities are derived, and charged on the contemporaries of our Lord, and through them on the writers of the New Testament, is the Talmud. Probably there are no writings in existence from which a more monstrous set of absurdities can be collected than from those of the Talmudists. But how does this prove that this mass of nonsense was believed in by the Jewish nation in our Lord's day? One portion of the Talmud, the Mishna, was composed between A.D. 180 and A.D. 200, or some years after the date assigned by unbelievers to the Fourth Gospel. The lateness of this date is urged by them as conclusive proof that that Gospel does not embody the real traditions of the early followers of Jesus. How then can it be urged with any thing like consistency that the Mishna adequately represents their views respecting the order of nature? But the other portion of the Talmud, the Gemara, was not put forth in a written form prior to A.D. 500. To quote works thus remote in time as proofs of the superstitions of the followers of Jesus, is to adopt a course which if applied generally to history, would reduce it to a tissue of falsehoods. Bishop Jewell was a believer in witchcraft; but it would be absurd if some future writer were to quote the writings of modern spiritualists as a proof that he believed in their doctrines.

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Nor is it true that the opinions of the masses of a nation are at all adequately represented by those of its learned men, especially when learning, as in the case in question, assumed the most unbounded licence of speculation. In most cases the common sense of the masses who are brought into contact with the hard facts of daily life will preserve them from puerilities, into which learning, which draws exclusively on the imagination,

is certain to fall. There is sufficient evidence of the superstition of the masses during the middle ages; but nothing would be more absurd than to quote some monstrous opinions held by the great scholastic writers to prove that they were the current opinions of the vulgar. Yet the principle here adopted is to adduce opinions propounded by learned writers, who lived centuries afterwards, as a proof that they were current among the entire Jewish race at the time of Jesus Christ.

The remaining references in proof of this position are still more noteworthy. To establish the superstition of the Jews at the time of the Advent, a set of opinions are adduced which were held by Christian Fathers, whose writings cover a period of not less than four centuries. A list of them will be sufficient. The apocryphal Barnabas and Hermas, Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tatian, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Lactantius, Eusebius, and Cyril of Jerusalem. A number of grotesque opinions are collected from these writers, as though they could have any possible bearing on the question whether the followers of Jesus were able correctly to report what they saw and heard.

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I submit therefore that the facts adduced utterly fail to establish the charge of intense superstition and credulity against the followers of Jesus. But I go further, and affirm that they furnish the means of giving a most conclusive proof of the contrary.

These quotations furnish us with a clear and conclusive proof, which is also furnished by the entire range of literature, that when writers are the prey of a definite class of superstitions, their pages will afford abundant evidence not only of their existence, but of their nature and character. This, of course, must be qualified by the supposition that the subject-matter on which they wrote is one suitable to call their latent superstitions into activity. This always happens when the works are of a religious character. In such cases they will faithfully reflect the superstitions entertained by their authors. This is pre-eminently the case with all the writ-

ings in question. They are all on religious subjects, on which they allowed their imaginations to run riot. They entertained a number of grotesque opinions, and accordingly we find in their writings a grotesque super-naturalism, exactly corresponding to the peculiar ideas of each individual writer. On the principle that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” we may be quite certain that when an author is extremely credulous and superstitious, it will find expression in his pages whenever he is writing on a subject on which his imagination gives scope to exhibit them.

I put the argument as follows: all writers exhibit in their pages the superstitions to which they are a prey. The writers of the New Testament do not exhibit the superstitions in question. It follows therefore that from these particular superstitions they are free. [299] Consequently the charge against them of intense superstition and credulity falls to the ground, as far as it rests on the evidence in question.

The amount of subject-matter in the New Testament which, independently of a general belief in miracles, the opponents of Christianity can designate as superstitious, is of a very limited and definite nature. It may be said to be almost exclusively confined to a belief in the reality of possession;—a few cases of disease occasioned by Satanic agency;—an occasional intervention of angels, and their power to act on nature;—and perhaps that demonology and heathenism were in some way connected with each other. This is the sum total of such beliefs which appear on the face of the New Testament. They appear in unequal degrees in the works of different writers; and viewing them as mere human compositions, we have no right to charge on one writer the beliefs of another. The book of Revelation, and its imagery as professedly merely seen in a vision, cannot fairly be introduced into this controversy.

If then we concede, for the sake of argument, that the Jews in the time of Christ were a prey to the extravagant superstitions

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referred to; if they believed that the whole course of nature and human life was incessantly interfered with by an army of spirits in numbers passing all comprehension, and that these interferences were of the most grotesque and phantastic character; if they universally believed in magic, charms and incantations, the non-appearance of such phenomena in the pages of the New Testament is a proof that its authors were not a prey to the current superstitions of the day. No inconsiderable number of supernatural events are recorded in their pages, but unbelief itself is compelled to admit that they are all of a dignified character, with perhaps the exception of the entrance of the demons into the swine, and the discovery of the piece of money in the mouth of the fish. From what is monstrous, grotesque and phantastic, they are absolutely free.

If it be conceded, for the sake of argument, that miracles are possible, then it cannot be denied that those of the New Testament, taken as a whole, stand out in marked contrast to the current supernaturalism of superstition. Their whole conception is lofty; there is in them nothing mean or contemptible; they subserve a great purpose; they are worthy of that great character to whom they are ascribed, Jesus Christ. I put the question boldly: how is it, if the followers of Jesus were a prey to the degrading superstitions above referred to, that we find no indications of them in their pages? Also: how is it possible that men of such a character should have invented such a number of noble creations? Let unbelievers account for this on any principle which a sound philosophy can recognise.

But further: the Gospels mention a certain number of possessions, and their cures effected by our Lord. Here then we are in the very presence of a demonology such as was actually believed in by the followers of Jesus. Here, therefore, is the very condition of mind and outward circumstances where, if they had been a prey to the phantastic and disgusting beliefs about demons above referred to, such beliefs would certainly have made their

appearance in their pages. But, as I have shown, the demonology of the Gospels stands in marked contrast to that of the Talmud, of Josephus, and of the Christian Fathers. We have no fumigations of demoniacs with the liver of a fish, we hear nothing of a demon drawn out of a man's nose, and overturning a basin of water, nothing of a demon inhabiting every private closet. On the contrary, their action is described as mental, and, through the mind, affecting the body, with the exception of a few doubtful cases. I am not here arguing whether a belief in the reality of demoniacal possession is a superstition or not. But I affirm that if the writers of the New Testament had been a prey to the superstitions with which they are charged, these are the narratives in which they could not have failed to make their appearance. Again: It has been affirmed that they held a monstrous angelology. I reply that although angels are unquestionably stated to have appeared, and their existence is affirmed by the writers of the New Testament, still their recorded appearances are rare. They are confined to a few very remarkable occasions, viz.: the Annunciation and birth of our Lord, the temptation, the agony in the garden, and the resurrection. Surely this does not look as if the authors of the Gospels thought that they were always interfering with the course of nature or the events of life. In the Acts of the Apostles, they appear at the Ascension; once to liberate St. Peter, and at another time the Apostles, from prison; to direct Philip to preach to the eunuch; twice in a vision to St. Paul; and Herod Agrippa is also said to have been smitten by the ministry of an angel. There were certainly many occasions when, if the writers had believed in the habitual intervention of angels, we should have found them introduced. Thus an angel is not sent to deliver Paul from prison, or to still the tempest, but simply to assure him of his safety. St. Paul enumerates in a passage of some length the various dangers which beset him in his missions, especially mentioning the perils he encountered in travel. But neither he nor St. Luke once refers to an angelic intervention in his favour. In

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numerous passages he refers to dangers and persecutions which he encountered. But it is our Lord, and not angels, who delivered him. Is this consistent with a belief in their habitual intervention in nature? If he was the visionary which he has been asserted to have been, would he not have been continually seeing visions of angels for his protection?

In St. Paul's writings we are in the presence of documents which are in the highest degree historical. Even those who endeavour to prove that the Gospels and the Acts were not written until the second century, are obliged to allow that at least four of the most important of his letters were written within 30 years after the Crucifixion, and that the evidence that four of the remainder are his, vastly preponderates. Here then we are in the presence of historical documents of the highest order, compared with which such a writing as the book of Enoch is worthless, and the Talmud and the Fathers are modern compositions. What light then do these letters throw on the opinions of St. Paul and the Pauline Churches? Much every way: they let us into the secret of their inner life. They tell us that these Christians thought they possessed certain supernatural gifts; that St. Paul asserted that he wrought miracles; that demons by an invisible agency tempted men to sin, and opposed the progress of the Gospel; but beyond this there is scarcely a trace of angelology or demonology in them. With these epistles in our hands, is it credible that their writer, or those to whom he wrote, held a multitude of monstrous and phantastic beliefs on this subject? Are not these writings characterized by supreme good sense? Do they not in this point of view marvellously contrast even with those of the earliest Fathers? The writer undoubtedly believed that unseen spiritual agencies were capable of acting on the mind of man, and that they were active agents in the production of moral evil; but where is the evidence that he considered that external nature was under their control, or that they made themselves visible to the mortal eye? Although he affirms that he possessed a supernatural

illumination on religious subjects, only on two occasions does he refer to visions as actually seen by him; and he directly affirms that he had the power of distinguishing the ecstatic from the ordinary condition of his mind. Even with the aid of the Acts of the Apostles, we can only add a few more to the number. Surely this is not the mental condition of a man who was a prey to unbounded superstition. Contrast the amount of good sense in the epistles of St. Paul with an equal number of consecutive pages from the Fathers and the Talmud, and the difference is enormous. Where are the ineffable puerilities found in these writings even hinted at in those of St. Paul?

Again: if we include in our examination the other writings of the New Testament, they wholly fail to supply us with any evidence of the superstition or credulity of their authors. On the contrary they are characterized by the marks of uniform good sense. It will be doubtless objected that they, as well as St. Paul, were bad logicians, and that their applications of the Old Testament Scriptures are inapt: but this does not affect their trustworthiness as historians. They were undoubtedly men of great religious fervour, yet they are both sparing in the use of miracles, and when they report them, the miraculous action is never represented as extending beyond the necessities of the case. Their miracles consist of simple acts, as for instance the cure of diseases, but all marvellous superadditions are wanting. It has been urged that in comparing the miracles of the Gospels with other miraculous narratives, we have no right to do more than compare the external miracle of the one with the external miracle of the other; as for instance a resurrection with a resurrection, or a cure of blindness recorded in one with a similar case recorded in another; and not to take into account either the external circumstances or the moral aspect of the miracle. I have elsewhere proved that this position is untenable. But for the purpose of the argument let us here assume that all the circumstances may be the invention of the narrator. If it be so, it proves at any rate

the soundness of his judgment and the elevation of his ideas, *i.e.* that it is impossible that he could have been either intensely superstitious or credulous. How is it possible, I ask, for minds which were a prey to such monstrous beliefs as those which we have been considering, to have dramatized miraculous narratives of the elevated type of those contained in the Gospels? Would not all the circumstances with which they invested them be the counter-part of their own degraded conceptions?

But there is one most distinctive phenomenon presented by the Gospels which affords a conclusive proof that neither their authors nor the followers of Jesus could have been a prey to either degrading superstition or credulous fanaticism. I allude to the fact that, whatever theory may be propounded to account for their origin, the Gospels, as a matter of fact, unquestionably contain a delineation of the greatest of all characters, whether actual or ideal, that of Jesus Christ. I shall hereafter draw attention to the portraiture of this character for the purpose of proving that they are veritable historical documents. In this place I refer to it simply for the purpose of proving that their authors and those who invented the alleged fictions of which their contents consist, were possessed of a soundness of judgment which is wholly inconsistent with the truth of the assertion that they were a prey to boundless superstition or credulity.

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For the purpose of the argument I must assume that this character is a fictitious one, because to assume that it is a delineation of an actual historical character, would be to take for granted the entire question at issue. If the Jesus of the Evangelists is an historical personage, there can be no doubt respecting the claims of the Gospel to be a divine revelation. But even if we make the assumption above mentioned, it is quite clear that those persons who invented the character, or who put it together out of the number of legendary stories floating about in the Church, must have been possessed of a sound judgment, and the highest appreciation of what was great and noble. The character we have

before us, and it is confessedly the noblest which can be found either in history or fiction. The inventors, whoever they were, have succeeded in portraying a great harmonious whole. Such a character could only have been delineated by men possessed of sound discriminating judgment. The more the Gospels are depreciated as histories the more does this depreciation establish the credit of their authors as the successful delineators of an ideal character, to which they have succeeded in imparting a naturalness which men of the most exalted genius have mistaken for an historical reality. They must have been, therefore, consummate masters of the art of ideal delineation. The mental powers adequate to effect such results are those of high genius, to which in this case must have been added a very elevated conception of morality. Such mental qualities are never exhibited by men who are the prey of gross credulity and superstition. The great ideal delineations of poets have been only capable of being produced by the *élite* of the human race. On the other hand, if we assume that the character is a fictitious one, and its inventors men of the mental calibre which they are affirmed to have been by those against whom I am reasoning, it would have been inevitable that its proportions should be marred by the introduction into it of traits marked by meanness, puerility, and monstrosity. [306]

In support of this assertion we have no occasion to appeal to theories but to facts. Happily antiquity has preserved to us several delineations of a mythical Jesus on which the inventors have stamped the most unmistakable impress of their own credulity and superstition. I need not say that I allude to the Apocryphal Gospels, the delineations of Jesus which they contain, and above all to their miraculous narratives. Those who reiterate these charges against the authors of the Canonical Gospels, are very slow to draw attention to their bearing on this portion of the argument. In the Apocryphal Gospels we are brought face to face with the legendary spirit exerting itself in the invention of miraculous stories. There can be no doubt that their authors were

both extremely credulous and superstitious; and their miraculous narratives give us the precise measure of their credulity. There is every reason to believe that two of these compositions were written as early as the second century. What, I ask, is the general character of the miracles which they have attributed to Jesus? There can be only one answer. They are mean, ridiculous, degraded, burlesque, destitute of all trait of moral grandeur. If the authors of the four Gospels, or the inventors of their miraculous narratives, whoever they may have been, had been a prey to similar credulity and superstition, the marks of them would have been indelibly stamped on their pages.

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These documents also contain accounts of miracles wrought by Jesus, some of which, as bare facts, are precisely the same as some recorded in the Canonical Gospels, *i.e.* they contain accounts of resurrections from the dead, and the cure of diseases. I ask, do their accompanying circumstances and moral aspect stand as nothing in our estimate of the credibility of their authors? Compare the account of the resurrection of Lazarus, or that of our Lord himself, with the resurrections in the Apocryphal Gospels, and mark the difference. Compare likewise the other miracles, which, as bare facts, resemble one another. The one have the stamp of historical probability, and precisely fit in with the lofty character of Jesus; the other of an unbelievable legend, in which the character is degraded to a level with the conceptions of the inventors.

Let not unbelievers, therefore, decline to grapple with the question. Let them cease to pass it over in silence. I propose to them the following questions for solution. If both sets of Gospels originated with minds intensely credulous and superstitious, whence has come the difference between them? Why is the one set of miracles dignified, and the other mean? Whence the entire difference of their moral aspect? Why is the Jesus of the Canonical Gospels the most elevated personage in history, and the Jesus of the Apocryphal ones, one of the most mean and

silly? If two of the Apocryphal and the four Canonical Gospels are the production of the superstition and credulity of the same century, whence the marvellous contrast between them? Which of the Fathers of the second or third century was equal to the task of reducing a mass of floating legends, the creations of numbers of superstitious men, into their present form, as they stand in our Canonical Gospels? Would they not certainly have coloured the events with their own absurdities? If, on the other hand, it be allowed that the Canonical Gospels are the production of the first century, and the Apocryphal Gospels of subsequent ones, how came the credulous followers of Jesus to produce fictions dramatized with such admirable taste in the first century, and the same spirit in subsequent centuries to present so striking a contrast? The only possible answer which can be returned to these questions is that the phenomena of the Canonical Gospels are inconsistent with the supposition that their miraculous narratives are the invention of men who were the prey either of credulity or dense superstition; they must have been men well able to distinguish between a genuine miracle and a mythic parody of one. [308]

But it has been urged that the dignified character of Jesus induced the compilers of our present Gospels to select all the miraculous stories of a high type which were current in the hotbed of Christian fanaticism, and to attribute them to Jesus, and to suppress all of a contrary description. If this be the true solution of the facts, then it certainly follows that the compilers of the Gospels must have been free from the superstitions of the times in which they lived. Otherwise, how came they to select all the elevated stories and attribute them to Jesus, and to consign those of a lower type to a well-merited oblivion? Is it not a fact that credulous and superstitious people have often attributed what is contemptible and mean to elevated characters? Let the Apocryphal Gospels bear witness. It follows, therefore, that even on this supposition the question must be decided in favour [309]

of the authors of our present Canonical Gospels, that they must have been free from the degraded superstitious to which their fellow-believers were a prey.

But there is yet another problem, even if we assume the above supposition to be true, which urgently demands solution. If, among the mass of legends with which the history of Jesus was incrustated, a certain portion of the miraculous stories were of an elevated type, who among His credulous and superstitious followers were the inventors of them? Were they men of like credulity with the remainder? There are only two alternatives. They were, or they were not. If they were, I ask, how came they to invent elevated stories? If they were not, then it follows that there were persons among His followers who were neither intensely credulous nor superstitious. If the latter be the alternative adopted, then the theory which I have been considering, which attributes to the followers of Jesus such a degree of those qualities as to render their historical testimony valueless, falls to the ground.

It follows, therefore, on a careful consideration of the position, that the data on which the charge which we have been considering is made against the followers of Jesus and the authors of the Gospels utterly fail to establish it; and that the phenomena of the New Testament prove the contrary to have been the fact.

## Chapter XIV. The Love Of The Marvellous—Its Bearing On The Value Of Testimony To Miracles.

It has been objected that the love of the marvellous has in every age constituted so remarkable a phase of human nature as greatly to weaken, if not entirely to invalidate the testimony to the performance of miracles. It is alleged that the great historians of ancient times have recorded a number of supernatural occurrences which are now summarily rejected as incredible: and it is therefore argued that all narratives of miraculous occurrences must share the same fate. This objection differs from that which I have considered in the former chapter, in that it avoids the necessity of imputing to the followers of Jesus and the authors of the Gospels a degree of superstition and credulity greatly in excess of that which characterizes the majority of mankind. It will be therefore necessary to give this subject a careful consideration.

It is an unquestionable fact that the human mind has been in all ages disposed to accept a number of narratives of supernatural occurrences upon very insufficient testimony, and which the principles of sound reason lead us to reject as untrue. Such beliefs have been peculiar to no one period of the world's history, but have been co-extensive with the human race; and they form one of the most remarkable facts in our nature. Many of the ancient historians have reported such occurrences without apparent suspicion; or if they entertained any doubts respecting their truth, they did not venture even to whisper them into the popular ear. What is still more; eminent men of the ancient world did not scruple to act in matters of this kind a part which

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they knew to be deceptive, because they held the opinion that such beliefs, though they might be laughed at by philosophers, were necessary to act as restraints on the vulgar. Thus we know, on the most indubitable authority, that a Roman Augur could gravely act his part before the public at the very time that he was secretly laughing in his sleeve at the ridiculousness of his art. It does not therefore follow because the ancient historians have reported numbers of occurrences of this nature with considerable gravity, that they accepted them as facts. They were frequently influenced by the spirit of accommodation, thinking it necessary for the welfare of society to keep up the vulgar ideas on the subject. It would be inaccurate therefore to attribute all the accounts of such things which we meet with in ancient writers to simple credulity, or to infer from them that they did not believe in an inviolable order of nature of some kind. With respect to the arts of magic, however, one feels that even the greatest of the ancient writers contemplated them with a kind of bated breath. This would appear to have been the state of mind even of Tacitus, with one exception the greatest historian of the ancient world, and one who was intimately acquainted with the various systems of its philosophy. Conscious as he was that vast numbers of the professors of magic were impostors, he seems hardly able to realize the fact that the whole art was a delusion.

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It has been affirmed that the progress of physical science has destroyed in this nineteenth century all belief in the actual occurrence of the supernatural, and that it now prevails only in some of the dark corners of Christendom. The widespread belief in the phenomena of spiritualism, which is certainly very far from being confined to religious men, and from which some students of physical science have not been exempt, is a striking proof of the contrary. All that can be affirmed with truth is that, in these modern times, these forms of belief have taken a new direction. Modern science has done much to establish and spread the belief that the operations of all natural, *i.e.* material forces are uniform.

Many of its students have even brought themselves to the belief that the occurrence of any event whose existence is due to the action of any other than the known forces of nature, is impossible: though this is far from being the invariable, and is certainly not the necessary result of its study. Still, probably, the most ardent votary of these opinions would find it difficult to keep himself wholly free from terrors arising from unseen causes, if they were aroused by a suitable apparatus. The study of physical science is far from being a universal safeguard against the invasions of superstition. Its causes lie far more deeply rooted in our nature than the principles of physical science can reach. Nor is it able to guard against an extravagant use of the imagination.

Whether, in the present state of our philosophy, we have fully penetrated to the depths of this principle thus working in the mind of man, may admit of doubt; but its presence there, as an essential portion of our nature, is an unquestionable fact. We are not without the means of getting a general idea of its character. It is doubtless intimately connected with those principles of our nature which constitute man a religious being, and which form a fundamental part of his mental constitution. As such it must, like all our other faculties, have a legitimate and an illegitimate action. It points, as we shall see, to the existence of the super-[313]natural. A rational religion forms the object for its appropriate exercise. Whenever man has been destitute of this, and his reason has been weak, this principle, devoid of its proper object, has always manifested itself in various forms of extravagance. So powerful is it in the human mind that even avowed atheism has not been proof against its power. Julius Cæsar was an atheist, and possessed one of the most powerful minds that ever inhabited the human frame. Yet, on the great day of his triumph, he ascended the steps of the Capitol for the purpose of averting an avenging Nemesis. Napoleon the First was no atheist, though few persons who have ever lived have been more free from the restraints of religion or superstition. Although he possessed a mighty intellect

and was no stranger to the truths of modern science, yet even he believed in his star. Many other instances of men of powerful intellect who disbelieved in religion, yet who entertained singular superstitions, might be easily adduced. I refer to them for the purpose of proving that the principle out of which such things originate must be one which is deep-seated in the nature of man, and therefore an essential portion of it. If it is founded on a fundamental principle of our mental constitution, it follows that it must have a legitimate subject-matter on which to exercise its powers, and that the abnormal forms of it which are so frequently manifested are the results of some disorder in its action. What then is its nature?

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There are certain principles deeply-seated within us, which form as definite a portion of ourselves as even our rational faculties, and which directly prompt to the belief in the supernatural, and therefore point to its existence. Among these, the faculties of imagination, wonder, reverence and awe, hold a conspicuous place. It is impossible to deny that they form portions of the actual constitution of our minds, however we may account for their origin. Is it then our duty to eradicate them because they prompt us to the belief in something which transcends the visible order of nature? This will hardly be affirmed by the most thorough-going sceptic; for if it be our duty to do so, the human mind must be a mass of disorder in the midst of a universe of order. If we were to make the attempt (for indeed it has been attempted) the result would be to upset the balance of our mental constitution, and it would terminate in failure. Human nature, taken as it is, constitutes a whole. These faculties hold in it a place subordinate to reason and to conscience. When our rational, our imaginative, and our moral powers act harmoniously together, they constitute man a religious being.

But, for the purposes of the present argument, I have simply to draw attention to the fact that imagination, wonder, reverence and awe form an essential portion of our being. It would be in

the highest degree undesirable to get rid of them, even if we were able. How mighty is the influence of the first of these principles! It lies at the foundation of everything that is great and noble in man. To it are due the magnificent creations of poetry; in fact everything which adorns life, and much of that which raises us above the mechanical forces of nature. Destitute of it, our reason could not act; nay, it could not even exist; and we should be reduced to the mere mechanical action of the understanding, the wheels of which would be in danger of rusting. Nor has the faculty of wonder a less definite place in our being. It is closely connected with our imagination, which supplies it with objects fitted to excite it, and ought to be exercised under the guidance of reason. Its object is the great and the vast, shall I not say, the infinite? Regulated by reason and united with awe, it produces reverence. Reverence points to the existence of some object which is really worthy of veneration. Veneration can only be legitimately exercised on that which is truly venerable. As such it directly points to a personal God, and refuses to rest in anything short of Him as able fully to gratify its aspirations. Viewing them as a whole, the legitimate object of these faculties, and the subject from which they can receive their fullest gratification, is that Great Being who everywhere manifests Himself in this glorious universe. But when man has ceased to contemplate in nature a rational power guiding and controlling it, the principle of wonder has frequently prompted him to gratify its aspirations by peopling it with a multitude of phantastic creations. When under the influence of awe, he has contemplated it in its terrible aspects, unguided by a being who possesses a moral character, these feelings have prompted the imagination to fill it with beings who excite the feeling of superstitious dread. [315]

Although the vastness of the material universe and the energy of its forces can excite the feeling of wonder, yet that of reverence refuses to find in the mere extension of space, or the might of material forces, any object adequate to its demands. The

vastness of the material universe may fill the mind with wonder and admiration; but even wonder refuses to rest satisfied with a vastness of which the limits are known. It demands something which is conceivable, which yet runs up into the regions of the inconceivable. But even here the feeling of reverence can find nothing on which to energize. It directly points to a moral being in whom it can find a centre, and it will find its gratification in nothing short of one. To talk, as many Pantheists do, of feeling reverence for an impersonal Universe, is a misuse of language. What! to reverence a Being, if the impersonal Universe can be called a Being, which is everlastingly casting up the bubbles of existence in the form of moral agents, and is everlastingly devouring them, devoid alike of consciousness, volition, and a moral nature!

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It follows, therefore, if these principles form a constituent portion of our nature, that like all our other faculties, they must admit of a right and a perverted use. It is therefore absurd to lay down as a general principle, because they admit of an illegitimate use, that the whole class of phenomena connected with them are worthy of nothing but summary rejection, without exercising our reason on the evidence on which they stand. All that their existence can prove in reference to this subject is something which is very like a truism; that mankind, being liable to all kinds of mistakes and errors, and having frequently fallen into them, no class of phenomena ought to be accepted as facts, until evidence of their occurrence has been adduced which is capable of satisfying our reason. But this is a very harmless proposition.

There can be no doubt that to a perverted use of these faculties is due the belief in a kind of current supernaturalism, which in various forms runs through the entire history of man. This has owed its origin to the efforts of the imagination to supply objects for its gratification when the reason is feeble and the moral faculties have become perverted. Hence the readiness of large masses of mankind to accept narratives of marvels without

regard to the evidence on which they rest. They are accepted simply as gratifying the principle of wonder. This is the cause of what I have designated by the term "Current Supernaturalism." [317]

But because all our faculties admit of abuse, and the higher they are, the greater, this forms no reason for rejecting their legitimate use, or the entire subject-matter on which they operate. As I have observed, the principle is found energizing wherever man exists. Although in one age it may be more active than in another, it is alike the inheritance of the civilized man and the savage. It has displayed itself in the creations of the poet and the writer of fiction; in the various forms of religious thought; in the production of ghost-stories and pictures of the under-world; in the creation of the various forms of demonology, witchcraft and magic; in the milder form of fairy-tales; in charms and incantations, and in efforts to pry into the future. Even in philosophy and science we may trace its influence, not only in aiding and suggesting their great discoveries, but in propounding multitudes of startling theories, erected on the smallest basis of fact. These not only gratify this feeling, but promise an apparently royal road to knowledge, which avoids the long and tedious one of only propounding theories after a careful investigation of facts. But in the regions of intellectual pursuit, its abnormal manifestations are pre-eminently in the science of historical criticism, in those numerous departments of historical inquiry where the facts are few and vague. Here nothing is easier than to supply the absence of facts by theory, and to erect a magnificent edifice on a foundation of sand. The ancient soothsayer gratified vulgar curiosity by guessing at the events of the future. There is a species of modern soothsaying which expends its energies in guessing at the events of the past. Such guessing presents an unspeakable fascination to a large number of minds, by its happy mixture of fiction and fact, and is the true analogue to many of the forms of ancient thought. It has been necessary to draw attention to these things for the purpose of proving the widespread influence of [318]

this principle on human nature. Its action has manifested itself in different forms in different ages; but the cause is the same in all, the existence in man of a principle which points to the existence of God, and which can only receive its adequate gratification in Him.

The action of similar principles produces in man the love of the extraordinary, the unusual and the novel. This is so powerful that unless it is kept in subordination to reason, it produces a number of fictitious beliefs. So strong is it, that it may be truly said of large numbers of mankind that they spend all the time which they are not compelled to devote to the serious realities of life, in little else than hearing and speaking of some new thing. It is undoubtedly the cause of a large number of fictitious beliefs, and produces, in minds where the rational powers are weak, a ready acceptance of the unusual, the strange, and the wonderful. The same principle, acting in conjunction with others, when uncontrolled by reason, has occasioned many of the exaggerations which are to be found in history.

Still, as one of the fundamental principles of our minds, it cannot but have a legitimate sphere of action. United with curiosity, it is the chief source of all mental activity. It is that which produces the earnest desire to penetrate into the regions of the unknown. As such, it is essential to the activity of our rational faculties, and has been the exciting cause which has rendered all our great discoveries possible.

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It follows, therefore, that if these principles form part of our mental constitution, the objection that they destroy the value of miracles as a testimony to a revelation is absurd. We might as well argue that because the love of the marvellous has generated a belief in a number of fictions as facts in ordinary history, it invalidates its testimony to events which have really happened, or renders all unusual occurrences incredible. I will illustrate this by an example. Herodotus tells us in his history that there were certain tribes who dwelt in wooden habitations erected over

lakes, and he gives us several particulars as to their manner of life. This fact, until a comparatively recent period, might have been pronounced incredible, and have been supposed to have originated in the simple love of the marvellous, either in the author or in his informants. I own that when I first read the historian, this was the opinion which I formed respecting it. But we now know that he reported an actual fact. On the other hand it is certain that a great portion of the details of the Scythian expedition of Darius must have originated in the undue activity of the mental faculties to which I have referred, *i.e.* that they are inventions. But if the principle of summarily rejecting narratives of events which lie beyond our experience is valid, because the abnormal activity of certain faculties has urged men to invent, and believe in a multitude of fictions, the account of the lake-dwellings given by the historian ought to have been rejected as equally unworthy of credit, with some of the occurrences of the Scythian expedition. It is impossible to deal with the events of history on any general *à priori* principles; they must stand or fall on their own intrinsic evidence.

It follows, therefore, that if these principles admit of an abnormal action, we are still by no means justified in a summary rejection of all unusual occurrences. It only forms an adequate reason for closely scrutinizing the evidence on which the cred- [320] ibility of history rests. The faculty of imagination, instigated by that of wonder, has produced widespread beliefs in a mass of supernatural events which are utterly incredible. But as that faculty must have a legitimate action somewhere, it is clear that its abuse can be no valid reason for the rejection of all supernatural occurrences, unless for other reasons they are proved to be incredible. The whole must be a question of evidence and of reason. If it formed a valid ground for the rejection of miracles, it is clear that the principle on which it is founded cannot be confined to any such narrow limits, but must have a wide and general application, and extend to all that is wonderful

and unusual.

It is an unquestionable fact that a large proportion of mankind in every age have eagerly sought the means of affording gratification to the feeling of wonder, and that this has been the means of introducing into history a considerable number of fictions of various kinds. But does this invalidate its testimony? Does it justify us in rejecting whole classes of phenomena as unworthy of consideration? We have already seen that whatever principle is applied to miracles must be equally applied to all extraordinary events, because as phenomena there is no difference between them. We admit that many fictions have got into history. These it is the duty of the critical historian to detect and displace. Will anyone affirm that their introduction invalidates the events in the history of the past, which rest on an adequate attestation? What that is, I shall consider hereafter. Whatever effect this may have exerted on the minor details of history, will anyone affirm that its great outlines do not rest on a substantial basis of truth? It is impossible to lay down on these subjects a wide and comprehensive canon which will save us the trouble of careful and accurate investigation. All reports of extraordinary events, marvels, and miracles, must stand or fall with the adequacy of the evidence which can be adduced for their occurrence, and cannot be decided by any artificial rule. If the evidence is good, they must be accepted, notwithstanding the fact that extensive classes of marvels have been accepted by mankind on testimony wholly insufficient to establish their truth. If the evidence fails, they must be regarded as the result of the abnormal exercise of faculties which yet have a legitimate place in our mental constitution.

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Nothing is more common than the assertion that at certain periods of history, mankind have been ignorant that there is an order in nature; and that this ignorance has given these faculties such unbounded play as to render all reports of supernatural occurrences unworthy of credit, notwithstanding any amount of evidence which may be alleged in their favour. It is urged that,

if men are ignorant that there is an order in nature, to such a state of mind nothing would be really supernatural; but every event, whether supernatural or otherwise, would be viewed as a matter of ordinary occurrence. To this state of mind a miracle would convey no meaning, and therefore it would be valueless as evidence of a divine revelation. In other words, it has been affirmed that there have been certain conditions of mankind in which the love of the marvellous has been so powerful, and the action of reason so weak, as to destroy all sense of the distinction between a natural and a supernatural occurrence.

I reply that the Christian revelation was not addressed to such a condition of the human mind. On the contrary, it was made after a long course of preparation for its introduction. After the whole course of previous history, under the controlling providence of God, had prepared the way for His Advent, Jesus Christ appeared. The Gospel was not preached to men in the lowest state of barbarism, but to civilized man. What may have been the ideas of degraded savages, at some early period of the history of our race, it will be needless to inquire. With mankind in such a condition we have nothing to do in the present controversy, but with the state of thought in the Roman Empire during the first century of our era. This was no period of mental darkness or of boundless credulity. In the early ages, when every phenomenon of nature was viewed as due to the action of some capricious god, the belief in an order of nature must have been in a high degree vague and uncertain. But such a state of things, whatever it might once have been, had long since passed away. The period of history now under consideration was one of widespread intelligence, varying greatly in different parts of the empire, but still one of intelligence and civilization.

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It is impossible for men to attain a degree of progress necessary for the existence of civilization, and still to remain ignorant that a large class of natural occurrences follow an order which does not admit of deviation. Civilization would be impossible unless this

were generally recognized. It is in fact founded on its recognition. At the same time, there is a class of phenomena which are not recognized by the ordinary mind as following a definite order. It is within this alone that the beliefs of current supernaturalism exert their activity. But the supernatural occurrences narrated in the New Testament do not belong to this ambiguous order of events, and are therefore unaffected by them.

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There is a large class of events which civilized man cannot help recognizing as belonging to a definite order and sequence, and where the belief in the marvellous exerts little or no influence. The violation of this order he views as impossible. Thus he cannot fail to recognize the fact that men cannot walk on the water without support; that thousands of persons cannot be fed by a few loaves and fishes; that diseases never leave us instantaneously by no other agency than that of a touch or a word; and that men who have been actually dead have never returned to life. No amount of the love of the marvellous has ever induced men to consider such occurrences possible. Whatever may have been the current supernaturalism of the ancient world, it did not embody beliefs of this description. This is proved by the entire course of ancient history. Its supernaturalism is of a wholly different order. The love of the marvellous, therefore, has never so confounded the distinction between the natural and the supernatural among civilized men, as to have deprived a miracle of its significance.

Such an assertion respecting any part of the Roman Empire, during the century which preceded and that which followed the Advent, would be contrary to fact. On the contrary, certain classes of events which were reported to have happened, were invariably believed to have been really supernatural. They were so far from being considered as devoid of meaning, that persons supposed to be skilled in the art of interpreting them were habitually consulted as to what they were intended to denote. The only exceptions to this were those occurrences which were supposed

to have been brought about by the art of magic. These seem to have been viewed as in some measure due to the existence of occult powers in nature, the results of which the professors of the art had succeeded in mastering. It may be safely affirmed that at no portion of this period was the love of the marvellous so prevalent in any portion of the Roman Empire as to have deprived a real miracle of its signification. [324]

It follows therefore that it is impossible to lay down any abstract rule which will save us the trouble of investigating the evidence of miracles, because mankind has in all ages been greatly influenced by the love of the marvellous, and under its influence has invented a number of occurrences which reason pronounces incredible. The action of this principle is far from being confined to subjects connected with religion, but extends over the whole range of literature. While it is quite true that, under the influence of various principles of this description, numbers of fictions have been reported by ancient historians, this forms a valid reason only for rejecting those which rest on no adequate attestation. The adoption of the other principle would render all knowledge of the past impossible. All the faculties of our minds admit of a legitimate and an illegitimate use. To reject the results of the right use of our faculties, because they are capable of a wrong one, is absurd.

But an opposite view may be taken of the entire question, and one which is dictated by the principles of reason.

Several principles in man directly point to the existence of the supernatural. Among these veneration and conscience occupy a conspicuous place. These acting in conjunction with reason constitute man a religious being. Man alone of all living beings is capable of religion. The principle of reverence finds its only adequate gratification in the contemplation of moral perfection. Moral perfection is inconceivable where personality and volition are not. This principle therefore forms the counterpart in man which is directly correlated to the being and the perfections of a [325]

personal God. It follows that instead of these principles invalidating the existence of the supernatural, they establish it. The conception of immensity is the adequate subject-matter on which our faculty of wonder works. The highest conception of greatness is realized in God. In Him therefore this faculty receives its most perfect realization. Reverence points to greatness united with supreme moral goodness. The imperfection of man will not satisfy it. It therefore impels man to bow down before the throne of One who transcends the imperfections of the created universe. If there be a personal God, supremely good, who is the Creator and moral Governor of the universe, nothing is more in conformity with our highest reason than that He should make a further manifestation of Himself to man, in addition to that which He has made in the material universe.

# Chapter XV. Our Summary Rejection Of Current Supernaturalism Considered In Its Bearing On The Evidence For Miracles.

There can be no doubt that there is an enormous mass of supernatural beliefs which we feel at once justified in rejecting without troubling ourselves to inquire into the evidence on which they rest. Others also we reject because on investigation we find them altogether destitute of evidence. Others again which rest on evidence which would be sufficient to establish an ordinary fact, we reject notwithstanding this attestation, on the ground of their inherent improbability. It has been objected that our summary rejection of the great mass of current supernaturalism puts the case of miracles out of court, and renders them so improbable, that it is unnecessary minutely to examine the evidence which can be adduced in support of them. I propose therefore in this chapter to consider the reasons for our summary rejection of the great mass of current supernaturalism, and its bearing on the credibility of the miracles in the New Testament.

First: I observe that the stories of current supernaturalism are not the only ones which we reject in a summary manner. We treat in the same way a great number of other stories which offend against the principles of common sense. It is clear that in these latter cases, we do not reject them merely because they are supernatural, but because they are generally incredible. The

fact therefore that we thus reject a number of absurd narratives without inquiry into the evidence on which they rest, cannot be urged as a reason for rejecting other occurrences which are not involved in any such absurdity. If the principle is valid against miracles, it must be equally so against other extensive classes of facts. To assert that miracles are thus absurd or ridiculous is to assume the point which ought to be proved.

Secondly: We reject the great mass of current supernaturalism because it is unable to assign any adequate reason for its existence. When it is alleged that a miracle has been performed as an attestation of a revelation, if it forms a necessary portion of such attestation, this is an adequate reason for the miracle. But the great mass of current supernaturalism is utterly unable to assign any reason for its existence; or if reasons have been given, they are quite inadequate. Of this the case of magic is an example. If it were a reality, it would not only interfere with the order of nature, but no reason could be given for this interference. If, on the other hand, its phenomena were alleged to be due to secret forces in nature, then they would belong to an order of grotesque and monstrous phenomena, which we are justified at once in refusing to believe to be due to the action of intelligence or goodness; and on the supposition that there is a moral Governor of the universe, it is utterly incredible that they would occur either by his agency or with his permission.

Perhaps the best attested occurrences of current supernaturalism are the phenomena of spiritualism. It will tend to the illustration of this subject, if we consider the grounds on which we reject a large portion of its reported phenomena quite irrespectively of the evidence produced in favour of their reality, and ascribe the belief in them to the effect of an excited imagination, and in some cases to imposture. In considering this subject, it is not necessary to examine whether the phenomena alleged by spiritualists, if true, would be really supernatural, or belong to an order of nature hitherto unknown.

Many of the manifestations of spiritualism possess a grotesqueness which we see in no other class of natural phenomena. If they are alleged to be the results of the action of natural forces previously unknown, then they must belong to a class of forces which contrast in a most remarkable degree with all known ones; that is to say, the known and the unknown forces of nature must be utterly out of harmony with one another. I am now speaking on the supposition that such forces are merely natural ones, not under the guidance of intelligence. In that case they must have been always in existence, only latent; yet they now for the first time manifest themselves under very special circumstances and conditions, such as are highly favourable to the existence of delusion. The abnormal character of these phenomena, so entirely at variance with the known order of nature, forms the strongest ground for the conviction that they cannot be the results of the action of unknown natural forces. It would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to convince us that these two sets of natural forces, distinguishable by the strongest possible contrasts, (viz. those which produce the visible phenomena of nature, and those which produce another class, intermittent in their action, of which grotesqueness and monstrosity are the most striking characteristics, and which only manifest their existence under circumstances calculated to throw a suspicion on their reality), can be the results of the action of forces which have been present in nature during all past time. [329]

But further: these phenomena, if natural, must belong to an order of nature which is not only unlike the visible order, but would throw its action into confusion. I am here reasoning on the supposition that the moral order of the universe is due to the action of nothing but physical forces. If this be so, it must form a portion of the existing order of nature. But the forces which, on the supposition of the truth of spiritualism, must be capable of being brought into activity, would interrupt that moral order of which we are actually conscious. Their action, if real, would

interrupt the entire course of the moral world. No man would be safe from their intrusion. Even in our deepest retirement we should never be free from the invasion of their prying curiosity. Such a power would be incompatible with the moral order of society. It follows, therefore, that an unknown order of nature, presenting the most violent contrast to the visible one, whose phenomena do not follow an invariable but an intermittent law, and are only alleged to manifest themselves under conditions favourable to imposture, possesses such a degree of inherent improbability as to justify its rejection, even by those who recognise the action of none but material forces in the universe.

But to those who recognise the present order of nature as due to the action of a wise and intelligent Creator, it becomes absolutely incredible that forces such as the phenomena of spiritualism require for their production, can form a portion of that order which He has created, as they contradict every conception which we can rationally form of his character.

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But if these phenomena are viewed as due to the action of supernatural agency, the reality of their occurrence becomes still more inconceivable. If such agency is capable of being exerted, we can only conceive that its exertion is permitted for the realization of some known end. Yet the phenomena of spiritualism serve no purpose whatever. Spiritualists have been holding their *séances* for many years; but no one practical result has yet been realized by them. The spirits of the departed have been invoked, but they have never yet given a single useful response. Surely if there be a spirit world, its occupations cannot be the production of the abnormal, the mean and the grotesque. Its employments must possess some pretensions to be esteemed dignified. It has been alleged that such manifestations help to convince the incredulous of the reality of the immortality of man. On the contrary, the idea that spirits can be guilty of such phantastic tricks can only help to throw discredit on the doctrine. It follows, therefore, that if the phenomena of spiritualism are viewed as

due to supernatural causes, it is utterly incredible either that the Governor of the Universe would permit such a course of action, or that the spirits themselves, unless deprived of reason, would exhibit themselves in such a variety of phantastic forms, and for no other apparent purpose than to effect a number of capricious interferences with the visible order of nature. This incredibility is so great as to entitle us summarily to reject the idea that the reputed phenomena can be actual occurrences. In addition to this, the alleged manifestations are made under circumstances pre-eminently suited to excite suspicion.

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The phenomena of modern spiritualism are a fair illustration of the general character of the current supernaturalism of the ancient world. It was for the most part equally senseless and absurd. The attestation to its actual occurrence was of a very inferior character to that which can be urged in favour of the alleged facts of spiritualism. I have merely taken notice of these latter as an illustration of the general aspect of the phenomena of current supernaturalism, and as placing before us the reasons which fully justify us in rejecting a large portion of it without minutely inquiring into its evidence.

I will now proceed to contrast the entire mass of current supernaturalism with the miracles of the New Testament for the purpose of still further illustrating the grounds on which we reject it, while we claim for the latter that their reality must be tested by the evidence which can be adduced in favour of their actual occurrence.

Let me again draw attention to the fact that the only correct conception of a miracle in connection with this controversy, is that of an event wrought in external nature with a definite moral aim and purpose. Extraordinary events, to which no such moral aim and purpose can be assigned, may be unusual occurrences, but are in no proper sense of the words evidential miracles. An isolated occurrence of an extraordinary nature, and an event marked with a definite moral purpose, are two wholly different

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things. The one may be credible, and the other wholly incredible. We habitually recognise the distinction in ordinary life, and it entirely affects our judgment of the probability of an event. We esteem the action of a particular person quite credible under one set of circumstances, which we should reject as incredible under another. Thus if we were informed that a friend with whom we were intimately acquainted, had precipitated himself from a height into the water, supposing him to be sane, we should not believe it. But if we received the information that he had done it to save a person from drowning, and we knew that he was a man of courage, we should accept the fact without the smallest hesitation. On this account, therefore, the moral aspect of the alleged miracle is of the utmost importance; and it is necessary for its correct conception that it should not only be an extraordinary occurrence in external nature, but that it should take place at the bidding of another, and in order to render it credible, that it should be calculated to effectuate some definite moral purpose.

Alleged supernatural events, which are destitute of these accompaniments, are always liable to a very high degree of *à priori* suspicion. In fact it would be difficult to prove them to be supernatural. All that could be affirmed respecting them would be that they were very unusual occurrences, which it was impossible to account for by the action of any known force. If the universe is under the government of God, all supernatural action must either be the result of His agency or permission. If He interferes with the order of occurrences, it is evident that such interference cannot be capricious, but must have a definite purpose. We are justified, therefore, in refusing to accept occurrences as supernatural, which are destitute of all appearance of purpose in their performance.

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But further: the alleged miracle must be consistent with the character of God, before it is possible to attribute it to Him as wrought by His direct agency. This rests on the same principle on which we refuse to credit the reports of actions performed

by men which are contradictory to their well known characters. But this is far more certain with respect to God than it can be of man. Human characters can at best be but imperfectly known, and there are unseen depths in the human heart which sometimes render actions possible, which stand in striking contrast to the general character of the agents. To state the truth generally, as it is impossible that man can act in opposition to the inmost principles of his moral being, so in a far higher degree is it impossible that God can contradict the perfections of His moral nature. This being so, it follows that we are entitled to reject all miracles alleged to have been wrought by God, which are contrary to His moral attributes; all which are low, mean, or grotesque, and unfitted to realize an elevated moral purpose.

It will here be objected that if these positions are true, demoniacal miracles are rendered impossible. I have already pointed out that if demoniacal supernaturalism is affirmed in the New Testament to be an actuality, its action is described as being limited to the human mind, and that whatever permitted activity is conceded to it, always bears the most distinctive marks of being from beneath. There is no possibility of mistaking between such supernatural occurrences and the miracles of God.

Such then are our general principles, the truth of which can hardly be contested. If they are true, the great mass of current supernaturalism is worthy of rejection for the following reasons.

1. While it claims to be the result of supernatural agency, it is destitute of all definite moral purpose, and such moral impress as it bears is mean and degraded. What end, I ask, was it designed to serve? It involved an almost continual interference with the order of nature; or if at times it claimed to be due to occult forces, they were only suited to confound the visible order of the universe. I am reasoning on the supposition that there is a God who rules the world. This being so, it is impossible to conceive that such a mode of acting can be His. Under this head of supernaturalism fall all the monstrous and the grotesque, and the entire range of

magical phenomena.

2. The whole range of ancient supernaturalism is in contradiction to everything which we can conceive of the moral character of God. Let us take as an illustration the phenomena of Soothsaying. Who can believe that God employed the entrails of slaughtered beasts as the means of revealing the future? or that it was consistent with his character to manifest his will through a multitude of monstrous portents? There is perhaps not a single occurrence of ancient supernaturalism which does not offend against our primary conception of the Divine character; and, therefore, the whole is worthy of summary rejection.

3. Ancient supernaturalism assigned its occurrences to no cause adequate to produce them. Those who asserted its reality, referred it to the action of deities who possessed very limited power, or to occult powers in nature. Such occult powers we now know to have no existence, and the power attributed to the supposed deities was far too limited to be capable of producing the results in question. All reputed events, the alleged cause of which is unable to produce them, we are entitled to reject without further investigation.

4. A large amount of ancient supernaturalism rested on no evidence whatever. Of those portions for which any reasons were alleged, the evidence itself was of a character exactly suited to discredit it. Of this kind was the whole of the supernaturalism connected with the state religions. These were in the hands of men who used them for the purpose of acting on the vulgar, and who therefore readily accepted the report of anything, however incredible, which could subserve their end. Other portions were palpable impostures worked for the basest and most selfish purposes. A very brief acquaintance with the nature of the evidence on which it rests is sufficient to justify us in rejecting it without entering on any inquiry as to its details.

Such being the general character of ancient supernaturalism, it is absurd to argue that its existence is a reason for rejecting along

with it another order of supernaturalism, which stands contrasted with it in every particular. We might as well urge the existence of a vast number of counterfeits as a reason for rejecting everything which is genuine. We do not reject it because it is supernatural, but because it is utterly incredible. A statement of a few particulars will exhibit the contrast between it and the supernaturalism of the New Testament in a striking point of view.

1. Christian supernaturalism alleges that its occurrences are the result of the action of a force which, if present, is certainly adequate to produce them. Ancient supernaturalism alleges no cause whatever, or one wholly inadequate.

2. Christian supernaturalism alleges a perfectly adequate purpose for its production; that purpose being the attestation of the divine mission of Jesus. Ancient supernaturalism alleges either no purpose at all, or a degraded one.

3. Christian supernaturalism is made to centre around the greatest and most exalted character that has ever appeared in history. Ancient supernaturalism, instead of being connected with the most eminent characters of the times, directly connects itself with the most questionable.

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4. Christian supernaturalism is stamped throughout with a high moral character and aspect. This is wholly wanting in the supernaturalism of the ancient world.

5. Christian supernaturalism belongs to an elevated order and type; the objects realized by it were for the most part benevolent. The mode of its action was dignified and the effects produced by it were instantaneous, following directly on the word of the agent. The mode in which its miracles were performed is characterized by the utmost simplicity, destitute alike of anything scenic or fantastic, entirely in harmony with the great character who performed them. The supernaturalism of the ancient world is marked by the opposite characteristics.

6. Christian supernaturalism, or to speak more correctly, the greatest supernatural occurrence which Christianity records,

namely the Resurrection of Christ, has not only left a mighty impression on history, but has created a civilization of its own which embraces all the progressive nations of the world, and exerts a powerful influence even on those who deny its truth. The only result wrought by the supernaturalism of the ancient world was the moral degradation of those among whom it prevailed.

7. The supernaturalism of Christianity rests on an attestation which even unbelievers would allow to be quite sufficient to establish the truth of any ordinary facts. The other rests either on no testimony at all, or on one which is open to the gravest suspicion.

Such are some of the striking contrasts which distinguish the supernaturalism of the New Testament from that of the ancient world. When two series of events present such opposite features, it is the duty of a sound philosophy to trace these distinctions to their causes, and to show what is the nature of the forces which have impressed on each series its own peculiar characteristics. Instead of this, however, we are invited to pronounce both alike incredible; that is to say, because one series of events is deeply impressed with characteristics which render them incredible, we are invited to pronounce a similar condemnation on another series, which is distinguished by the most opposite features, and which has only this point in common with the former, that both belong to an order of events which we designate as supernatural. Nothing can be more unphilosophical than such a mode of reasoning. We reject the one series in a mass, not because the events which it contains are supernatural, but because they are absolutely incredible. A similar rule we apply to ordinary, no less than supernatural occurrences.

But it will doubtless be objected that there is another series of supernatural occurrences which rational men, with a few exceptions, greet with an equally summary rejection, viz. the long series of ecclesiastical miracles which extends in an almost unbroken succession from the second century of our era nearly

to the present day. These, it has been urged, are alleged to have been wrought in attestation of Christianity, and bear some remarkable analogy, as facts wrought in external nature, to the miracles recorded in the Gospels. It is argued that if we reject the one, we are for the same reason bound to reject the others.

The following points may be considered as admitted.

First; That every century from the second downwards has been characterized by a considerable amount of pretension to the possession of supernatural power; and during this period one section of the Christian Church claims to have actually wrought miracles. [338]

Secondly; Several of these miracles, viewed merely as phenomena in outward nature, are precisely similar to those recorded in the New Testament.

Thirdly; When a miracle is alleged to have been performed at the present day, as has recently been the case in a neighbouring country, not only all unbelievers in the possibility of supernatural occurrences, but also all rational Christians concur in its summary rejection, not merely on the ground that the evidence is insufficient, but that the event is in itself incredible.

Fourthly; That rational men reject in a similar manner and for similar reasons the great mass of ecclesiastical miracles as unworthy of serious inquiry into their attestation.

With respect to the second point, I have already observed that if we view miracles merely as phenomena in external nature, and if a similar belief in a current supernaturalism, which we have seen to be one of the phenomena of human nature, prevailed in the Church, it was to be expected that the current forms of ecclesiastical supernaturalism would adopt those of the New Testament for their basis, and consequently that it would abound in narratives of resurrections from the dead and the cures of various diseases. This is actually the case. It may also not only excite our wonder that the model was not far more exactly copied, but that ecclesiastical, and especially monkish miracles,

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which constitute an overwhelming majority of the miracles of Church history, abound so largely in features which stand in such marked contrast to the miracles of the New Testament, their peculiar characteristics being the same as those of ancient supernaturalism, viz. the monstrous and the grotesque. This point is one which demands the serious consideration of unbelievers; for if, as they aver, they are both due to the action of the same causes, this diversity requires to be accounted for. The truth is, that with the exception that both series contain reports of miracles which are similar or mere objective occurrences, in other respects their characteristics differ widely.

With respect to the fact that rational men concur in the rejection of modern miracles, it should be observed that this is not because all supernatural events are believed to be incredible; but because the reputed events themselves possess characteristics which excite in us the gravest suspicions of their truth; and especially because by far the greatest number of them are well known not to have originated in mere credulity, but in actual imposture. Men or communities who have once lent themselves to the deliberate coining of miracles, are of blasted reputations, and whenever marvellous occurrences are reported by such persons, we are justified in rejecting them without further inquiry. It is evident that these are the grounds on which such stories are rejected, and not simply because they are supernatural, since those who believe in the supernaturalism of the New Testament concur with those who disbelieve in it, in thus rejecting them.

I must now briefly consider the general grounds on which we reject the great mass of ecclesiastical miracles, while we accept those in the Gospels as actual occurrences.

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The general ground of our rejection of them is precisely the same as that on which we reject the supernaturalism of the ancient world. The only thing which distinguishes them from the latter, is that they contain a number of events which viewed as bare facts are similar to those recorded in the Gospels. In every other

respect the contrast is complete. I shall only draw attention to a few considerations which might otherwise escape the notice of the reader.

The ecclesiastical miracles were not wrought in attestation that the person working them had a divine commission, but that a divine power permanently abode in the Church. The qualification which was thought necessary for the exhibition of this power was the possession of a great degree of reputed sanctity. The exercise of miraculous power was supposed to prove, not that its possessor had a divine commission, but that he was a saint. The saint was supposed to have in himself some inherent power of working miracles, bearing a considerable analogy to that which the woman with the issue of blood believed to be possessed by our Lord. A miraculous power in the shape of a virtue issued from the saint. Hence the supernatural power which was ascribed to dead men's bones and to relics. Such a supernatural power is devoid of everything which presupposes a divine purpose, and of all evidential value. Its frequency would destroy the nature of a miracle as an attestation of a divine commission, and involve an interference with the order of nature, which would destroy the sense of its regularity, the knowledge of which is so essential to our well being, as well as to the conception of a miracle. Moreover, the supernatural agency is not supposed to be due to the direct intervention of God, but to some imaginary virtue residing in man.

The ecclesiastical miracles of which we have anything like a detailed account, when they are not simply regarded as due to the direct sanctity of the person performing them, are never alleged to be performed in proof of a divine commission; but when they are asserted to have been evidential, they are affirmed to have been wrought in proof of some doctrine, or in favour of some particular party in the Church; or, what invests them with a still greater degree of suspicion, in favour of the power of a particular order. The last class of alleged miracles may at once be dismissed [341]

as due to simple imposture. The first are strongly contrasted with those of the New Testament, where we cannot find the account of a single miracle wrought in attestation of a doctrine, the one or two apparent exceptions being really performed to attest a divine commission. But when a miracle is wrought to prove an irrational doctrine, the credibility of the miracle perishes with the truth of the doctrine. We are, therefore, justified in rejecting the miracles whenever we have sufficient evidence that the doctrines which they were alleged to attest are untrue. Again: whenever a particular party alleges a divine attestation in its favour, its character may be known by its works. The parties in the Church who have claimed such miraculous attestation, have proved by their actions that the idea of a divine interference in their favour is incredible, as being inconsistent with the divine character.

It is perfectly true that at the present day all rational men, with few exceptions, concur in rejecting almost the entire mass of ecclesiastical miracles. They do this, however, not because they believe miracles to be impossible, but because they are persuaded that God will not work one on a light or trivial occasion, and because the great mass of such pretended miracles are characterised by marks which are inconsistent with the idea that they have been wrought by God. With our larger acquaintance with the order of nature, we no longer believe that it is possible for miracles to be wrought by any inherent virtue in things themselves, but that if performed at all, it can only be by the direct agency or permission of the Author of Nature. In a word, the general incredibility of the ecclesiastical miracles, and their repugnance to our conception of the mode of the divine acting is the reason why we reject them altogether.

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It is also unquestionably true that at the present day a great majority even of religious persons would receive with no little incredulity the report of a miracle, while such incredulity would not have existed at a former period. This is due to two causes: first, our increased knowledge of the permanence of the forces of

material Nature; and secondly, our belief that supernatural occurrences can only take place by the direct agency and permission of God, and not by means of my supernatural power inherent in particular persons. From this we draw the inference that almost all the alleged ecclesiastical miracles must be rejected as inconsistent with the divine character. We are of opinion, therefore, that a miracle wrought for any other purpose than the attestation of a revelation is not credible; and as from the nature of the case revelations must be rare, we summarily reject all reports of supernatural occurrences as impostures, or the offspring of a heated and undisciplined imagination.

Now although this is generally the case, yet it is unquestionable that if a miracle was reported to us with a pre-eminently strong attestation, no rational person would refuse to give a serious consideration to the evidence merely because the event was supernatural. A reported miracle would doubtless be attended with no inconsiderable degree of antecedent improbability; but if a man with whom we were intimately acquainted, of sound intellect, and high moral character were to allege that he had performed an act which, if real, must have been indisputably miraculous, it would be altogether irrational to reject his assertion summarily as unworthy of consideration merely because in all ages miraculous stories have been extensively believed. The application of such a principle would lead us into the grossest error. [343]

This question has a very important bearing on the subject before us. It has been alleged that while nothing has been more common than the ascription of miracles to eminent men, it is impossible to find a man of sound judgment and high moral character who has deliberately affirmed that he has performed one himself. That such affirmations have been very rare is certain, and for the simple reason, that miracles have been very rare occurrences. But the assertion that no such cases are to be found is inaccurate. One, at all events, exists, although probably

[344] the only one, but it is that of a man of the most undoubted veracity, the Apostle Paul. As I have already observed, four of the most important writings which have been attributed to him are admitted by a vast majority of those unbelievers who are competent to form an opinion on the subject, to be his genuine productions. These are before us, and we can form from them a full judgment as to the character of the man. In them he distinctly tells us that he performed miracles. He writes: "I have therefore whereof I may glory in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ." (Rom. xv. 18, 19.) Here at least we have a direct affirmation on the subject. It is not the only one made by him. But there is also one which is equivalent to another affirmation made by One whom unbelievers must admit to have been the greatest man who ever lived, Jesus Christ Himself. Those with whom I am reasoning allow that the discourses in the Synoptic Gospels are accounts of His real utterances. In them He directly affirms that He performed miracles.

Even those against whose opinions I am arguing, will concede that the characters of Christ and St. Paul stand at the greatest height of moral elevation. If there are any other persons whose utterances have been handed down to us, who have deliberately made this affirmation, their numbers are unquestionably few. Certainly no other thoroughly great and elevated character has done so. This is a remarkable fact and well worthy of consideration. While many of the Fathers have affirmed that miracles were performed by others, not one of them has affirmed that he has wrought any himself. The supernaturalism of the New Testament differs, as we have seen, from all other alleged kinds of supernatural occurrences. It differs moreover in this respect,

that one of the persons through whose agency these miracles are declared to have been performed, has made a deliberate affirmation that he wrought them; and that the founder of Christianity, in recorded utterances which are admitted to be genuine, has likewise asserted that miracles were wrought by Him. [345]

It follows, therefore, that our summary rejection of all the current supernaturalism which has been alleged to have taken place at various periods of history, is quite consistent with our accepting as true the series of supernatural events recorded in the New Testament, which are distinguished by characteristics of an entirely different order.

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## Chapter XVI. General Objections To Miracles As Credentials Of A Revelation.

While considering this subject, it will be necessary to keep steadily in view that miracles are not alleged in the New Testament to have been performed to prove the truth of doctrines, but that a particular person possesses a divine commission; or in attestation of particular facts, such as the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The truth of a divine commission being established, it follows that the divinely-appointed messenger must have some message to communicate. We further infer that God will not intrust a message to any person whom He has not previously fully enlightened as to the subject which he has to communicate, and who would not truthfully communicate the message with which he is intrusted. A miracle is therefore not only an attestation to the divine commission of the person performing one, but also to the adequate information and veracity of the messenger. Although a miracle is not wrought to prove the truth of a particular doctrine, but that a particular person is intrusted with a divine commission, we accept a doctrinal statement as true, when made by a messenger thus attested, within the limits of the message with which he affirms himself to be intrusted, on the ground that such a messenger must both be truthful, and possess adequate knowledge. In other words, our belief in the doctrinal statement does not rest on the miracle, but on the veracity of God.

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This is the affirmation made in the New Testament respecting the most important class of the miracles which it records. As I have elsewhere observed, not a single instance occurs in it of

a miracle wrought for the purpose of proving that a doctrine is true. Our Lord's distinct affirmation is, "The same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." (John v. 36.) "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John viii. 46.) The miracles which are alleged to have been performed by the Apostles for directly evidential purposes, were wrought in proof of the Resurrection of Christ, and of their own divine commission, which directly depended on it.

Let it also be observed that it by no means follows that every miracle recorded in the New Testament was performed exclusively for evidential purposes. This point I shall consider hereafter.

If these principles are correct, they will at once dispose of two objections which are alleged against miracles: first, that they cannot prove a doctrine; and secondly, that they cannot prove a moral truth. I fully accept the statement that moral truths cannot be proved by the evidence of miracles, but must rest on their own inherent evidence; and that all positive duties rest on the command of God, to whom we feel, on other grounds, that all love, reverence, and adoration are due. The truth of doctrines also cannot be established by the performance of a miracle; but when we accept them on external authority, they rest on the testimony of God, and our full persuasion that He must be in possession of all truth. Although, therefore, I accept as correct these principles, on which the objection is founded, they have no bearing on the point at issue; for the New Testament nowhere affirms that its miracles were wrought to prove either doctrinal statements or moral truths, but facts. [348]

1. It is objected that the prevalence of supernatural beliefs renders the existence of miracles "so hackneyed as scarcely to attract the notice of the nation to whom the Christian revelation was in the first instance addressed." (*Supernatural Religion.*)

I reply that this objection contains two inaccuracies. First, it is not true that the miracles of Jesus scarcely attracted the notice

of those among whom they were performed. The only authority on this point is the New Testament itself, and this assertion contradicts its express statements. Numerous passages in the Gospels directly affirm that the miracles of our Lord attracted very general attention, and produced a profound astonishment; and that those who had witnessed them considered that there was a wide distinction between them and the miraculous pretensions then current. His fame is represented as having been spread by them in regions beyond Palestine; and great multitudes are stated to have collected, both for the purpose of hearing Him and of being healed of their diseases. The fourth Gospel represents our Lord as rebuking the multitudes, for attending on Him for sordid purposes. It is quite true, that notwithstanding the miracles, the body of the Jewish nation ultimately rejected Christianity, though the epistles bear witness that the Jewish element which was attracted into the Christian Church was large. The assertion, therefore, is simply contrary to fact, that miracles were in those days so common and hackneyed as to attract little or no attention to him who professed to work them.

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Equally inaccurate is the assertion that the evidence of miracles as the attestation to a revelation was a "hackneyed" one. The Old Testament professed to rest on miraculous evidence. This being the case, the Jews were fully entitled to expect that if God made a further revelation of His will, it would be accompanied by a miraculous attestation. But Judaism was the only religion of the ancient world which professed to be founded on the evidence of miracles. A belief in a current supernaturalism was no doubt mixed up with the ancient religions, but its wonders were not alleged to have been wrought in attestation of the fact that they were revelations, nor even as attestations to their truth. The religion of the Greeks possessed both priests and prophets; but they performed no miracles in attestation of a divine commission. The only attestation of this kind which they claimed was the utterance of obscure or mendacious oracles. I am not aware

that anyone who pretended to be a revealer of the divine will in ancient times ever professed to perform visible and palpable miracles in proof of his assertions. Similar is the position of the old religions which still exist in the modern world. Many of them abound in stories of the most fantastic manifestations of their gods in ancient times. Their votaries believe in the efficacy of magic, charms, and incantations. But none of these things have been affirmed to have been wrought in attestation of a divine commission. Mahometanism claims, in the strictest sense, to be a divine revelation; yet the Koran even offers apologies for the fact that its founder wrought no miracles in attestation of his claim to be a divine messenger. So far therefore is it from being the fact that miracles are so generally alleged by religions in vindication of their claim to be revelations, that Judaism and Christianity are absolutely unique in this respect. The idea of working a miracle in attestation of a divine commission is so far from being a [350] "hackneyed" one, that it has the strongest claims to originality.

2. It is urged by the same writer that "every marvel and every narrative of supernatural interference seemed a matter of course to the superstitious credulity of the age. However much miracles are the exception to the order of nature, they have always been the rule in the history of ignorance. In fact the excess of belief in them throughout many centuries of darkness, is almost fatal to their claims to credence now. They have been limited to periods of ignorance and superstition, and are unknown to ages of enlightenment. The Christian miracles are rendered almost as suspicious from their place in a long series of similar occurrences, as they are by their being exceptions to the sequence of natural phenomena. It would be extraordinary if cycles of miracles occurring before and since those of the Gospels, and in connection with every religion, could be repudiated as fables, and these alone maintained as genuine."

The principles which I have laid down in a former chapter fully meet the chief points raised in these objections. A few

additional observations on them, therefore, are all that will be necessary.

First: the assertion that every marvel or narrative of supernatural interference seemed a matter of course to the superstitious credulity of the age, is inaccurate. If they had been of habitual or constant occurrence, they would have ceased to be marvels at all. In such a case the trade of the impostor would have gone, for it would not have paid him. The entire plausibility of such reasonings arises from confounding under a common name phenomena wholly different in character. I ask emphatically, did the current supernaturalism of any age or nation accept as matters of course such events as the resurrection of Christ, or the cure of a blind man, or a man full of leprosy, by a word or a touch? Have not heathen writers pronounced actual resurrections from the dead to be impossibilities? Were such occurrences ever believed to be within the power of magic to effect? Belief in the possibility of such occurrences became current only under the influence of Christianity.

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2. It is not correct to assert that the belief in miracles has been confined to ages of ignorance. Will it be affirmed that the most flourishing period of Grecian literature was an age of ignorance? Yet a belief in a current supernaturalism prevailed in it. Was the Augustan age an age of ignorance? Both ages were ignorant of physical science: but during few periods has the human intellect been equally active. Each age contained men endowed with common sense sufficient to make them adequate judges whether the supernatural occurrences above referred to were possible or not.

3. It is inaccurate to affirm that the Christian miracles are interposed between two similar series of supernatural occurrences. There is only one point in common between them; the claim to be supernatural. As I have proved, in every other respect they are strongly contrasted. It is, therefore, by no means extraordinary that a series of supernatural occurrences, which have the highest

moral impress, and possess other distinguishing characteristics, should be true; and that the others, one of which took place before and the other after that in question, and which are stamped with the very opposite characteristics, should be false.

The same author adduces the following objections, as lying at the root of miraculous testimony to a revelation: "Surely supernatural evidence of so common and prodigal a nature betrays great want of force and divine originality. How could that be considered as special evidence for a new revelation, which was [352] already so well known to all the world, and which was scattered broadcast over so many centuries, as well as successfully simulated by Satan." Again: "Instead of a few evidential miracles taking place at one epoch of history, and filling the world with surprise at such novel and exceptional phenomena, we find miracles represented as taking place in all ages and in all countries. The Gospel miracles are set in the midst of a series of similar wonders which commenced many centuries before the dawn of Christianity, and continued without interruption fifteen centuries after it. No divine originality characterized the evidence selected to accredit the divine revelation." (P. 192.)

I reply, First: It behoves those who except against the plan of attesting a divine revelation by miracles, to inform us in what other way it is possible that the truth of a divine commission can be attested. It is doubtless possible for God to make a special revelation of His will to each individual man; yet even this would involve supernatural agency of some kind; and it is very questionable whether to do so would be consistent with the plan of God's moral government which comes under our actual observation. But the Christian revelation is founded on the idea of making a divine manifestation additional to, and of a different order from, that which is made by the created universe; and not simply of imparting so much additional information to each individual. This manifestation professes to be made by the Incarnation. How, I ask, was such a manifestation to be made except

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by a supernatural action of some kind? It is clear, therefore, that every manifestation of God differing from that made by the ordinary forces of nature, or by the moral nature of man, must be supernatural. There can be no doubt as to the means which must be employed. The only question which can be raised is one which I have considered elsewhere, namely: whether it is the purpose of God to make such a manifestation of Himself.

It will be objected that such a manifestation might have been made self-evident to the moral nature of man, and consequently it would have required no additional attestation. To this I reply that, on the supposition that it is God's purpose to make such an additional manifestation of Himself, He must be allowed to be the only adequate judge of the right mode of accomplishing it.

But even if a revelation involved no such manifestation of God, but only a communication of truth to man, it is incumbent on those who object to its attestation by miracles, to find some other method by which the reality of a divine commission could be attested, and to show that this mode would be preferable to an attestation by miracles.

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But further: if we regard a miracle as a supernatural occurrence wrought in attestation of a divine commission, which is the unquestionable aspect of a considerable number of those recorded in the New Testament, the fact that there was a widespread belief in the existence of supernatural events is far from interfering with its efficacy. What did the current beliefs imply? That there existed beings, other than the blind forces of nature, who interfered in human affairs; and that they were in some way or other capable of communicating with man. What is the very conception implied by a revelation? That a God exists, who is the moral Governor of the universe, who cares for man, and is capable of holding communications with him. Both conceptions rest on a common ground—the existence of supernatural beings capable of manifesting themselves by outward indications. Why then should not the moral Governor of the universe, if it was

His purpose to make a revelation, employ media, which were all but universally recognized? No inconsiderable number of the objections of unbelievers rest on the assumption, that if there be a God, it is derogatory to His character to suppose that He is capable of condescending to the weaknesses and imperfections of man. A God who neither will nor can do so may be a very grand conception; but one who is very ill adapted to the wants of human nature, and who is incapable of exciting human sympathies. The only thing that would be necessary, on the supposition that it was His purpose to make such a revelation, would be that His mode of manifesting His presence should be one clearly distinguishable from the events of current supernaturalism. What was requisite would have been to afford evidence that the manifestation in question was due to no other being than Himself; that is to say, that the miracles should bear the unquestionable impress of His own perfections. The subject of alleged demoniacal miracles I have considered elsewhere. The simple question before us is—Are the supernatural events recorded in the Gospels clearly distinguishable in their general character from the supernaturalism which was current previous to the Advent? I have already shown that it contains no doubtful indications as to who the agent must have been, if we suppose the facts to have been actual occurrences.

But further: if the objection has any validity, it presupposes that God ought not to make a revelation in ages of superstition and ignorance; but must wait until knowledge has cleared away the mists of ignorance and error, and supplied us with the means of infallibly discriminating between true miracles and false ones; or, in other words, we must wait for the much-talked-of jury of scientific men, who can submit His alleged miracles to the whole range of scientific tests. Happily, however, God has gifted a considerable number of men with common sense, which is quite adequate to determine whether a certain class of events wrought under certain circumstances are miraculous operations, or mere [355]

natural occurrences, or due to imposture. If this be so, what is there, I ask, unworthy of God, in making a revelation at such times as man stands in special need of one?

It is further objected that a miraculous attestation to a divine commission shows a want of force and divine originality. I ask, how? The fact is that with the exception of Judaism, no ancient religion professed to be so attested; and the Jew would naturally expect that any fresh revelation would be attested in a manner similar to that which he believed in as divine.

The objection that because the belief in supernaturalism was so general, therefore miracles must be worthless as evidence, I have already shown to be fallacious.

But it is also objected: "Instead of a few evidential miracles taking place at one particular period of history and filling the world with surprise at such novel and exceptional phenomena, we find them represented as taking place in all ages and in all countries."

This is the old objection of the Jews who demanded of our Lord a sign from Heaven. Both demand a particular class and order of miracle, viz.: something stupendous, or terrific. The value of each objection lies in conceiving of a miracle as a mere objective fact in external nature, stripped of all its moral accompaniments. In one word, it contemplates the miracle in its most vulgar aspect, as a bare act of power, a portent, a prodigy. A great light everywhere appearing in the heavens might have appeared to vulgar minds a greater miracle, and have attracted more attention than the cure of a man full of leprosy by the utterance of a word. But it would not have presented stronger evidences of having been wrought by the power of God.

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But with respect to the general question, I ask, Is not the resurrection of Jesus Christ in every respect an exceptional event? Where are resurrections to be found in the history of current supernaturalism? Who ever pretended, before or since, to have a divine commission which was attested by his own resurrection

from the dead? This miracle is at any rate absolutely unique; and it must never be forgotten that it is the only one recorded in the New Testament on the truth of which its writers stake the claim of Christianity to be regarded as a divine revelation. Although they refer to other miracles, wonders and signs which God wrought by Him, yet whenever they adduce the full and conclusive evidence of His divine mission, they always appeal to the fact that God had raised Him from the dead.

But a further objection is urged as invalidating this kind of testimony: "At the very time when the knowledge of the laws of nature began to render men capable of judging of the reality of miracles, these wonders entirely ceased. This extraordinary cessation of miracles at a time when their evidence ought to have acquired value from an appeal to persons capable of appreciating them, is perfectly unintelligible, if they are viewed as the supernatural credentials of a divine revelation."

This passage contains several fallacies. One, to which I have repeatedly drawn attention, runs through it, viz., the classing together every kind of alleged supernatural occurrence, from the miracles of Jesus to the fantastic performances of the magician, as though they all stood on the same level. I need not further allude to the fallacy of such reasoning.

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2. It is affirmed that miracles entirely ceased when the knowledge of the laws of nature began to render men capable of judging of their reality. I conclude that by the word "miracles" in this passage, the author means ecclesiastical miracles, viz., those which have been alleged to be wrought in attestation of the established system of belief. If it is meant to be asserted that all belief in a current supernaturalism has now ceased, the affirmation is inaccurate, as the wide-spread belief in spiritualism abundantly testifies.

But if the assertion is intended to be confined to ecclesiastical miracles, it involves an inaccuracy as to a matter of history. They had become thoroughly discredited long before the birth of

modern physical science. The cure of blind and leprous persons by a touch, or the feeding of five thousand persons on seven loaves and a few fishes, require nothing else than sound common sense for the appreciation of their supernatural character, or the testing of their reality. The assertion, therefore, that miracles ceased precisely at the time when their evidence would have been most valuable, by their being able to be tested by those persons best capable of appreciating them, is entirely inaccurate.

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I fully admit that a belief in a current supernaturalism, as for instance in the absurdities of witchcraft, survived the Reformation. What the Reformation destroyed was a belief in a divine order of miracles wrought in support of an ecclesiastical system. The belief in this current supernaturalism has been gradually diminishing ever since, under the combined influence of the increase of the knowledge of physical science, and common sense. The objection raised is simply irrelevant to the point at issue.

But there is another subject which demands consideration. Hitherto we have been dealing with the evidential character of miracles. But although all miracles have an evidential value, if they can be adequately attested, it by no means follows that every miracle recorded in the New Testament was intended to subserve this purpose alone. It was necessary not only that a revelation should be communicated, and receive an adequate attestation, but that it should be propagated among mankind. To render this possible, it was necessary that its messengers should be armed with some means of insuring that their message should be heard with attention. There was also another object to be effected; namely, the establishment in the world of that great institution, the Christian Church, which was intended so largely to influence its destinies.

It will be quite clear to any person who carefully considers the various supernatural occurrences recorded in the New Testament that they are not all of equal evidential value. The highest class

of them are directly affirmed to have been performed for the purpose of attesting the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and as a portion of His supernatural manifestation. To this class belong the miracles wrought by Himself, and several of those performed by the Apostles. But there is another class referred to in the Acts of the Apostles, of which the primary object seems to have been to awaken attention to the Apostolic message, though even these were not destitute of evidential value. There is also another order of manifestations frequently referred to in the Epistles, viz., the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, one of the declared purposes of which was to lay deep the foundations of the Christian Church. [359] As divine interpositions, they were all to a certain extent evidential; but it will be important to observe that there is an order of supernatural manifestations mentioned in the New Testament, whose apparent primary intention was to subserve a different purpose.

Let it be observed therefore, that at the introduction of Christianity, two distinct purposes had to be effected: first, to attest the truth of the revelation; secondly, to establish the Church.

I will briefly draw attention to this latter portion of the subject, as far as it affects certain portions of the supernatural action affirmed in the New Testament. I allude to a certain class of miracles, such as the cure of the cripple at Lystra, those wrought by the passing of Peter's shadow, and by garments brought from Paul's person, and some others; also to the entire class of the supernatural gifts mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and so frequently referred to in the Epistles.

One of the greatest difficulties which beset the missionary is to obtain a hearing in the midst of the hostile elements by which he is surrounded. Yet to obtain this is the necessary condition of carrying on his work. In this respect, the modern missionary possesses great advantages compared with the primitive missionary of Christianity. He belongs to a superior civilization, and is therefore able to bring to bear the whole force of a higher on a

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lower one. This was exactly reversed in the case of the primitive missionaries. Instead of being able to bring to bear the prestige of a high civilization on those among whom they laboured, they belonged to a despised race; or if the missionary himself was a member of the race whom he addressed, he belonged to the lower sections of society. How was this enormous deficiency to be supplied? How was a man thus despised to obtain a hearing for the message with which he was charged? The New Testament affirms that the deficiency was supplied by imparting to the early Church a certain number of supernatural endowments, which, when once communicated, acted like our ordinary faculties; also that a supernatural gift of curing certain diseases was imparted to particular individuals, a gift which was exactly suited to obtain an attentive hearing for their message.

Among the supernatural gifts which St. Paul affirms to have been communicated to the Church, there were two of which he asserts that the operation was distinct, but which are merged in the modern idea of miracles. These he designated by the expressions *ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων*, or the inworking of powers; and *χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων*, endowments of healing powers. The distinction in function between these powers is affirmed by him no less than three times; what it consisted in, we are only able to judge from the terms themselves, and the nature of the case. There is every probability that the distinction points to a higher and a lower exercise of supernatural power; the one being the evidential miracle properly so called, and the other a supernatural knowledge of how to effect cures—a gift which would be exactly suited to enable the missionary to obtain that attentive hearing of his message which he so urgently required. The Epistle of St. James furnishes us with a general idea of the nature of the gift, when he directs, that in case a person was sick, the elders of the Church were to be sent for, who were to pray over the sick man, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord; “And the prayer of faith,” says he, “shall save the sick; and the Lord

shall raise him up.” (James v. 15.) The whole description points [361] to a cure which, although in a measure supernatural, was not instantaneous; the latter point being one which would be required to make a miracle in the proper sense of the word evidential. A power of effecting cures, however, whether by a knowledge of natural means supernaturally acquired, or by supernatural agency, would be one which would obtain for the despised Jewish missionary a hearing in Gentile cities, which otherwise he would be unable to obtain.

To such a class of supernatural operations would belong such cures as those effected by the conveyance of handkerchiefs and aprons from St. Paul's body to the sick. These are only asserted to have taken place on one occasion, at Ephesus, a city greatly addicted to the arts of magic. They were adapted to the circumstances of the place, where the Apostle had to encounter a particular form of supernaturalism; and they would have been exactly suited to meet the difficulty in question. The historian tells us that the success was great, for many of those who had used magical arts came forward and confessed their deeds, collected together their magical books, which were worth a considerable sum of money, and publicly burned them. The same observations apply to Peter's shadow. Although the historian does not tell us that cures were wrought by it, yet the narrative presupposes that a large outburst of supernatural power took place in connection with Peter's person. Although the cure of the cripple at Lystra belongs to a class of miracles which is strictly evidential, yet the immediate occasion of its performance seems to have been with the view of arousing the attention of an ignorant heathen population.

But not only had a revelation to be communicated and attested, [362] not only had converts to be made and instructed, but it was also necessary that the foundations of the Church, the visible kingdom of Christ, should be firmly laid, and that it should be established among the visible institutions of the earth. Sufficient attention

has not been paid to this portion of the subject in considering the question of supernatural intervention. The establishment of the Church as a visible institution, which was intended gradually to leaven mankind with the great principles of His revelation, is again and again affirmed by Jesus Christ to have been one of the great purposes of His coming. A description of its character and functions forms the subject of no inconsiderable number of His parables, and it is the great end and purpose for which He gave the great final Apostolic commission to go and gather it together out of all the nations of the earth.

The Church of Christ had therefore to be formed into a community out of the most heterogeneous elements. It was destined not for a momentary existence, but for a continuous growth, so as to leaven human nature with its influences. The creation of such a society was a conception so bold that it had never previously entered the head of either poet or philosopher. Those with whom I am reasoning will not deny that the attempt was a very arduous, and to all appearance a most chimerical one.

Yet it is the most certain of facts that the Church of Christ is now in the nineteenth century of its existence. The boldness of the undertaking will be more fully estimated when we reflect that the Church was intended to be a society which, while existing in the world, should differ in its essential character from all the other societies on the earth. Its action was to be entirely spiritual and moral. Its founder intended it to be invested with no coercive powers. The appeal was to be, not to force, but to conscience.

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Those who offered to enroll themselves as the subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom had to be formed into a social organization. Unless this could be effected, one of the great objects for which the revelation was given must have proved a failure. The elements of which it had to be composed were of the most unpromising description. The first converts consisted of no small number of Jews and proselytes, who were extensively leavened with the narrowest prejudices of Judaism. When the Gentiles

began to join the new community, its members were chiefly derived from the lower ranks of society, including a considerable number of slaves. The infant Church embraced a great diversity of opinions and characters. When converts were made, the time for their instruction was short. Yet such an institution had to contend with mighty civilization, the habits and prejudices of existing society, the self-interest of a corrupt religion, and the opposition of a powerful government.

Such were some of the difficulties which had to be surmounted before this new institution could be firmly planted among the existing societies of the world, and expand itself with the life which was peculiarly its own. If the primitive followers of Jesus were animated by the credulous superstition which unbelievers delight in attributing to them, none should be better qualified than they to form a judgment of the difficulties which must have beset their path. Yet these have been surmounted. To this fact the vigorous life of the Church during eighteen centuries testifies. It has not only held its ground, but it has succeeded in leavening all existing civilizations with its influences. How has this been accomplished? The Apostolic Epistles return an answer. They affirm that the early converts were endowed with a number of supernatural gifts, exactly fitted to qualify them for the various functions which they were called upon to discharge. I subjoin a list of them, as they are directly affirmed by St. Paul to be then existing in the Corinthian Church. They were nine in number, each of which is asserted by him to have had a distinct and separate function and subject-matter: the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, working of miracles, endowments of healing powers, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation. It does not appear whether this last is meant to be exhaustive of the supernatural mental endowments which the members of the early churches supposed themselves to possess, or whether they were varied for the purpose of meeting particular exigences. Nor do I ask those with whom I am reasoning to

accept this statement as a true account of an objective fact; but only that they were supposed to be so by the Apostle and those to whom he wrote. It is plain, however, that these supernatural endowments, if real, were precisely such as the Church was in urgent need of, as the instrumentality for welding together the discordant elements of which it was composed, and enabling it firmly to plant itself in the soil of human nature.

These supernatural gifts of the Spirit, with two exceptions, produced no results on external nature. They constituted enlargements of the powers of the human mind. As such, they cannot with strict propriety be said to belong to the class of evidential miracles, although like all other supernatural operations of which God is the Author, they cannot fail to be indirectly evidential. It is important to observe that they belong to a separate class of supernatural phenomena, which were as necessary in reference to the Christian revelation, contemplating as it did the institution of a divine society, as the order of supernatural manifestations which directly attested the divine mission of Jesus Christ and His Apostles. If this was their end and purpose we can understand why they were withdrawn at a very early period, before they could be submitted to the tests of our modern *savants*. They were given for a special purpose, and they were withdrawn when they had accomplished it. The Apostle who affirms their existence asserts that they were not intended permanently to continue in the Church.

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There is one more allegation which is occasionally urged against the miracles of the New Testament, and which I must briefly consider. It is alleged that pious frauds have been very general in all ages of Christian history; that many good men have not hesitated to participate in them; and that literary forgeries were very abundant in the first ages of Christianity, and were even common in the days of the Apostles. It is insinuated that this state of mind throws great suspicion on the alleged miracles of the apostolic age.

As the charge of pious fraud is not made against Jesus himself or his immediate followers, it is difficult to meet so indefinite an objection. It seems to be put in to add force to others, rather than for its intrinsic value. Modern unbelievers express a nearly unanimous concurrence in endeavouring to account for the miracles of the New Testament, by assuming that the followers of Jesus were the victims of the most intense enthusiasm, superstition, and credulity. It is difficult to comprehend, on the assumption that the existence of the supernatural portions of the New Testament is due to these causes, how direct fraud could have anything to do with the concoction of these miraculous stories. Intense enthusiasm and fanaticism, and deliberate fraud, are usually opposite poles of character; and if we call in one to account for these miracles, we must exclude the other from exerting an influence on their origination. To make the charge of any avail against the narratives of the Gospel, it is necessary not to prove that pious frauds were common in the second, third, or fourth century, or even in the first, but to establish directly either that Jesus professed to work miracles while He knew that they were not such, or that His followers deliberately invented a number of miraculous stories and attributed them to Him, well knowing that He had performed none. The charge that the miracles of the New Testament originated in enthusiasm and credulity is a definite one, and can be definitely met. So is the one that they originated in deliberate fraud. So would be the charge that the innocent followers of Jesus were imposed upon by fraudulent impostors. But to combine the charge of intense enthusiasm and credulity with that of conscious fraud, is a mode of reasoning which contains the grounds of its own refutation. [366]

It is no doubt a fact, that the practice of literary forgery was not unknown to the early ages of Christianity. St. Paul seems to have thought that there were in the world impostors daring enough to attempt to forge a letter in his name, and to try to foist it on the churches which he had planted, as a genuine production.

But the existence of such impostors has no bearing whatever on the question whether the miracles recorded in the New Testament are facts or fiction. Did not St. Paul himself assert that he had performed miracles? Was he an impostor? Did he not believe that Jesus Christ in veritable reality rose from the dead? What have such beliefs to do with the existence of a set of daring literary impostors? Happily, however, the whole of this class of ancient writers were utter bunglers in the art of fictitious composition. It is a universal characteristic of them, that they were entirely unable to throw themselves into the spirit of former times, or of the persons whose names they assumed. In their references to history, geography, manners, customs, and character, they lay themselves open at almost every point to certain detection. There is good reason for believing that no forger or writer of fiction in the ancient world has succeeded in his art. In investing fiction with apparent probability, the modern world has completely outstript the ancient. Still, however, even in the most perfect works, when the fictions are extended over a wide sphere of action, no amount of genius will protect a writer from leaving some weak point unguarded. It is probably not too much to say that neither in ancient nor modern times, has a fictitious work or a forgery been able to maintain its ground against the apparatus which can be brought to bear on it by a sound and rational criticism.

Most of the other objections which are adduced against the miracles of the New Testament have been answered in principle under the foregoing heads. I must now adduce some of the most important considerations which prove them to have been historical facts.

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## Chapter XVII. The Historical Evidence On Which The Great Facts Of Christianity Rest—General Considerations.

It has been urged by opponents, that the defenders of historical Christianity rest content with endeavouring to prove that miracles are possible or probable; but that they neglect an all-important part of their duty, viz.: that of adducing historical proof that miracles have been actually performed. If the fact is as here stated, there can be no doubt that works which profess to discuss the subject of miracles, and omit to give a clear statement of the chief points of the evidence which can be adduced to prove that they have actually occurred, must be unsatisfactory. To answer the objections which are urged to prove that miracles are impossible, or which affirm on general principles that all evidence in their favour is unworthy of credit, is an essential preliminary to the consideration of the historical evidence which can be adduced to prove their actual occurrence. But to afford proof, that as facts they rest upon an adequate attestation, is the essential duty of every one who asserts their reality. To this portion of the work I will now proceed to address myself.

What then is the position occupied by the Christian advocate? Is it requisite in order to establish the truth of Christianity, that he should give an historical proof of everyone of the miracles recorded in the New Testament? I answer this question emphatically in the negative, and for the following reason. The New Testament itself, while it affirm that many miracles have

been performed, rests the truth of Christianity on one miracle alone, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the great event which, according to the Acts of the Apostles, the early missionaries urged as the distinctive proof of their Master's divine mission. The views expressed in the Apostolic Epistles are precisely similar. In them, the entire evidence of the truth of our Lord's divine mission is made to centre in the fact of His resurrection. Not only is the great fact referred to either directly or indirectly in almost every page, but St. Paul has distinctly rested the truth of Christianity on the reality of its occurrence. Such a statement is made respecting no other miraculous event recorded in the New Testament. It is the miracle of miracles, unique and alone, by which the seal of God was affixed to the divine mission of Jesus Christ. It formed the *locus standi* of the Church, and the sole ground of its existence. If it was not an objective fact, those who testified to its occurrence must have been false witnesses, and the whole of Christianity either a delusion or an imposture.

It follows, therefore, that this great miracle forms the very key of the Christian position. Everything else is an outwork, an important one it may be, but yet an outwork. If this position can be successfully assailed, the entire fortress of Christianity must surrender at discretion. If, on the other hand, the most determined unbeliever could be convinced that there is good historical evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he would find no difficulty in accepting the Gospels as historical documents, and the whole *à priori* objection against them would disappear.

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Again: If the Resurrection of Christ is a fact, Christianity must be a divine revelation. The perfect historical accuracy of the Gospels in minute details may be still open to question; deep thought and careful investigation may be necessary for ascertaining the precise amount of truth communicated by that revelation; past ages may have erred in its interpretation, or in their deductions from it; many questions as to the relation in which revelation stands to science or history may be open ones—all

this is both conceivable and possible—but still, if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, his entire manifestation, work, and teaching, must be a communication from God to man.

This then is my position. The real question stands within very narrow limits. The miracle that requires strong historical proof is the Resurrection. The other supernatural occurrences recorded in the Gospels are important portions of the revelation made by Christ. They were important evidences to those who witnessed them. But to us in these latter times the one great question is: Is the Resurrection capable of being established as an actual occurrence? If it is, it will carry with it all the others. If it is not, the proof of the others will fall along with it.

Let us examine the historical conditions of the case. Christianity differs from all other religions in professing not to consist of a mass of abstract dogmatic statements, but to be founded on, and largely to consist of, a number of historical facts. There are unquestionably a considerable number of dogmatic statements in the pages of the New Testament; but they profess to grow out of the facts and to be explanations of them. The facts form, so to say, the essence of the religion. The Christianity of the New Testament is a growth which encircles itself around the person of its founder in a manner in which no other system of thought or religion, which has existed among men, has ever done. If we take the person of Jesus Christ out of the New Testament, the whole system of its teaching crumbles into nothingness. If we remove the person of its founder from every other system of human thought—its great religions form no exception—the system remains intact. This is a very striking peculiarity in Christianity. In this respect it stands absolutely unique. [371]

But as Christianity is founded on an historical person, who lived in a particular age, so He is the founder of a great historical institution, the Christian Church. This institution differs from every other society which has ever existed, in that both its origination and its continued existence are inextricably bound up

with the person of its founder. Other societies could exist even if it could be proved that their reputed founders were creations of the imagination; but this would be fatal to the life of the Church of Christ. If it could be proved that Jesus Christ was a myth, or nothing but a learned Rabbi, the Christian Church, mighty society as it is, would certainly collapse. The Christian Church without Christ would be far more out of place than the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. In this respect it is a institution unique among all those which the world has ever seen, whether political or religious.

This great society, which now comprehends a vast majority of the intelligence of mankind, and all the progressive nations of the world, had a definite beginning in historical times. It differs wholly from a philosophic sect, whose bond of union consists in the acceptance of a body of dogmatic teaching. It is and ever has been an organized society with specific purposes and aims, and one which has ever meditated schemes of conquest. It differs widely from all political institutions, and yet ever since its birth it has taken a place beside them.

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The origin of this society is not lost, like that of many others, in the mists of the hoary past. History enables us to assign a definite time when this society was certainly not in existence. It no less definitely marks out a period when it not only was in existence, but had entered on a condition of active growth. Its origin did not take place in the cloud-land of the mythic or the semi-mythic period of history, but in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, and in a country occupied by Roman garrisons, and presided over by Roman governors.

It will be objected that our only accounts of the causes which led to the organization of this society are writings composed by its own members. In this there is nothing peculiar; for until societies have grown sufficiently powerful to attract the attention of the world outside them, there can be no other source of information. Still the fact can be ascertained on the most unquestionable

authority, that at a certain date this society was not in existence, and that within a certain number of years afterwards, it was not only in existence, but rapidly increasing; and that it originated in Jesus Christ, who was put to death by the Roman government.

This society, therefore, came into existence at a definite period of time. Its early writers give us an account of how it originated. They affirm that its founder was Jesus Christ; and that, having been interrupted by His death, it was called into a new existence by His resurrection. To this great event they most positively affirm that the origin of the Church, as an institution, was due. To the belief in it as a fact, it has certainly owed its gradual enlargement, until it has attained its present dimensions after more than eighteen centuries of existence. To this belief is due the great moral power which it has exercised on mankind; and if its members could be persuaded that the belief in the Resurrection of its founder was a mere delusion, great as this society is, it would certainly perish. [373]

There are five facts connected with the origin of this society, which no one who believes in the possibility of historic truth will dispute.

First: That at the year A.D. 25, this society had no existence.

Secondly: That in A.D. 40, it was in a state of vigorous growth.

Thirdly: That it was founded by Jesus Christ.

Fourthly: That His crucifixion by the Roman government caused its temporary collapse.

Fifthly: That an event of some kind, which took place shortly after His death, imparted to it a new vitality, which it has never lost to the present hour, and which has caused it to exert a mightier influence on mankind than any other community, whether political or religious, that has ever existed.

The problem, therefore, which history has to solve, is to account for the renewed life, the marvellous progress, the intense vitality of this society, and the mighty influence which it has exerted on the destinies of mankind; originating as it did in the

smallest possible beginnings, and in a manner differing from all other existing institutions.

The Christian Church has propounded, from the first commencement of its renewed life, its own solution of this problem. It is: that its founder, after having been crucified, rose again from the dead. This account has this clear and obvious advantage, that if it be true, it sufficiently accounts for all the phenomena whose existence we have to solve. His resurrection was a power adequate to revive the society after its temporary collapse, to impart to it its mighty moral and spiritual energy, and to impress on the original work and teaching of Jesus, a new and peculiar aspect. In short, assuming the Resurrection to have been a fact, it assigns a cause adequate to account for all the phenomena which have been presented by the Church. Here then we have firm ground on which to take our stand; viz., the belief of this society as to its origin, capable of being traced historically to the first hour of its renewed life, and which also, if true, affords a rational account of it.

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But further; besides this account which the Church has given of its own origin, there is no rival account of it in existence. As far as historical documents are concerned, there is no other. All others are founded on conjecture.

Our opponents, however, affirm that the alleged fact which the Church asserts to have been the cause of its existence is incredible, because all miracles are impossible. Then, leaving *à priori* grounds, they also affirm that the evidence to prove the Resurrection to have been an historical fact is insufficient for the purpose.

The Church, however, is clearly in possession of a vantage-ground, from which it is not easy to dislodge her. The cause which she alleges is adequate to account for all the phenomena.

The *onus probandi* therefore clearly rests on the opponents of Christianity. If they deny the truth of the fact which the Church has ever handed down as the true account of her origin, they are

bound not only to show that it is devoid of historical attestation, but to propound a theory which will adequately account for all the facts to which history testifies. It is clear that nothing short of this is required of them as philosophical historians. Certain facts are plain and undeniable. A society, of a very special character, sprang into existence at a definite point of history, and has exerted a mightier influence than any other on the destinies of man. If therefore they reject the account which the Church herself gives, they are bound to supply a rational account of how this great society came into being; how the phenomena which constitute its history have been brought about; and what it was that imparted to it its vitality and power. We are in the presence of the greatest institution with which history is acquainted, founded as it is on the greatest ideal conception (if it is not historical) which the human mind has ever succeeded in inventing. Both these came into existence, not in pre-historic times, but in the midst of a period of contemporaneous history. Respecting the times, the modes of thought, and the general character of the period, we have extensive historical data. The religious, moral, and philosophical opinions, and the general line of thought, are well known. The various forces which were then in activity we are able to appreciate. With all these data before him, it is incumbent on the philosophical historian to give us an account of the moral and religious forces in activity at this period, which were capable of creating the Christian Church, and generating its conception of the ideal Christ. If it is alleged that after the utmost investigation it is impossible to account for their origin by the action of any known moral or spiritual forces acting on the human mind, this would be at once to confess that the origin of Christianity and the Church is entirely abnormal, or in other words, that it is a moral and spiritual miracle. [375]

To do unbelievers justice, they have not been slow to recognize the fact that if they reject the account which the Church has given of its origin, they are bound to give us a rational one [376]

of how Christianity came into existence. Accordingly, theory after theory has been propounded on this subject. No intellectual exertion has been spared to point out how Christianity and the Church have succeeded in getting into existence, and in effecting their religious and moral conquests, by forces purely human, and without the aid of any supernatural intervention.

One thing respecting these theories is worthy of particular attention. No unbeliever has as yet been able to suggest one which has succeeded in commanding, I will not say the universal, but even the general assent of the unbelieving world. Theory after theory has been propounded and abandoned. It is therefore clear that the difficulty of accounting for the origin of Christianity and the Church through the action of the ordinary forces that operate on the human mind, is extreme. There is no analogous case in the whole history of man. Let me briefly enumerate the chief principles which have been invoked to aid in the solution of this problem.

First, it has been attempted to get rid of the supernatural elements contained in the Gospels by representing them as distorted representations of real facts. This has been justly abandoned as childish. Then came the mythic and legendary theories. These, having been found inadequate, have been supplemented by various theories of development of ideas; and the supposition of a violent party spirit existing in the Church, which under the influence of a spirit of accommodation produced various compromises; a mass of varied and often contending opinions seething in the bosom of a society continually threatened with disruption, until they somehow succeeded in welding themselves together; enthusiasm, fanaticism, boundless credulity, aided by a prodigious power of mythic and legendary invention, and whenever occasion so required, the presence of a moral atmosphere, which on great emergencies did not shrink from deliberate imposture. All these, in ever varying degrees and proportions, have been pressed into the service of creating the Church, the ideal Christ,

and the Christianity of the New Testament. It is impossible in a work like the present to examine these various theories, and show their inadequacy as philosophical explanations of the fact. This I have already done in a former work,<sup>5</sup> to which I must refer the reader for their refutation. A few observations only will be necessary in this place.

First: The positions taken by unbelievers are theories, which rest on the smallest basis of historical evidence. I readily admit that where there is a known fact, but the recollection of the events which would give an account of its origin has perished, if a theory can be propounded which fully accounts for the fact, then it has a right to take its place as an historical event which rests on evidence of the highest probability. An example derived from the mode in which the study of comparative philology discloses the history of the past will explain my meaning. We have before us the facts of language. The history of those who formerly used it has perished; the accounts of their migrations have nowhere been preserved. But certain facts of comparative philology justify the assumption that certain primitive races of men must have migrated in particular directions. These assumed migrations are really a theory, but one which is exactly adequate [378] to account for the facts which language unquestionably presents. Thus the facts of the Indo-Germanic languages justify the assumption that in the pre-historic ages, migrations westward must have taken place, of which history contains no record. Still the theory affords so perfect an explanation of the facts, that the occurrence of the migrations is as certain as if they had been recorded by contemporaneous writers. On similar grounds it has been inferred with a degree of probability so high as to be equal to certainty, that a language earlier than the Sanskrit, and from which both it and the Indo-Germanic family of languages have been derived, was spoken by a previous race. Investigations of

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<sup>5</sup> "The Jesus of the Evangelists."

this kind are largely adding to our historical knowledge.

Let us observe the basis on which such arguments rest. In all these cases we have before us not mere conjectures, but a distinct and positive fact, or set of facts. The connecting links are missing. By the aid of conjecture we propound a theory; or in other words, we suppose a set of events to have occurred, which, if they really happened, would be adequate to account for the facts in question. When they thus account for them, and for them alone, and no other conjectural occurrence will do so, the assumed fact is fully entitled to take its place in history as an event which has actually happened. The reason of this is, that it can stand the test of historical verification.

A problem similar to that above referred to is the one which those who deny the historical truth of the Gospels are called upon to solve. We are in the presence of certain unquestionable historical facts, viz., the five above referred to, and many others. The denial of the truth of the Christian account leaves them without the connecting link which once united them. What was that link? It can only be supplied by conjecture. But to enable such a conjectural fact or facts to take rank as historical events, they must be adequate to account for the facts, and be true to human nature, and to the circumstances of the case; in other words, they must be capable of enduring a rigid historical verification. Theories which cannot endure this are no better than ropes of sand. This is the character of the theories which have been propounded to account for the Christianity of the New Testament.

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Let me illustrate this by one of the favourite theories used by unbelievers for this purpose. We are told that a number of extremely hostile factions divided the primitive Church. Of these the followers of James, Peter, and Paul may be taken as fairly representative. These were in a state of great hostility to each other, and went on gradually elaborating a Christianity that was in conformity with their own views and tastes. After a while it

occurred to these hostile parties that it would be advantageous to compromise their differences. An influential person, such as we may suppose the author of the Acts of the Apostles to have been, composed a history, for the purpose of making matters smooth, and to afford a common ground of union among the contending factions. This process was repeated as often as was necessary; and in good time, by the aid of myth and legend, and the whole of the needful apparatus, appeared the Christianity of the New Testament, and the Church was consolidated out of these varied elements.

Such theories grievously offend against the logic of history, and are in direct variance with the facts of human life. We are here in the midst of a whole mass of conjectural facts, each of which is imagined to account for the existence of the other; and the whole of them taken together fail to give an adequate solution of the phenomena before us. They are both untrue to human nature and unable to account for either the facts of Christianity or the existence of the Church. I must content myself with selecting one of them for illustration. We are asked to believe that the Church was divided into a number of parties, the opposition between whom was violent; and that these effected a number of compromises, out of which was ultimately evolved a common Christianity. This result is in direct contradiction to the testimony of the religious history of man. Religious parties do not effect compromises, but go on contending and widening their differences, until their enthusiasm wears out and they die of inanition. To this the history of all sects bears ample testimony, and the greater the enthusiasm and not unfrequently the lesser the grounds of difference, the greater the animosity. Compromises between hostile sects, in the rare cases in which they have taken place, have been brought about by means of external coercion. The religious history of mankind presents no example of furious religious parties, while animated by a living enthusiasm, voluntarily coalescing on the general principle of compromise. Witness [380]

[381] the unsuccessful attempts at compromise between the Eastern and Western Churches, even when it was urged by the strongest external pressure. Witness the sects which grew out of the Reformation. Compromises have frequently originated among politicians, but these have in vain tried their healing influences among contending sects. Occasionally they have been brought about by the aid of pressure exerted by the temporal power, as in the Church of England. Nothing more strongly illustrates the difficulty with which compromise between religious parties can be effected than the failure of the attempts to reconcile the Church of England and the Methodists. The compromiser who will effect this union exists only in the hopes of the future. But we need not confine ourselves to the manifestations of sectarian spirit in connection with Christianity. The Mahometan Church is also divided by sectarian differences. Is there any tendency to produce a common Mahometanism, erected on the basis of compromise? Do Buddhism and Brahminism show any disposition to compromise their differences by fusing them into a common Pantheism which shall suit both parties? The idea of producing a Christianity by a succession of happy compromises entered into by violently hostile parties in the early Church, is a dream which, however plausible it may have seemed in the closet, is rudely dissipated the moment we come in contact with the stern realities of life.

But further: the wide separation of the early Churches from each other; and, according to the opinions of those against whom I am reasoning, their want of a governing power acknowledged by all, must have rendered agreement on the basis of mutual compromise impossible. Compromises are the results of considerations of policy, and are unheard of among fanatics, such as my opponents assert the early followers of Jesus to have been. But what further renders this theory untenable is, that it is compelled to imagine a number of developments accompanied by corresponding compromises between hostile parties, before we

can succeed in evolving the Christianity of the New Testament. Not only does it contradict the history of man; not only is it an assumption made to form the connecting link between other established facts, but it is itself founded on other assumptions. Among these are the assertions made as to the evidence of the party spirit existing in the Church, and the opposition between its leaders. Party spirit we know to have existed, but not with the violence which this theory is compelled to postulate. The statement also that the doctrinal opposition between these parties was of so declared a type is not founded on the evidence that we possess, but on a highly exaggerated view of it, distorted for the purpose of adding strength to the theory; or, in other words, it is founded on a set of unwarranted assumptions. The passages in the New Testament alleged to prove the declared opposition between the leaders of the Church, which this theory is compelled to pre-suppose, can only be made to do so by taking it for granted that they do. For example, the assertion that the person denounced in the Epistles to the Seven Churches in the book of Revelation, is St. Paul, is a simply gratuitous one, the only evidence for which is the will and pleasure of those who make it. The theory, therefore, not only contradicts the history of man, but is based upon a number of alleged facts which are either absolute assumptions or exaggerations, and fail to give any account of the origin of Christianity which will stand the test of the scrutiny of a sound philosophy. [382]

The mythic and legendary theories are equally unable to account for the facts as they stand in the New Testament. I cannot here attempt to follow them in their innumerable windings. Taken by themselves they are not now accepted as adequate accounts of them, but other theories are called in to aid them. Still, whatever assistance these are supposed to impart, myth and legend must always hold a prominent place in the systems of those who endeavour to account for the origin of the Gospels on purely human principles. As they contain a large supernatural element, [383]

it is certain that if this is not historical, it must have originated in some species of fiction, *i.e.* either in the mythic and legendary spirit, or in pure invention. Hence the use of myths and legends must always be freely invoked by those who, while they deny the historical character of the Gospels, do not go to the length of accusing the original followers of Jesus of deliberate invention.

I must here draw attention to one particular portion of the evidence, the full significance of which I have described elsewhere. Whatever opinions may be formed as to the unhistorical character of the Gospels, there is one fact respecting them as to which believers and unbelievers must alike agree, namely that they contain a delineation of the most perfect conception ever formed by the mind of man, the character of Jesus Christ. There it is, beyond the power of contradiction; the overwhelming majority of men possessed of the most powerful minds have recognized it as the greatest of ideals, as well as the millions of ordinary men to whom it has been the object of supreme admiration and attraction. The following questions respecting it therefore urgently demand an answer.

If the Gospels are a mere collection of mythic and legendary stories, generated and put together in the manner affirmed by those who deny their historical character, how got this great character there? If the fables of which they are composed are the inventions of many minds, whence its unity? If their inventors were credulous enthusiasts and fanatics, whence its perfection? If they were implicated in all the superstitions of the age, whence its moral elevation? Of what order of thought then existing is it the embodiment? How could the credulity which was necessary for the acceptance of such fictions, or how could the spirit which invented them, have conceived these moral elements? There the character is—let us be distinctly informed how it was put together; how much of it is fact, and how much fiction; how the fictions were welded together with the facts so as to compose the whole; and what class or order of minds in the early Church was

equal to its elaboration. This delineation must have been made at an early period, and could not have been a late invention; for it is substantially the same as that contained in those Epistles of St. Paul, which are acknowledged to have been written within thirty years of the date of the Crucifixion. A distinct answer to these questions is demanded of those who affirm that the Gospels have no value as histories. It is impossible to deny that they have a most important bearing on the present question. Why do not unbelievers set themselves to grapple with this problem?

But the value to be assigned to the Gospels as histories must be a matter for subsequent consideration. At present I need simply draw attention to the fact that while the opponents of Christianity fully recognize the necessity of propounding a rational theory of its origin, the more we examine their various theories in detail, the more apparent becomes their inadequacy to account for the phenomena. The fact, already alluded to, that unbelievers cannot come to any agreement among themselves on this subject, shows that they find the problem extremely difficult of solution. The plausibility of their theories is due to the abstract and general form in which they are presented. Various causes are held up without any discrimination as to what each of them is capable of effecting; and the wished-for result is ascribed to their combined action. But when we analyse the various forces at their command, ascertain the mode of their action, the difficulties they would have to encounter before they could effectuate their results, and examine whether they are true to the facts of human nature as testified to by the long course of history, it is not too much to affirm that all the investigations of unbelievers have completely failed to give an account of the origin of Christianity which can take the place of that handed down to us by the Church. Until this can be given, notwithstanding all the expenditure of intellect on the question, we are justified in affirming that the problem is insoluble, although Christianity originated in a period unquestionably historical, in the midst of the Roman Empire over which

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it rapidly spread, despite the opposition of the government and the entire organization of society.

Before proceeding to the direct considerations by which the great fact of Christianity is attested, I must take a general glance at the nature of the materials which we have at our command, and at their historical value.

I shall take as my starting-point the five facts already mentioned, the historical certainty of which it is needless to prove. My starting-point, therefore, is the continuous existence of the Church, which came into being at a definite period of time, to which it can be traced up in one unbroken succession. This society has always affirmed that its corporate existence, as well as the life of its individual members, is due to the Resurrection of its founder. I shall also carefully examine and estimate the contemporaneous evidence afforded by the Epistles of St. Paul, especially those which are acknowledged to be genuine, as well as that of the other writings of the New Testament, for the purpose of estimating the value of their testimony on this subject. Even if some of these writings are not allowed by unbelievers to be the productions of the persons whose names they bear, still they are all of a very early date, and unquestionably reflect the thoughts and ideas of those who wrote them, and of the persons to whom they are addressed. But before I enter on my immediate subject, it will be necessary to lay down the leading principles of historical evidence, and to estimate the value of tradition as a testimony to historical facts.

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I am fully prepared to abide by the chief principles laid down by Sir G. C. Lewis on this subject in his great work on the *Credibility of Early Roman History*. They are generally considered to be sufficiently severe and exacting. By many they are viewed as of far too stringent a character. The evidence on which the great fact of the Resurrection rests, will endure their most rigid application. They have this great advantage, that they are laid down for the investigation of a subject purely secular, with which

religion has nothing to do. They are therefore wholly free from religious bias, and are simply the principles for testing the claims of ordinary facts on our belief. If the chief facts of Christianity can stand this scrutiny, it is impossible to affirm that they are not supported by the strongest historical testimony.

1. Every alleged fact, in order to be entitled to our belief, must be shown to rest on direct contemporaneous testimony, or that which is its historical equivalent.

This rule is by no means intended to affirm that every fact for which contemporaneous testimony can be adduced is true; but only that it is to be accepted as such when there is no reason for disbelieving it. We must have some means to enable us to form a judgment of the knowledge and veracity of the informant. It remains for consideration, when the direct testimony of a contemporary is not to be had, as must be frequently the case with events long past, what may be considered as its historical equivalent?

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It must be kept in mind that one of the most valuable forms of contemporaneous testimony, if not the most valuable of all, is a set of letters which contain various and definite allusions to the current events, habits, and modes of thought of the time. For certain purposes these are far more valuable than formal histories. The latter are frequently written under the influence of party spirit, partiality, or bias. The writer of a history is usually on his guard, has carefully considered what he says, and affords us but little opportunity of interrogating him. But the writer of a letter, unless he has special reasons for being guarded, places before his correspondent his entire mind. We are therefore capable of interrogating him. He often lets us into the secret causes of events. He also makes a number of incidental allusions to events which are passing. These form testimony of a most valuable kind. We can in a manner almost converse with him. As a confirmation of the facts which formal histories narrate, and as letting us into the secret springs of events, a series of letters, written by persons

who were actively engaged in them, are historical documents of the highest order. Their value is increased when they bear all the appearance of coming from the writer's heart. Nothing is more striking than the happy results which have accrued from the extensive use made by modern historians of original correspondence. It is not too much to say that it has largely modified our view of events, as they have been reported in formal histories. Another very high form of contemporaneous testimony is the existence of institutions and monuments which can be certainly traced up to a particular period, and which owed their existence to events of that period. These form a species of living witnesses to the truth of the facts out of which they have originated, and as far as their testimony goes, it is incapable of falsehood. The most valuable testimony of this kind is a great institution of which we possess definite evidence that it originated in a particular event, or in the belief of it. This kind of evidence Christianity possesses in the highest form, in the continued existence of that great institution, the Christian Church.

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2. Testimony has a general credibility, subject of course to the knowledge and honesty of the informant, when the reports are derived from those who lived during the generation in which a particular event occurred, supposing it to have been one of sufficient notoriety to attract attention, and that the reporter possessed adequate means of information, and investigated it with sufficient care. We are always justified in assuming that he tells the truth unless there are reasons for suspecting the contrary.

3. Narratives of events which a man has heard from his father or his contemporaries, but which happened before his own recollection, are for the purpose of history, (but subject to the requisite qualifications) fair representations of contemporaneous testimony.

History admits hearsay testimony under proper restrictions. The knowledge of the past would be impossible, if it were to allow itself to be fettered by the technical rules which have been

introduced into the administration of justice. The all-important considerations with the historian, are the notoriety of the fact and the truthfulness of the informant. Facts that a man may have heard detailed by his grandfather or his contemporaries as having happened in their time stand as representations of contemporaneous testimony in the same position as those derived from the earlier generation. [389]

4. But when a third stage is interposed in the transmission of events, as for instance when we learn from our fathers or grandfathers what they have learnt from theirs, an element of uncertainty is introduced. Still an historian, writing after such an interval of time, if he sifted evidence with care, would be able to report with accuracy all the great events, whatever difficulty he might have in ascertaining the minor details. Within this period abundance of sources of accurate information exist on all points of importance, although the details gradually fade out of people's recollections. After this interval, the accounts of events are likely to receive a certain amount of colouring, according to the prejudices of the narrators; but the interval is too short, and the remembrance of them too recent, to allow of their becoming incrustated with important mythical additions. All the materials for investigation are in existence, and within the reach of the honest historian. He might find difficulty in arranging the details in historical sequence; but if he does not give an accurate account of the great outlines, it is owing, not to the want of historical materials, but to the absence of a desire to investigate and report the truth.

5. The limits of time during which tradition can be considered as a sufficiently accurate medium for preserving the memory of events, may be put generally at from one hundred to one hundred and twenty years. Within this period careful investigation and inquiry will enable the historian to report the main features of events with substantial truth, from the testimony of those who were contemporaries, or who derived their information [390]

from those who were. Beyond this period, when the knowledge of occurrences has to pass through three or four media of transmission, tradition becomes an uncertain and untrustworthy informant, and after the lapse of a greater interval, it is utterly unreliable, affording no means of checking the introduction of legendary narratives. There may be a few exceptional cases which have impressed themselves deeply on the public recollection. Occasionally the protracted lives of a few individuals may lengthen the period of trustworthy transmission, but this is an event of such rare occurrence as but slightly to modify the general rule.

It must be observed that there are two cases in which the traditional knowledge of events is transmitted with far more accuracy, and over far longer intervals of time than in ordinary ones, viz., those of families which have an historical importance derived from the actions of their ancestors, and those of bodies of men who have a kind of corporate life, succeeding one another in unbroken succession, especially when this corporate life is founded on the events themselves. This latter case presents the means best adapted for the traditional transmission of facts, and one in which it is hardly possible that they should fail of being accurately transmitted within a reasonable interval of time. This was precisely the position occupied by the Christian Church during the first century of its existence respecting the chief events in the life of its founder.

An example will illustrate this: If there had been no written memorials of the life of John Wesley, there can be no doubt that the society which he founded would have handed down to the present day an account of the chief events of his life, which would have been accurate in its main outlines. Thousands of persons are now living who have conversed with those who have heard him preach; I myself have done so. It would therefore be impossible to impose upon them a wholly mythic account in place of that which would have been handed down by the

Wesleyan body. Yet this society is founded on a set of dogmas, not on the historical facts of its founder's life. The Christian Church therefore was in a far superior position for preserving a substantially accurate account of the chief events in the life of Jesus Christ, yet the interval which separates us from the death of Wesley is greater than that which elapsed between the death of Christ, and the publication of the latest of the Synoptic Gospels, even if we accept the dates which are assigned to them by our opponents.

6. When the knowledge of past events has perished, it is impossible to re-construct them by the aid of conjecture, except within the limits to which I have previously alluded. These limits must be strictly defined, otherwise that which is propounded as history becomes nothing else than a statement of our subjective impressions. Conjectures which cannot stand the test of historical verification cannot be accepted as facts of history.

Nothing is easier than, when facts are wanting, to invent them, and thus bridge over the intervals which lie between others, the connecting links of which have perished. But how are we to know that such conjectural events were real facts, and not mere creations of the imagination? Clearly this can be determined in no other way than by subjecting them to a rigid verification. If they will not endure this, they must be rejected. Historical conjectures have no higher claims for acceptance than scientific ones. Both must be subject to the same tests, and must share the same fate. I do not deny that many such conjectures may have a considerable degree of plausibility; but, unless we rigidly reject from the rank of historic facts those that break down under the test of verification, histories will be converted into novels or poems. If our knowledge of the connecting links between events in the history of the past has perished, we shall not improve it by imagining facts, and calling the result by the name of history.

We cannot be too guarded in this particular subject, because an almost boundless license has been introduced into the present

controversy. Pure creations of the imagination, which it is impossible to verify, are constantly propounded as facts in the history of the past. I by no means wish to deny that both parties must plead guilty to the charge of this species of historical forgery. The fact may be unpleasant, but we shall do no good by refusing to recognize it. When the knowledge of past events has perished, and our conjectures break down under the test of verification, we have nothing to do but to remain content with our ignorance.

If these principles are correct, a considerable number of recently published lives of Jesus, and other similar compositions, have no claim to the designation of historical writings. They are mere novels evolved out of the self-consciousness of their authors. They are nothing but simple imaginations of what, under certain conjectural circumstances, might have happened, but are destitute of all evidence that they actually occurred. If history is thus degraded, it must become devoid of all scientific value. I have pressed this point because nowhere is this license of conjectural guessing at events more largely indulged in, than in questions connected with the Bible and its criticism.

## Chapter XVIII. The Testimony Of The Church, And Of St. Paul's Epistles, To The Facts Of Primitive Christianity. Their Historical Value Considered.

I have in the preceding chapter drawn attention to the chief principles of historical evidence, and to the importance of certain classes of historical documents; also to the important bearing which the continued existence of a great institution like the Christian Church has on this subject, especially as its origin can be traced up to a definite period of history. I have further shown that as the Church gives a definite account of its origin, which, if true, is an adequate one; it is incumbent on those who reject this account to propound another which shall be able to stand the application of the principles of a sound philosophy of human nature. I must now consider the evidence which the existence of the Church as a visible institution, and the Epistles of St. Paul, afford to the great facts on which Christianity is based.

If it can be proved beyond question that the Church immediately after it assumed a distinctive form not only believed in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as one among many miraculous facts, but affirmed that the belief in its truth was the one sole ground of its corporate existence, within a very short interval after the date of His crucifixion, it must be admitted, even by unbelievers, to involve a question of the most serious importance. It proves for certain that the belief in one miracle, and

that the greatest of all recorded in the Gospels, was neither a mythic nor a legendary creation. It further follows that if the original followers of Jesus thought that He had risen from the dead, it may be taken as a moral certainty that they must have believed that other supernatural actions were performed by Him during His life. The solution which unbelievers propound as the account of the origin of the miraculous narratives in the Gospels is that they are a gradual creation of a mythic and legendary spirit. Hence their efforts to assign them to the latest possible date. If their publication can be deferred to the early years of the second century, they consider that this would afford the requisite time for surrounding the history of Jesus with a halo of mythic and legendary environment. But if it can be shown that the new-born Christian Church, within a short interval after the Crucifixion, affirmed that the sole ground of its renewed life was the belief in the Resurrection of its founder, the possibility that such belief could have been either mythic or legendary is taken away. Whatever may be urged about the other parts of the story, there remains one miracle (and that the greatest of all), which it is impossible to affirm to have been either a mythical or a legendary creation. If the Church accepted it as the sole ground of its existence, and if that belief can be traced to the hour of its birth, it must have been due either to some species of delusion, or to a fact. If Jesus was thus believed to have risen from the dead, it is useless to assign the belief in His other miracles to a later legendary spirit.

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But further: The Church, within a short number of years from the date of its birth, must have had all the consciousness that it was a young society. It was engaged in a constant struggle for existence, and had before it the alternative of enlarging its numbers, or perishing. A new society constantly struggling for existence could not fail within this interval of time to have the most lively consciousness of what it was to which it owed its origin, and which formed the bond of union among its members.

It must have been to them a constantly recurring thought. Every one must have known that it was an alleged miraculous fact, a supposed Resurrection of one who had been crucified. Was it possible for the members of such a society to avoid looking back with anxiety on the alleged ground of its existence? It was no dogma capable of endless discussion, but a fact. The bond of union was allegiance to a living person. Is it conceivable that this person was not the object of daily interest to its members, or that they did not make His history the subject of earnest inquiry? Can we suppose for one moment that any of them were ignorant of or had forgotten the grounds on which they had joined the new community, or which formed the basis of its life? The recollections of the members of a society which is only between twenty and thirty years old must be fresh.

But it may be said, these people were very credulous. Be it so. Credulous people placed in the circumstances of the Christian Church are never deficient in curiosity. Even if the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus had originated in credulity, the first principles of human nature would have urged them to get all the information which they could respecting it. They were in the exact position to enable them to do this. Within ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years, there must have been plenty of information at hand to enable them to ascertain whether the society to which they belonged did or did not owe its existence to this belief, and to get full information as to the general outline of the story on which it was founded. It is impossible for members of a society whose origin was so recent to have remained ignorant of the circumstances which gave it birth. They must have been handed down by a lively tradition. I conclude therefore, that it would have been simply impossible for the members of the Church, within this short time, to be mistaken as to whether its existence and continued life was due to the belief that its founder had risen from the dead, or whether He was supposed to have worked miracles during His life; and that its belief could not have been

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due to mythic or legendary causes.

The question before us then, becomes clear and definite, freed from the vagueness with which it has been endeavoured to obscure it. If it can be proved that the Christian Church owed its origin to its belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that its renewed life began within the briefest interval after His crucifixion, the whole discussion becomes narrowed into the following issue: Is it possible that such a belief, within so short a time after His death, could have originated in a fiction? Three alternatives are open for our acceptance, and three only; either:

Jesus did not really die, while his followers supposed that He had, and they mistook some appearance of Him after His crucifixion for a resurrection:

Or they imagined that He appeared to some of them after His death, but the appearance was a delusion of their imaginations:

Or He rose from the dead as an objective fact.

Other alternatives there are none; and with respect to this particular miracle, the whole apparatus of myth, legend, development and compromise, which is so liberally used to account for the supernatural portions of the Gospels, is simply worthless as a rational account of the origin of the story.

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A very bold affirmation has been made, that no contemporary testimony can be adduced for the performance of any miracle recorded in the New Testament. This assertion is founded on the supposition that none of the Gospels can be proved to have been written earlier than the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century. It is alleged that they are of very uncertain authorship, that two of them do not profess to communicate anything but second-hand information; and the proof of the early composition of the other two utterly fails. The three first Gospels being thus quietly assigned to the region of myths and legends, and the fourth affirmed to be a forgery, it is asserted that contemporary evidence for the truth of the supernatural narratives of the Gospels wholly disappears.

What then is contemporaneous testimony to a fact? Few persons who actually witness events compose histories of them. There is scarcely an account of a great battle which has been composed by the general who commanded in it; and when such accounts have been published by persons who were actually present, they could have witnessed but a small portion of the events which they describe. Such is the case with the great mass of facts which constitute the history of the past. The chief actors in them are seldom the historians.

But although such persons rarely compose narratives of events at which they were actually present, yet it is quite possible to possess testimony which for all practical purposes is of equal value. As I have already pointed out, such testimony consists of historical documents composed by persons who lived during the time in question, and who had ample means of procuring information from those who must have known the truth of the occurrences. [398]

We possess contemporaneous testimony of the highest order in the Epistles of St. Paul. I have already observed that no documents are of higher historical value than letters composed by persons actively engaged in the events to which they refer. I must now point out specifically the importance of these letters as historical documents.

First: four of the longest of them are admitted, by every school of unbelievers, who have given any consideration to the subject, to be the genuine productions of the Apostle. The evidence, both external and internal, of his authorship, is of the highest character. If it is not valid to prove that they were written by him, all historical certitude is rendered impossible. They are the two to the Corinthians, and those addressed to the Romans and the Galatians. Their importance is greatly enhanced by their presenting to us a more distinct picture of the innermost life of the Apostle than any others which have been attributed to him. To these may be added four more, viz. the two to the Thessalonians, and those

to the Philippians and to Philemon, which, although doubted by some, are yet fully admitted by other unbelievers, among whom is Renan, to be genuine. The internal evidence that the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon were written by the same person who composed those to the Corinthians and Galatians, is as strong as such evidence can possibly be. The whole form of thought is instinct with the presence of the same mind. Nor can the two to the Thessalonians admit of any reasonable doubt. To these follow the two to the Colossians and the Ephesians, for which the evidence is certainly less strong; but Renan admits that it greatly preponderates on the side of their being genuine productions of St. Paul. Altogether, then, we have eight letters which are undoubtedly his, and two more which are probably so; instinct with his mind, and placing before us a vivid picture of the innermost life of the early Church.

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Secondly, as to their date. Six of them were unquestionably written within twenty-eight years after the crucifixion, by the most active agent in the propagation of Christianity, who had been employed in this work for a period of at least eighteen years previously. Let us consider what such a period of time really means. Twenty-eight years is about the period which lies between the present year and the repeal of the corn-laws. While some of those who effected it have passed away, many of those who took a most active part in it are still living. All the events connected with it lie within the period of the most lively historical recollection. Many persons are still alive who can look back with the most perfect reminiscence to the great events of the anti-corn-law agitation. While these persons live, it will be impossible to encircle the chief actors in it with a halo of myth or legend. In precisely the same position must multitudes have stood to the ministry of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of the Christian Church, when these Epistles were written. The fact is worthy of our deepest attention, that when we read these letters and the various statements they contain, we are in the immediate

presence of some of the most important events in history.

Although St. Paul had never seen Jesus himself, yet his age was such when he wrote these letters, that his recollection was good for many years before the commencement of His ministry. Great numbers of persons also were alive whose recollections of events that occurred at a much earlier date must have been distinct and clear. With the early followers of Jesus he had for not less than twenty years every facility for holding communication. Is it to be believed that a man whose entire being was swallowed up in one continuous sacrifice of himself to Jesus Christ, and who was penetrated with the profoundest love towards Him, had not accurately informed himself of the great facts of His earthly life, when during the last twenty years he had enjoyed every means of obtaining information from His followers, and previously had investigated it with the keen scent of an angry persecutor? The idea is incredible. In these letters of St. Paul therefore, as far as they throw light on this subject, we are in the presence of contemporaneous historical evidence of the highest order. [400]

Thirdly: Although these letters were written within so brief an interval after the Crucifixion as from twenty-five to thirty years, yet they afford evidence which carries us up to a much earlier period. St. Paul's conversion dates at least eighteen years earlier than the earliest of them. His testimony therefore is good as to the general nature of the beliefs of the Christian Church during the whole period of his ministry. It proves, among many other things, this all-important point, that the Resurrection of Christ was believed by the whole Christian community, and formed the groundwork of the existence of the Church, within less than ten years after the crucifixion. But the Apostle's hostile connection with the Christian sect dates still earlier. As a persecutor he must have ascertained what were the leading subjects of the Christian belief, and must have subjected the whole matter to a rigid investigation. Above all, he could not have failed to know whether the belief in the Resurrection of Christ was or was not [401]

from its commencement the ground of the renewed life of the Christian Church.

Every consideration must have induced him when a persecutor to make this entire question the subject of a most careful investigation. Nothing was more important than that he should ascertain whether any considerable interval had elapsed between the Crucifixion of Christ and the propagation of the report of His Resurrection; and his means of ascertaining the truth about it must have been complete. To determine this for certain would have been most important in his work of convicting the founders of the new sect of imposture; for if any considerable time had elapsed between the death and reported resurrection, it would have afforded that of which all the theories of unbelief stand in need, a sufficient interval for the delusion to grow and propagate itself; or, if the belief was the result of fraud, for the imposition to be concocted and spread. St. Paul's testimony therefore affords the most conclusive proof that the belief in the Resurrection as a fact was contemporaneous with the foundation of the Church; that it was the cause of its renewed vitality; that no interval could have elapsed between the death of Jesus and His reported resurrection, sufficient for the growth of myth or legend, the fabrication of an imposture, or the gradual spreading of the hallucinations of a single individual among a multitude of persons. In one word, if the belief in the Resurrection originated in the conversion of some subjective delusion into an objective fact, it must have been one which spread with incomprehensible rapidity.

These letters also form the most convincing proof, not only that the Resurrection was universally believed as a fact by the communities to which they were addressed, but that it was accepted by the individual members of these Churches from the first commencement of their Christianity. Although two of these Churches had been planted by St. Paul, that of the Romans was not planted by him, and was of considerable standing when he

wrote the letter. Its fame had spread throughout the whole Christian world. Everything in the Epistle denotes that its Christianity was of no recent growth. Many of these Churches, especially the Jewish portions of them, could carry their recollections up to a much earlier time. It should be carefully observed that the interval of twenty-eight years from the foundation of a sect is a period wholly insufficient for the growth of an hereditary and otiose faith. The majority of the members of these Churches were beyond all doubt actual converts, who had once been either Jews or Pagans. However credulous we may suppose them to have been, their conversion must have been due to an inquiry of some kind. The short period which had elapsed since the foundation of the Church and the supreme interest which the whole of the events and circumstances must have excited in the converts, were precisely what was requisite for preserving traditionary recollections with the utmost soundness. There could have been no doubt in any of their minds whether or not the belief in the Resurrection was the groundwork of their Christianity. They must have known therefore whether it was a story which had gradually spread, or had existed from the beginning; or whether the peculiar form of it was an invention of St. Paul; or whether it was the foundation of the convictions of those by whom they had been converted. The manner in which the fact of the Resurrection is referred to in these Epistles proves that the belief was of no recent growth, but had existed from the beginning. The Epistle to the Romans opens with these words:—“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ ... who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead.*” It is impossible that a writer could have made such a reference as this at the opening of his letter, unless he had been certain that the belief in the Resurrection had been accepted as a fact by those whom he addressed, and by the whole Christian community with whom they were acquainted. [403]

But further: it is utterly incredible that if the converts accepted

the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of their Christianity, they should have contentedly remained ignorant of the facts of His previous history, at a period when there must have been abundant means of obtaining an acquaintance with it.

Fourthly: the value of these letters as historical documents is greatly increased by the fact that a strong spirit of party existed in the Churches. None are more ready to accept the fact that the Church was divided into a number of parties than the opponents of Christianity. Not only have they admitted it, but for their own purposes they have greatly exaggerated it. But it is a weapon which can be used in defence of Christianity more efficaciously than in opposition to it. It is clear on the face of these letters not only that the Churches were divided into parties, but that party-spirit existed in them with considerable violence. It is needless for the purpose of the present argument to ascertain the number of the parties into which some of the Churches were divided; but these letters, confirmed as they are by incidental references in the Acts of the Apostles, leave no doubt that the opposition between St. Paul and those who followed his teaching, and a powerful Judaizing party in the Church, was of a very decided character; that this party had a great dislike to the person of the Apostle; and that he himself denounced them as corrupters of the fundamental principles of the Gospel. They make it quite clear that even in the Churches of which he was the founder, the Apostle was far from having it all his own way. Judaizing teachers had made very considerable progress in alienating the Galatian Churches from him. His letter to these Churches discusses the entire question between him and his opponents, who actually went the length of denying his apostolical authority. In the Church of Corinth also there was a powerful Judaizing party, who affirmed that he was no true Apostle. In this Church there were also other parties who designated themselves by the names of particular leaders in various degrees of opposition to St. Paul. It is evident that

these parties must have derived their views of Christianity from a source quite independent of the Apostle. Portions of the first and not less than half of the second Epistle are occupied by St. Paul in setting forth his claims in opposition to these leaders. It is altogether a mistake to suppose that these Churches were disposed to accept his assertions without question, as equivalent to oracles from Heaven. On the contrary, Judaizing teachers habitually followed his steps, and to some extent succeeded in subverting the faith even of his own converts.

Nothing can more enhance the value of these letters as historical documents than the existence of this party-spirit in the Churches to which they were addressed. If St. Paul had written them to none but devoted admirers, as is frequently the case with the leaders of religious sects, his assertions might have been open to grave suspicion. It might have been urged that such persons were ready to accept anything and everything which he affirmed. But nothing is more keen-eyed than religious party-spirit in detecting and denouncing the false positions of an opponent, even when it is sufficiently ready to accept everything which makes in its own favour. So strong was the opposition to the Apostle, that in two of these Churches, as we have seen, a powerful party existed who went the extreme length of denying his right to the apostolic office. Yet these letters were not only intended to be read to the whole Church, but portions of them are directly addressed to the opponents in question. What guarantee of the truthfulness of statements can compare with this? The Apostle's letters are openly read in the presence of the opposing party, before the assembled Church, challenging them to impugn his statements. It will perhaps be objected that we have no record of the discussion which followed the reading of his letters, and of the results attending it. The second Epistle to the Corinthians has preserved some of those results, though it is plain that an opposing party still continued. This Epistle is a very strenuous attack on them. The man who had the moral

courage to write such letters as the second to the Corinthians and that to the Galatians, to be openly read in the presence of his adversaries, must have been well assured of the goodness of his cause. Common sense alone would have suggested to him not to make in them statements which were sure to receive direct and instant contradiction.

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It is clear, therefore, that certain points on which these letters make very definite statements must have been held in common by St. Paul and his opponents. If it had not been so, it is impossible that the letters could have been written in their present form. The Christianity on which the two parties agreed beyond all doubt, concentrated itself around the Messianic character of Jesus. The letters themselves make the points on which they disagreed sufficiently obvious, centering as they did on the necessity of observing the rites of the Mosaic law in the Christian Church. But the Epistles contain a vast number of allusions to other subjects, not a few of which are of a very incidental character. What is the only legitimate inference which can be deduced from this circumstance? Obviously that the Apostle wrote them with the fullest conviction that his statements on these subjects would be accepted by his opponents as part of their joint belief; and not only by them, but by all the members of the Church. It is inconceivable that a man of the mental calibre of St. Paul should have written letters such as those to the Corinthians and Galatians, abounding as they do with references to facts and doctrines, if he had not been fully persuaded that they constituted the common faith of himself and those to whom he wrote.

It is impossible to over-estimate the historical importance of letters like these, when in this incidental manner they contain numerous references to facts and opinions, and to the actual controversies then existing in the Church. The form in which they are made constitute us almost as adequate judges of their value as if we were able to interrogate their author. We have him, in fact, in the witness-box before us, and can narrowly scrutinize

his mental character. They can leave no doubt on our minds as to whether the allusions were incidental, or made for a purpose. The value of letters, written by persons who have impressed on them the image of their own inner life and character, and referring at the same time to current events and opinions, is now universally acknowledged as the best means of correcting the mistakes and misrepresentations of formal histories. But when we take into consideration that these letters of St. Paul are outpourings of his inmost mind, intended not only for admiring friends, but for scrutinizing opponents, we have before us historical evidence of the highest order. [407]

Fifthly: The Apostle presents himself to us in these letters in the fullest outbursts of his heart. We have the whole man before us, intellectually, morally, and religiously. Probably no eight letters exist in all literature, from which it is possible to construct in equal fulness the mental portraiture of the writer. Nowhere can we find stronger bursts of feeling. He was a man of deep sensibility, united with the firmest resolve. His sacrifice of self, and complete freedom from all selfish aims, is exceeded by only one character in history. Who can read these letters through, and question the sincerity of the writer? Can any one believe that he was not true to his convictions, or that he was capable of deliberately stating what he knew to be false? If the facts were not as he has stated them, the only possible alternative is that he was the prey of an hallucination. Yet in every detail of business, and in disposing of all practical questions, his judgment was of the soundest character.

There is one remarkable fact which these letters bring out distinctly, which is probably true of no other man that ever lived. The Apostle claimed to decide certain questions authoritatively in virtue of a divine guidance which he possessed. He gave that decision on two points, having the closest bearing on the daily life of the Christians of that day, and which excited deep conscientious scruples. These were: whether the obligation of

[408] observing certain days was binding on the Christian conscience, and whether it was unlawful to eat meat which had been offered in sacrifice to a heathen god. On each of these points he gives his own apostolical decision; yet in the very act of doing so, he directly enjoins that the conscientious scruples of those who could not acquiesce in it should be respected. Can this be said of any other man who thought that he possessed a supernatural guidance? Enthusiastic he was; but his was an enthusiasm which did not blind his judgment. He was a man, too, of a highly delicate mind, yet capable of using a refined sarcasm in dealing with his opponents. We have the whole man before us, and his entire character renders him a witness of the highest order.

As modern unbelievers refuse to allow us to appeal to the Gospels as historical documents, it becomes a matter of the highest importance to ascertain what facts in connection with the origin of Christianity and the beliefs of the earliest followers of Jesus can be established with the aid of these letters. Unbelievers cannot dispute that they are the authentic writings of the most active agent in the propagation of Christianity, who has contributed more to its permanent establishment than any other of the disciples of Jesus. This being so, it is impossible to deny that they are contemporary historical records of the highest value. Our opponents demand contemporary testimony, and we present them with the Epistles of St. Paul. In pursuing this argument, it will be my duty to forget that we Christians consider that the man who wrote them had a supernatural guidance, and to use them as I would the letters of Cicero. I will proceed to examine their testimony.

[409] First: It has been asserted, with a view of weakening the evidence of the supernatural portions of the New Testament, that although its writers have reported miracles as wrought by others, not one of them has affirmed that he himself ever performed one.

I reply that St. Paul distinctly affirms that he believed he wrought miracles. "Truly," says he, "the signs of an apostle were

wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” (2 Cor. xii. 12.) He here affirms that such a power was possessed not only by himself, but by other Apostles also. The power to perform “signs, wonders, and mighty deeds” was directly connected with the apostolic office.

Again, he says to the Galatians (iii. 5), “He that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you.” In this reference he evidently means himself, and affirms that he had performed miracles in Galatia.

In the Epistle to the Romans he makes the following affirmation: “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.” (Rom. xv. 18, 19.) Here then we have St. Paul's direct affirmation that in his own opinion, throughout the mission in question, he had been in the habit of performing “mighty signs and wonders.” After these passages it is needless to quote further. The Apostle deliberately affirms to the Corinthians and Galatians that he performed miracles, and the whole passage makes it clear that he supposed they would fully recognize the fact of his having done so. Of course this affirmation does not prove that they were real miracles; but it does prove that he and those to whom he wrote thought that they were so. Not less distinct is his affirmation to the Romans. These passages further distinctly prove that it was an accepted belief in the Churches when the Apostle wrote, and even at a much earlier period, that supernatural manifestations attended the early preaching of Christianity. It follows therefore that the invention of miraculous stories was not due to a later mythic and legendary spirit. This the statement made by the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans distinctly proves; for he evidently considered that he had been in the habit of performing miracles up to the very time when he wrote the letter, and during

the whole course of his preceding ministry. Also the affirmation that miracles were the signs of an Apostle, and admitted to be such, is a strong corroboration of the statement made by the Synoptics that our Lord was supposed to have conferred such powers on the Apostles; and as it is simply incredible that any should have believed that He conferred on the Apostles powers which He did not exercise himself, it carries up the belief of the Church that Jesus was a professed worker of miracles to the very first years of Christianity. I am quite aware that these beliefs of the Church do not prove these miracles to have been real ones. But they do prove that the belief in their actual performance was contemporary with the birth of Christianity itself. They therefore could not have originated, as the opponents of Christianity are never weary of assuming, in a mythic or legendary spirit; for myths and legends require a considerable time to grow; and it is impossible that they can encircle an eminent character with an unreal halo till after those who witnessed his actions and personally know him are silent in the grave. But in the case before us we have affirmations of St. Paul respecting himself, which put the whole apparatus of myths and legends out of the question. If then this belief in the manifestation of a supernatural power in connection with Christianity dates thus early, there are only three modes in which it is possible to account for it, viz. that it was due to deliberate and conscious imposture; or that Jesus and His immediate followers laboured under a delusion when they thought that they performed miracles; or that they were really wrought. As no one now-a-days pretends to maintain the truth of the first alternative, we may dismiss it from further consideration.

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But it will be asserted that St. Paul does not mention any specific miracles which he considered that he had performed, and that his statements are merely general. I reply that such a mode of statement is precisely what we should expect to find in a letter of this kind, and is just the one which would be adopted by a

person who was satisfied that those to whom he was writing were as firmly convinced of the fact as he was himself.... A formal and distinct description of the miracles which he had performed would have been quite out of place in a reference of this kind, and would have implied that doubts respecting them existed on one side or the other. Besides, the words which he uses embrace all the different expressions by which the various kinds and aspects of miracles are designated in the New Testament.

Secondly: These letters also afford unquestionable evidence that at the time when they were written both the writer and those to whom he addressed them, were firmly convinced that there was then actively operating in the Church a number of supernatural manifestations of a very peculiar character, and widely different from any species of supernatural belief which has been current before or since. I allude to the gifts of the Spirit, to which the Apostle has so frequently alluded in these Epistles, and of the nature of which he has in those to the Corinthians given a distinct account, together with definite rules to regulate their use. [412] The reason why he has given us a far more definite account of this class of manifestations than of the other is obvious. In the Church in question they had become the subjects of ambitious rivalry, and under its influence some of them had been perverted to pernicious uses. The whole subject is definitely treated of in the 12th, 13th, and 14th chapters of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, besides a number of distinct references to it in other portions of his writings. These assertions on the part of St. Paul that both he and those to whom he wrote were fully of opinion that supernatural powers were then manifested in the Church, are so clear that they require a most careful consideration. The following points respecting them are proved by this Epistle.

1. That St. Paul, and the various parties in the Corinthian Church, however much they might disagree on other points, fully believed that these supernatural powers were *then and there* manifesting themselves in the Church. This belief might have

been a delusion, but the letter proves beyond doubt that it was entertained by the whole Church, including all its various parties.

2. That these gifts were earnestly coveted by the various members of this Church; that many of them made a very ostentatious use of them; and that stringent rules were required to prevent their use from degenerating into an abuse.

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3. Nine of these supernatural endowments are enumerated by the Apostle. It is not clear whether the list is intended to be exhaustive. Probably it is not; but it is evident that the writer intended to enumerate the chief of them. They are as follows: the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith; gifts of healing (χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων); working of miracles (ἐνεργήματα δυναμέων); the gift of prophecy, those of discerning spirits; tongues and interpretation. This list of gifts in a slightly altered form is repeated no less than three times in the same chapter. They are affirmed to be supernatural endowments, qualifying the possessor for distinct functions in the Church. It is worthy of particular remark, as showing how free the Apostle was from contemplating the subject with the eye of a credulous enthusiast, that he distinctly asserts that they were designed for a definite purpose only, and that when that was effected they were to cease. A fanatic would certainly have considered that they were destined to continue for ever. This point is worthy of our deepest attention.

4. The existence of a marked distinction between these gifts is definitely affirmed by the Apostle. They were not confined to a particular order of men, but were spread over the entire community. They also differed not only in kind but in degree. Some of them subserved higher, others humbler purposes. The reason for which they were given was the building up of the Church into a distinctive community. When that was effected they were to cease.

5. The Apostle also most carefully points out that a distinction of function existed between these various supernatural endowments. This is a very important consideration. Whether we view

them as realities, or as delusions, it is plain that this distinction of function must have pointed to some corresponding facts well known in the Church, at the time when the Epistles were written. The possession of one of them by no means implied that of another, although the subject-matter upon which they operated was closely akin. Thus the possession of the gift of tongues (whatever it may have been), did not imply the possession of the gift of interpretation. On the contrary, the rules which the Apostle gives for the regulation of those gifts, as well as his statements respecting them, prove that they were a set of distinct manifestations, and were possessed very often by different persons, and that the presence of the one power by no means implied that of the other. This must unquestionably point to the existence of a remarkable phenomenon of some kind. Even if it is supposed that St. Paul and those to whom he wrote were labouring under a delusion, it proves that the Apostle possessed a power of discrimination which is not exhibited by an ordinary enthusiast or fanatic. [414]

A distinction which St. Paul affirms to have existed between two of these gifts, viz. between the gifts of healing and of miracles, deserves special attention. That a real distinction existed between them is affirmed three times over in the same chapter. Both of these gifts, according to our present mode of viewing the subject, would be confounded under the designation of a power of working miracles. But it is clear from the Apostle's statement, that he, and those to whom he wrote, saw an appreciable distinction between them. "To another," says he, "are given the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles." "But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, *dividing to every man severally as he will.*" (1 Cor. xii. 9-11.) Again, in summing up their relative importance, he says: "thirdly teachers, after that miracles, *then gifts of healing,*" (ver. 28); and again, as qualifying individuals for particular offices: "Are all apostles? are all prophets? *are all workers of miracles?*

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*Have all the gifts of healing?"* (ver. 29, 30.) Now although we may deny that these phenomena were supernatural in their character, it is plain that there must have been something in existence in this Church corresponding to them, and of which they were the supposed manifestation. The Apostle and those to whom he wrote evidently understood one another.

What this distinction was it is now impossible accurately to determine. As I have already observed, it probably had reference to a higher and lower class of miracles; those which were in the proper sense evidential; and those which might in various degrees have resembled the act mentioned by St. James, the anointing a sick man with oil in the name of the Lord, the offering fervent prayer for his recovery, and the gradual cure of his complaint. Such would belong to a lower class of miracles to which I have elsewhere alluded, as rather fitted to procure a favourable attention to the missionary than for evidential purposes. Be the distinction what it may, and even supposing that St. Paul and the Corinthians were under a delusion as to their supernatural character, it is plain that some real difference, which was clearly distinguishable, must have existed in the outward manifestations. This is a fact of very considerable importance, as it proves that both the Apostle and the Corinthians were in a state of mind in which they were capable of exercising a clear discrimination between these gifts, which is the last thing of which visionary and credulous enthusiasts ever think.

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6. These gifts were likewise clearly separate in respect to the subject-matter on which they operated. The Apostle and the Corinthians supposed that they communicated a supernatural illumination of some kind; but the illumination conferred by one might leave the possessor completely in the dark with respect to the special subject-matter of the other. This is definitely affirmed with respect to the gift of tongues, and interpretation. A person might possess the former and yet be altogether destitute of the latter. There can be no doubt that the same analogy ran through

them all. This is affirmed when St. Paul asserts that all these gifts were the work of one and the same Spirit *dividing to every man severally as he will* (1 Cor. xii), and is implied by the comparison which he institutes between them and the members of the human body and their respective functions. Thus: the power of seeing furnishes no information in matters of sound; nor the latter on the perceptions we derive through the sense of smell. Equally functional were these gifts, each being confined to its own proper subject-matter. If the idea was that the possessor had an inspiration, as far as respects the subject-matter of his gift, it conferred on him no supernatural knowledge on matters outside its special function. Thus a man who had the gift of tongues might remain perfectly ignorant of the interpretation of them, if he had not the latter gift. One who possessed the power of discerning of spirits might have been destitute of the power of working miracles. One who had the gift of prophecy might have had no illumination with respect to that special knowledge which was conferred by the gift of wisdom. The inspiration which was supposed to be conferred by them, conferred no general infallibility—it was strictly functional and did not extend beyond the limits of the gift.

All these points are of the highest importance in an historical point of view. Whether we think that St. Paul and the Corinthians were, or were not, under delusions about this matter, they clearly prove that there must have been phenomena of some kind which were supposed to be the results of the gifts in question; and that the persons who believed that they possessed them exercised a discriminating judgment respecting them. It is no less clear that they did believe that they actually possessed them. Some of them were of such a nature that it is difficult to comprehend how the possessor could be under delusion on the subject. Take for example the power of discerning spirits. Once the possessor had it not. Afterwards he must have believed that he possessed a supernatural insight into the character of others. It is difficult

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to comprehend how a man's consciousness could be deceived on a point like this. He must have surely known whether within a definite period of time he had obtained an insight into character, which he did not possess before. Everywhere in the account given us of these gifts we seem to be dealing with facts. The distinctions laid down as existing between them, and the separateness of their functions are truly philosophical, supposing the gifts to have been real, and were the last things which were likely to have occurred to credulous enthusiasts.

7. These gifts admitted of being abused. The possession of them was not sufficient to confer any infallibility in the use of them. This fact is worthy of deep attention, not only as pointing to the reality of the manifestations but to the soundness of the Apostle's judgment. If these gifts had been mere inventions of a credulous imagination they would have been represented as guarded from the possibility of abuse by the supernatural power in which they originated. Even at the present day it is a very common idea that the gift of inspiration cannot possibly be a functional one which is limited to a definite subject-matter, but that it must confer a general infallibility. Very different were the views of St. Paul and of the Churches to which he wrote. The Apostle was of opinion that when they had been once conferred, they were subject to the control of the will, and capable of a good or bad use in the same manner as our ordinary faculties. His statement is clear that in this Church they were used in a manner little conducive to edification. In order to suppress this abuse he adopted some stringent rules. No person was to be allowed in the congregation to use the gift of tongues (a gift which he was so far from underrating that he thanked God that he possessed it more largely than any other member of the Church), unless there was some one present who had the gift of interpretation. The gift of prophecy held the second rank in point of importance. Yet from the eagerness of its possessors to use it, confusion arose in the congregation; and the Apostle was compelled to prescribe

rules for limiting its exercise and enforcing order among the prophets. The more the account is studied the stronger must be the conviction that it points to actual phenomena, which were exhibited in the Apostolic Churches; and that St. Paul, in his description of them, exhibits the strongest indications of a sound judgment.

Such were the phenomena which the Apostle, and those to whom he wrote, considered to be supernatural manifestations. I observe respecting them:

First: That it is clear that when St. Paul wrote these Epistles, both he and those whom he addressed were fully persuaded that certain supernatural manifestations were then habitually present in the Church. It is impossible to attribute this belief to the presence of the mythic or legendary spirit.

Secondly: It is clear from other statements in the Epistles, not only that St. Paul firmly believed that he himself was endowed with several of these supernatural gifts, but that he had been the means of imparting them to others. [419]

Thirdly: If we consider the nature of some of these gifts, it is difficult to conceive that a man like St. Paul could have been deceived respecting their reality. Several of them involved accessions of mental power, as for example the gift of wisdom, knowledge, and discerning of spirits. He must have known that at one time he had nothing but his natural endowments. At a later period he must have believed that his wisdom, knowledge, and power of discerning character was increased. These must have been definite facts of his mental consciousness. It is difficult to conceive how delusion was possible, when in his treatment of the entire subject he displays such clear indications of sound judgment and common sense.

Fourthly: It is necessary to suppose not only that St. Paul was a prey to delusion on this subject—if we deny that the gifts were real—but that a similar delusion was spread over the entire Church. Its individual members believed that they possessed

them, no less than the Apostle. Those who possessed only the lower gifts were emulously desirous of possessing the higher ones. They also made an ostentatious use of them. Such are not the phenomena presented by enthusiasm. Was it possible that considerable numbers of persons should be deceived in supposing that they had acquired particular mental endowments of which they well knew that they had been previously destitute?

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Fifthly: While the phenomena under consideration were unquestionably believed both by St. Paul and the Corinthian Church to be supernatural manifestations, yet it is a supernaturalism which differs in its entire aspect and character from any other which has been believed in by man. We may wander over the entire regions of history and fable, and we shall fail to find any belief in the supernatural, bearing the smallest resemblance to it. It is most definitely contrasted with that which has been ascribed to the contemporaries of our Lord; and which I have considered in the earlier portions of this work. Whence has come this most striking contrast? If St. Paul and the members of the Corinthian Church were a prey to the superstitious beliefs above referred to, how was it possible for them to have considered themselves to be living in the midst of an atmosphere which presented so marvellous a contrast. The gifts, if real, were precisely suited to the wants of the Church, for building it up into the great institution which it became. It required accessions to its numbers from the populations in the midst of which it lived. The two miraculous gifts, even if they were not evidential, were fitted to draw attention to its claims. Collected as its members were from Judaism and Heathenism, without sufficient means for their definite instruction, those who performed this office were qualified for it by two gifts conferring various degrees of enlightenment. Then there was the prophet, who as an inspired preacher expounded and enforced the truths of Christianity. Its members were ill-qualified for public offices, owing to the low condition of the society from which they sprang. Here again

were two mental endowments to supply the need, the power of discerning spirits and the supernatural gift of faith. All these gifts here enumerated, were the very endowments suited for the building up of a body of converts taken from such unpromising sources, into the great society to which it speedily grew. A new society had to be formed of a wholly different character from any previously existing. It was designed to leaven by new influences the state of religious, moral, and political thought out of which it originated. The old social organization met it with determined opposition. The problem was how was it to be erected on such a basis as would give it permanence? The Church of Jesus Christ was to be a new moral creation in the midst of effete society. An extensive communication of endowments, such as are referred to in the Pauline Epistles, was the very thing which was requisite to accomplish this purpose. It came into existence; it grew; it struggled; it conquered; it subverted the old forms of civilization; it created new ones. These are facts which require to be accounted for. The forces referred to in these Epistles as in active energy before the eyes of St. Paul and the members of these Churches, were adequate to have effected this. Without some such moral creation attending the first planting of Christianity, the formation of this unique society out of the various elements of which it was composed, and their welding together into an organization instinct with life, which has imbued with its principles all existing institutions, must remain a problem which baffles all the attempts of philosophy to solve. [421]

Lastly: These letters prove on the highest historical evidence that a supernatural power was believed to be manifested in the Church at the date of their composition, wholly different from any kind of ordinary current supernatural belief. Through the Acts of the Apostles, its existence can be traced up to a still earlier period. Two of these gifts, but two only, involved a power which we should now designate as essentially miraculous. This being so, the testimony of St. Paul, involving as it does that of

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the entire Church, is express as to the belief of contemporaries that miracles were actually performed. We can trace this belief up to the first origin of Christianity. If Jesus was believed to have endowed His followers with this power, it is impossible to believe that He was not supposed to have possessed it himself. These Epistles therefore are evidence that the earliest followers of Jesus believed that He was a worker of miracles. So far the proof is complete that the ascription of miracles to Jesus and His original followers was not due to the imagination of subsequent generations.

The careful perusal of these Epistles can leave only one impression on the mind of the reader, that he is in the presence of facts of an unquestionably historical character.

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## Chapter XIX. The Evidence Furnished By The Epistles To The Facts Of Our Lord's Life, And To The Truth Of The Resurrection.

I have proved in the last chapter that St. Paul and those to whom he wrote his Epistles firmly believed that a number of supernatural manifestations were displaying themselves in the Church under their immediate observation, and that their presence can be traced up to a much earlier date. I have also shown that St. Paul asserts in the most positive language that he was persuaded that he wrought miracles during the whole course of his mission. It is therefore in the highest degree probable that the servant was convinced that he did by the divine power of his Master that which he believed that his Master had accomplished before him; in other words, that he was a worker of miracles. But as it has been asserted that St. Paul knew only of a divine, and scarcely anything of a human Jesus, that is to say, that he was to a great extent ignorant of the events of our Lord's life, I must inquire what light the Epistles throw on this subject; for if it can be shown that St. Paul allowed himself to be ignorant of the human life of Jesus, it lowers the value of his testimony to the fact of the Resurrection.

The ground of this affirmation is that the direct references to the events of our Lord's life are few, and that he chiefly dwells on the glorified aspect of it after His Resurrection. The only passage, as far as I am aware, which has been adduced as proving this strange position is the following:—"He died for all, that they

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which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” 2 Cor. v. 15-17. The utmost that this passage can be made to prove is, that the belief in the Resurrection of Christ had thrown an entirely new aspect over His human life. The persons who had witnessed it had not seen its true significance. This is what the Synoptic Gospels plainly affirm to have been the case even with the Apostles during His public ministry. They had witnessed the events, but they had failed to penetrate into their inner life. This is what the Apostle means by “knowing Christ after the flesh,” *i.e.* according to the uniform meaning of that expression in the New Testament, the knowing the events of His life merely externally, as so many bare objective facts devoid of spiritual significance. This he affirms would be the mode in which neither he nor the Church would in future contemplate this subject. The very words which he uses imply that he and others had had this knowledge of Jesus. But such a knowledge would have been impossible without an intimate acquaintance with the events of His human life. What he affirms is, that he will contemplate them in future in their moral and religious aspect.

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The affirmation that St. Paul was not thoroughly acquainted with the details of our Lord's ministry, and that after his conversion he was simply absorbed in the contemplation of a divine Christ is incredible. When we are asked to accept a startling proposition, it is necessary that it should not offend against the first principles of human nature. That a man like St. Paul did not make accurate inquiries into the facts of his Master's life is inconceivable. In his eyes His human was the manifestation of His divine life. Did not the persecutor Saul thoroughly inform himself respecting the life and actions of Him whose divine

mission he denied, and whom he believed to be an impostor? Was not this the obvious course to take, in order to enable him to expose imposition, and to destroy the Church? On the other hand, the converted Paul was animated by a more intense love for Jesus than one man ever felt for another. Is it conceivable that such love did not impel him to treasure up in his bosom every reminiscence which fell within his reach, and to inquire with the most profound interest into the life and actions of him who was become the object of his adoration? Is it conceivable that the man who was incessantly inquiring into the condition of his converts, made no inquiry about the life and actions of his Master?

The position of St. Paul, the ardour of his temperament, the fierceness of his opposition, and the intense self-sacrifice with which he afterwards consecrated himself to Jesus Christ, falling into communication as he must with persons who had witnessed His earthly ministry, are sufficient proof that the Apostle had used every available means of becoming acquainted with the facts of His life. But in the Epistles themselves, although owing to the circumstances which called them forth, they contain few direct references to it, the indirect allusions are quite sufficient to prove that St. Paul and those whom he addressed, were in possession of a number of facts respecting their Master's life which formed the subject of a common Christology. I am quite ready to admit that when the Apostle wrote, none of our present Gospels were in existence. The converts had to receive their instruction orally, or from short written memoranda. But instruction of some kind they must have had. Without it, converts from Paganism could have known nothing about Him to whom in the act of joining the Church they professed allegiance; Jewish converts living in Gentile cities, but little. As Christianity was not a mere body of dogmas, like a philosophy, but consisted in direct adhesion to a person, it is clear that it could not be propagated at all without at the same time communicating information respecting His history. The early missionaries announced that Jesus was the Christ.

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Such an announcement would have been meaningless unless they had given an account of who Jesus was, what He had done to claim the homage of those addressed, and what was the nature of His office. These considerations establish the fact that an oral account of His life must have been handed down in the Church prior to the publication of written Gospels, sufficiently definite to constitute the Christianity of the converts. The intimations contained in the Epistles prove that such was the fact.

First let us consider St. Paul's own positive assertions. The most important is in 1 Cor. xv. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you (γνωρίζω, I remind you of, or refresh your memories respecting) the Gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all (ἐν πρώτοις, as matter of prime importance) that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

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Let it be observed that the subject which the Apostle was here discussing with certain members of this Church—the possibility of a resurrection of the dead—led him to refer to the first principles of Christianity as he had taught them. They denied the truth of a material resurrection. St. Paul draws their attention to the fact that Christianity as taught by him consisted of a body of facts. The following points are clearly deducible from the passage before us.

1. The εὐαγγέλιον, or message of good news, which the Apostle had announced at his first preaching at Corinth, consisted of a body of facts as distinct from mere doctrinal teachings; and that whatever doctrines he taught were built on them as a foundation.

2. Among the facts of prime importance which he announced, was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

3. He states that in his preaching there were matters of prime importance, of which Christ's death and resurrection was one. It follows therefore that there were other matters of prime importance, which his present argument did not require him to notice. This is obvious from the nature of the case: the announcement of Christ's death and resurrection would have been scarcely intelligible without the addition of a great many other facts to give it meaning. But further, the assertion that there were facts of prime importance, implies that there were also points of secondary importance, which he must have announced likewise, or in other words, that the Gospel which he proclaimed must have consisted of an account, more or less full, of the human life of Jesus.

4. This account the Apostle says that he delivered to the Corinthian Church. The words imply that he committed it in a formal manner to their keeping, as the ground of their Christian instruction. This he likewise affirms that he had no less formally received. [428]

5. As his statement respecting the Resurrection is somewhat minute, the inference is, that the other facts of prime importance were communicated with equal detail. It is also fairly presumable that in his oral communications the Apostle did not give a bare list of the appearances of Jesus after his Resurrection, but a detailed account of them; and so with respect to his other facts. This his converts would naturally have required him to do, if we suppose that they were only animated by common curiosity. The less important facts would be necessary to connect together those of primary importance. In short, the Apostle's narrative must have been what we may call a brief Gospel.

6. As St. Paul states that one of the facts which he committed to the Church was that Christ died for our sins, it follows that he must have given an account of his death more or less resembling those in our present Gospels.

7. One of the great facts which he delivered to the Church, was that of the Resurrection of Christ. This is the great miracle

of Christianity; the one to which it is expressly affirmed that the Church owes its being. The Apostle's Gospel therefore contained a detailed account of one great miracle. It is also fairly presumable that among his other facts of primary or secondary importance were accounts of supernatural occurrences in the life of Jesus.

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8. The Apostle does not leave us without the means of judging respecting the amount of matter in these narratives of events in the life of Christ which he committed to the Church. He has given us (in 1 Cor. xi. 23-25) a formal account of the institution of our Lord's Supper, quite as full as that contained in either of our Gospels. This account he prefaces by the same words which we have already considered, as denoting the form or mode in which he received it, and delivered it to the Church: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in My blood: this do ye as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." This account varies in words, but it is equal in minuteness, and substantially agrees with those in our present Gospels; although it more nearly approaches, while it is not precisely identical with that of Luke, who is asserted in the Acts to have been the companion of the Apostle. Judging therefore by this example, the historical details which St. Paul committed to the Church respecting the life of Jesus must have been of considerable minuteness.

8. Another fact in the life of our Lord is directly referred to in these letters, His descent from the family of David. "Who was made," says the Apostle, "of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." These words prove that St. Paul was in possession of an account of the

birth of Jesus, which in this particular point was in agreement with that in St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels, and that it was known to the members of the Church at Rome, and received by them as true. He does not positively affirm that the birth was supernatural; but his language clearly implies it. It would be absurd in speaking of an ordinary human birth to say that the person born was descended from his ancestors, "according to the flesh." The natural meaning of such an expression is that both the writer and those whom he was addressing were well acquainted with an account of the supernatural birth of Jesus, and accepted it as true. So far their accounts and that in the Gospels agreed in the main issue. [430]

9. One more reference must be added: "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "was made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." This passage not only proves that the Apostle and those to whom he wrote were in possession of an account of the circumcision of Christ, but also that they well knew that His ministry had been confined to the Jewish people, but with the ultimate purpose of His being manifested to the Gentiles. In these particulars it exactly corresponded with the account given in our Gospels.

10. There are also several passages in which the Apostle directly refers to our Lord's teaching, and clearly distinguishes it from his own. These references uniformly agree with that which is attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, and prove that the Apostle and the Church were in possession of details of it.

Such are the direct references to the life of Jesus in these Epistles. But there are numerous indirect references which prove that the Apostle and those to whom he wrote must have been acquainted with accounts of the life of its Founder, which went into a considerable degree of detail. I shall give a few instances:

1. His preaching of the Gospel to the Thessalonians is described as a proclamation that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah.

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In one of the Epistles to this Church he speaks of them as having been so powerfully influenced that in consequence of it “they had turned to God *from idols* to serve the living and true God,” and “as having become *followers of him and of the Lord.*” Among persons thus utterly ignorant of Christianity, as they were when he first preached to them, it would have been impossible to make an announcement of this kind, or to set forth the Messianic claims of Jesus, without laying before them a great many of the details of His human life. The expression above quoted, implies clearly that he had put his converts in possession of such an account of the life of Christ as to enable them to become “followers of the Lord.”

2. These Epistles contain many definite assertions as to the duty of imitating Christ. “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ;” “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ;” “Let every one of us please his brother for his good unto edification, for even so Christ pleased not himself;” “The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus;” “I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ;” “Ye have not so learned Christ;” “Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.” Many other similar expressions might be cited, but these are sufficient.

First: I observe that the exhortation to put on the character of another is meaningless, unless the persons so exhorted were known to have been thoroughly acquainted with the life and actions of him whom they are urged to imitate. The same observation is true when we are deliberately recommended to make another person our example. Again, the exhortation to lay ourselves out in efforts to please others for their good to edification, on the ground that Christ pleased not himself, would be without meaning, unless the writer felt assured that those whom he addressed were in possession of facts in the life of Christ, which exhibited Him in the character of a sacrificer of self. So again, the exhortation to patience, after the example of Christ,

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is founded on the assumption that those whom the Apostle was addressing were acquainted with details which exhibited him as a model of patience. The same remark is true with respect to the entreaty addressed to the Corinthians by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. They must have been acquainted with actions of His which exhibited Him as supremely meek and gentle. These and other indirect references form an indisputable proof that the churches to whom St. Paul wrote must have been in possession of a very considerable number of details of the human life of Jesus, in which a large portion of the instruction given to those Churches consisted. This imparts to them a far higher value than if they had been direct. It is the mode universally adopted in genuine letters, where the writer, and those to whom he writes, are freely communicating to each other their inmost thoughts. When one party is firmly persuaded that the other is well acquainted with a certain set of events, they never detail them formally, but simply refer to them in passing allusions. Such allusions are the strongest possible evidence that the events in question are the common property of the writer and of those whom he is addressing.

The whole of these Epistles contain a continuous body of references to the various aspects of our Lord's divine and human character as it is depicted in the four Gospels. The references to the former are very numerous. They contain a Christianity of so advanced a character as to resemble in all its great features that which we read of in St. John's Gospel, and which are only distinguishable from it, if distinguishable at all, by the aid of minute criticism. I have treated this subject at length in another work in reference to its evidential value, and therefore need not discuss it here. I shall only observe that the incidental references in these Epistles to these subjects form the strongest historical proofs that St. Paul and those to whom he wrote were in possession of a sufficient number of facts respecting the life of Jesus to enable them to found on them a definite Christology; and that there

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must have been well known in the Churches a general outline of His human life, which must have been to their members as recent converts a subject of the profoundest interest. I fully admit that if Paul and the early Christians, while centering their highest affections on the glorified Christ, had been contented to remain in ignorance of the facts of His human life, the value of their testimony to the truth of the Resurrection would have been greatly weakened. But the supposition is not only untrue to human nature, but is contradicted by the facts of the Epistles, which it is impossible not to admit as documents of the highest historical value.

I will now proceed to examine the evidence which these Epistles afford to the truth of the Resurrection. The references which they contain to this great miracle of Christianity are extremely numerous, occurring in some form or other in almost every page. Shall I not say that their entire contents are written on the supposition of its reality? They are of the most direct as well as of the most incidental character. They make it clear that the belief in it lay at the foundation of the existence of the Church; that it was that which was supposed to communicate its moral power to Christianity, and that it was the source of the new spiritual life of every individual believer. In the following passage St. Paul distinctly pledges the truth of Christianity on the reality of the fact: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not, ... and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Cor. xv. 14, etc.) Whatever opinion may be formed as to the genuineness of the other writings of the New Testament, they give one consistent testimony that the belief in the Resurrection was co-extensive with the Church,

and constituted the only ground of its existence. How could it be otherwise? The Church, as a community, was founded on the belief of the personal Messiahship of Christ; a dead Messiah would have been utterly worthless to it. Without a living Messiah to form its centre the whole superstructure must collapse.

The following are some of the most important points which these letters prove as matters of fact respecting the Resurrection.

First: That the belief in it was co-extensive with the entire Church. It was not the belief of any single party in it, but of the whole community.

This they establish on the most indisputable evidence. The existence of various parties in the Church in direct opposition to St. Paul proves beyond the possibility of contradiction that it was the one belief respecting which there was not the smallest diversity of opinion. If these parties had not existed, it might have been urged with some degree of plausibility that the testimony of these letters was inconclusive, because all the members of the Churches received servilely whatever St. Paul chose to dictate. [435] But as we have already seen, a powerful party existed in both the Corinthian and Galatian Churches, who summarily rejected his claim to apostolic authority, maintaining that the twelve were the only genuine Apostles. Nevertheless, the Epistles make it clear that they must have believed in the Resurrection quite as strongly as St. Paul did himself.

Let us suppose for a moment that they doubted it. How is it conceivable that St. Paul should have addressed to them such letters as those to the Corinthians, abounding everywhere with both direct and incidental allusions to it as an acknowledged truth and as the foundation of his reasonings? Would anyone in his senses have thus exposed himself to instant denunciation if he had supposed that there was the smallest doubt respecting its reality in the minds of his opponents? Would they not at once, if they had entertained it, have made short work with the Apostle and his reasonings? But the point is almost too clear to need any

argument.

In one of the passages where he is discussing with them the reality of his apostleship he urges as the foundation of his claim to this office: "Have not I seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" This reasoning is evidently founded on the supposition that all the other Apostles professed to have seen Him; and that none could have a valid claim to the office who had not seen Him. But Paul could only have seen Christ after the Resurrection; and it was in virtue of an appointment from the risen Jesus that he claimed to hold the office. If there had been the smallest doubt in the minds of his opponents as to the reality of the Resurrection, or if they had not been persuaded that the Apostles, whose claims they set up against those of St. Paul, affirmed that they had seen Him also, this would at once have settled the controversy and covered the Apostle with confusion before the assembled Church.

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But if this reasoning requires any additional confirmation, it is afforded by the Epistle to the Galatians. The opposition leaders in this Church were yet more hostile to St. Paul than those at Corinth. His denunciation of them is very severe. They are described as "false apostles, deceitful workers," and subverters of the Gospel. Yet in the very opening words of his address to this Church in which he thus sharply denounces his opponents, the Apostle writes: "Paul, an Apostle, not of man nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father *who raised him from the dead.*" Is it conceivable, I ask, that St. Paul should have used such language, under such circumstances, in addressing this Church, unless he was absolutely certain that his opponents accepted the Resurrection of Christ as a fact? We shall see hereafter that these assertions and allusions of the Apostle not only prove that the Resurrection was believed in by every section of the Christian community at the time when he wrote these letters, but that they enable us to carry up the date of this belief to the very commencement of Christianity.

Secondly: The Epistle to the Romans sets before us the state

of this belief in a Church which St. Paul had not visited. Of the exact date of the foundation of this Church we have no record; but the entire contents of the Epistle prove that it had been in existence for many years before the Apostle addressed to them this letter. The general impression produced by it is that this was one of the most important Christian communities then in existence. We learn from it that among its members were persons attached to the household of Nero. As the intercourse between Rome and Judæa was very considerable, there can be no doubt that the Church originated at an early period, either by Christian Jews visiting the imperial city, or by Roman Jews visiting Judæa and having thus become converted. At any rate its Christianity must have been derived from a source entirely independent of St. Paul. The evidence afforded by this Epistle as to the importance and universal prevalence of the belief in the Resurrection, and to its early origin is conclusive. The allusions to it are more numerous than in any other of St. Paul's Epistles. Most of them are of an entirely incidental character, and their general nature proves beyond the possibility of question that both the writer and those to whom he wrote must have viewed the fact as the fundamental groundwork of Christianity. The reference to a few passages will render this point indubitable. [437]

An allusion of a most incidental character as forming the ground of the writer's apostleship occurs in the very opening words of the Epistle: "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead*; by whom we have *received grace and apostleship* for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name." It is inconceivable that St. Paul should have thus addressed a body of strangers, at the very commencement of his letter, unless he had been certain that they accepted this belief as an unquestionable fact.

Besides several references in the intermediate chapters, there are three allusions to it in the sixth chapter of the most incidental

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character, in which the belief in the Resurrection is directly connected with baptism, and affirmed to lie at the very foundation of Christianity, and to be the divine power exhibited in the renewed Christian life. "Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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It is impossible to read this passage without feeling that it is conclusive of the question before us: the whole community to whom it was addressed must have accepted the Resurrection as a fact, and that acceptance must have been contemporary with the very commencement of their Christianity. A portion of the baptismal rite to which they had all submitted was viewed by them as symbolical of their Master's death: the other portion, of His Resurrection. His death and resurrection were considered by them as setting forth their cessation from their old habits, principles and character, in which they had lived as Jews or Pagans; and their entrance into that new moral life into which they were brought by Christianity. The Apostle directly appeals to the recollection of those whom he is addressing, to say whether it was not a certain fact that their entire Christianity, including all its moral influence, centered in this truth. His words therefore

carry this belief up to the first origin of this Church. They go, moreover, a step further, and involve the belief and testimony of those by whom its first members had been converted.

But further: the Apostle, throughout this chapter, speaks of the Resurrection of Christ as being the great moral and spiritual power of Christianity. The members of the Church had entered on a new moral and religious life. They had died to their former sinful habits and practices. They were living to God, and were reaping the fruits of holiness instead of receiving the wages of sin. That these facts were true, the Apostle appeals to their consciousness to witness. Was this a fact or was it not? It would have been impossible for St. Paul to write in this manner unless he had been assured that those to whom he wrote thought so. This power had for its centre the belief in the Resurrection of Christ. It was caused by their connection with Him as a living person to whom all their regards were due.

It is impossible to have stronger historical evidence that this belief was esteemed by the Church to be fundamental to Christianity when this letter was written. I shall therefore only quote two more passages as showing the purely incidental character of the allusions:—

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. viii. 38, &c.) Again: “He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.... For to this end Christ both died and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.” It

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is impossible that any words could make it clearer than these do that the belief in the Resurrection formed the centre of the daily life of Christians at the time when the Apostle was writing. The Christian was a man who was consecrated to the service of Christ as to a living person, who had a right to his supreme regard.

It is therefore established beyond the possibility of a doubt that the belief in the Resurrection of Christ was universal in the Church when St. Paul wrote these letters, *i.e.* within less than thirty years after the event. At this period of time the traditional recollection of it, according to the principles laid down by Sir G. C. Lewis, would have formed the best material for history. All the other writings of the New Testament, whatever be their supposed date, give a uniform testimony in complete agreement with this. One of them demands a special notice—the book of Revelation.

Unbelievers do not dispute that this is a contemporaneous document, the work of the Apostle John, and freely use it to support their own theories as to the intensity of the opposition between the Jewish Apostles and St. Paul. I am quite sensible that a book which is professedly an apocalypse must be used with caution as an historical document, or we may fall into numerous errors in drawing inferences from obscure allusions contained in visions. But if there is one point more than another which this book makes clear, it is the strength of the author's belief in the Resurrection of Jesus. The frequent allusions to it, and to Jesus as being the Christ, put this beyond all dispute. We have here the testimony of a book which unbelievers concur in considering to have been composed not later than a year after the death of Nero, and allow it to be the one solitary writing in the New Testament composed by one of the twelve Apostles.

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According to the opinions of the opponents of the historical character of the Gospels, St. John was the most Judaizing of the original apostles of Christ. Of this they think that they discern very distinct traces in the book of Revelation. His opposition

to St. Paul was in their opinion extreme; and they think that he is actually referred to in the second and third chapters as teaching the Jewish Christians to apostatize. To discuss the truth or falsehood of these opinions can form no portion of the present work; but it is plain that in either case we cannot have a more unexceptionable witness. If these views are correct, the Apostle may be considered as the spokesman of the Jewish Christians. At any rate he was one of the original followers of Jesus. Now there is no book in the New Testament which testifies more strongly to the completeness of the belief in the Resurrection of Christ, and of His continued Messianic life in the heavenly world. The writer had conversed with Him before His crucifixion. The vision is to a considerable extent a description of His resurrection life.

This testimony alone carries with it the belief of the primitive Church at Jerusalem, and proves that on this point at least they and St. Paul were at one. This his Epistles place beyond the possibility of question. The parties in opposition were beyond all doubt Judaizing Christians. According to those against whom I am reasoning, they represented the opinions and claimed to act under the authority of St. James and the Church at Jerusalem. But as these Judaizing teachers were at one with Paul about the fact of the Resurrection, it follows that the leaders of that Church concurred with him in opinion also. If their opposition was as strenuous as has been attested, if there had been any difference between St. Paul and the twelve on so fundamental a point, it is impossible that they could have avoided adducing it to the Apostle's prejudice. [442]

The strength of St. Paul's assurance, that there was no diversity of opinion in the Church respecting this fact is remarkably illustrated by a passage in 1 Cor. xv. Had it not been so, his reasoning would have been simply absurd. There were persons in that Church who denied the fact of a future Resurrection. Yet they must have admitted the truth of the Resurrection of Christ. This is clear from the following words:—"If there be no

resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.” The reply to this argument is so obvious that it could not have escaped the dullest apprehension; if those who denied the reality of a future resurrection of the dead had entertained the smallest doubt as to the Resurrection of Christ, they would have had nothing to do but to affirm that the fact was doubtful, and the whole argument would fall to pieces. On the contrary, however, St. Paul thought that they were so fully persuaded of the truth of Christ's Resurrection, that he could safely use the fact to prove the possibility of that future resurrection which they denied. It is clear, that unless the belief was of the firmest character, no logical position could be more dangerous than this line of argument.

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The Epistle to the Romans establishes the same conclusion. The belief of this Church in the Resurrection as the fundamental fact of Christianity can be traced up, as I have already observed, not only to the commencement of their own Christianity, which was palpably of many years' standing, but even to the birth of Christianity itself. Of this, one brief incidental allusion offers decisive proof: “Salute,” says St. Paul, “Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who were of note among the Apostles, who were also in Christ before me.”

This passage makes the following points clear. Andronicus and Junia were converted to Christianity before St. Paul, *i.e.* within less than ten years from the date of the Crucifixion. They must therefore have been members of the Jerusalem Church. They were of note among the Apostles. This expression cannot mean less than that they were highly esteemed by the original twelve, and by the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem. Yet the Apostle wrote this Epistle in the fullest confidence that they would accept his Christology, including his account of the Resurrection. This proves that both they and the Church at Jerusalem, including all its chief leaders, accepted the Resurrection as a fact within a very short interval after its supposed date. But it does more: it proves that its importance as vital to Christianity was

fully recognized; or, in other words, it proves that the belief must have been contemporaneous with the origin of the Church.

Equally decisive is the proof afforded by the Epistle to the Galatians. It mentions two visits which the writer made to Jerusalem. One in which he paid Peter a visit of fifteen days, during which time he communicated with James. On the second occasion he went up to Jerusalem as a member of an embassy from the Church at Antioch, for the purpose of settling points under dispute between the Jewish and Gentile converts. On this occasion he tells us that he had a formal interview with the leaders of the Jewish Church, of which Peter, James, and John were esteemed the pillars. He expressly informs us that he communicated to them the leading points of the Gospel which he preached among the Gentiles; and that he received from them the right hand of fellowship, which can only mean that they sanctioned his views and fundamental principles. It is true that the Resurrection is not expressly mentioned as one of these; but it is impossible that the statement that he communicated his Gospel to them can be true, if this was not one of the facts which he imparted to them. [444]

It is a very important fact, and worthy of special notice, that in the account given in the Epistle to the Corinthians of the appearances of Jesus after His Resurrection, St. Paul expressly affirms that the risen Jesus was seen by Peter and by James; the latter appearance being mentioned nowhere else: and the former only referred to in the exclamation which greeted Cleopas and his companion on their return from Emmaus. It seems, therefore, morally certain that St. Paul had heard an account of these two appearances from the Apostles in question. If so, it brings us directly into contact with two of the most important of the apostolic body, who must have believed that they had actually seen him. Respecting the belief of St. John, the third pillar of the Church at Jerusalem, the testimony of the book of Revelation leaves no room for doubt. These writings enable us to affirm that

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three of the original Apostles believed that they had seen Jesus, risen from the dead. It is evident, therefore, that this brings us into the presence of historical evidence of the first order, quite independently of the affirmations of the Gospels.

If the first Epistle of St. Peter is genuine (and there is nothing but surmises and *à priori* assumptions about the opposition of his views to those of St. Paul on which the doubts respecting its genuineness are based) then we have the affirmation of the fulness of his belief in the Resurrection under his own hand. Besides the strong external testimony that it was written by St. Peter, there is one proof of its genuineness which is almost conclusive, and to which sufficient weight has not been attached by either the defenders or the opponents of Christianity. It is hardly possible to read this Epistle carefully without feeling that the writer of it is the same man as the Peter of the Gospels; the one being separated from the other by a considerable interval of time; the Peter of the Epistle being in fact a mellowed form of the Peter of the Gospels. But this has not only a direct bearing on the evidence of the Resurrection, but also a most important one, which I shall notice hereafter, on the historical character of the Gospels themselves.

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One more writing of the New Testament must be alluded to, because whoever was its author it belongs to a school of thought distinct from the other writings of the New Testament. I need hardly say that I allude to the Epistle to the Hebrews. The testimony of this writing to the fact that the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus was fundamental to Christianity is no less decisive; it not only proves what were the individual opinions of the writer, but of the school of Christian thought for whom it was intended. It affords abundant proof that the writer knew that their opinions on the subject were entirely in accordance with his own.

I have now shown on the strongest historical evidence that it is impossible that the belief in the Resurrection can have grown up slowly and only succeeded in gradually establishing itself. On

the contrary, I have proved that it was coeval with the birth of the Church, and that it formed the one sole ground of its existence. I have also proved that the belief in it was universal, and that it was accepted by the entire Christian community without distinction of party; and that their belief can be traced up as the sole cause of the renewed life of the Church after the crucifixion. I shall consider in the following chapter the bearing of these facts on the truth of the Resurrection, and show that the facts before us are inconsistent with any other supposition but that of its objective occurrence, and that it is impossible to account for it by any theory which endeavours to explain it on the supposition that the belief originated in the credulity and enthusiasm of the followers of Jesus.

## Chapter XX. The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ An Historical Fact.

I have proved in the preceding chapter, on the testimony of the highest order of historical evidence:—

1. That the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus was universal in the Church when St. Paul wrote these Epistles.

2. That this belief was held by every section in the Church, by the strongest opponents no less than by the admiring friends of St. Paul.

3. That the Churches holding this belief were separated from each other by a wide geographical area, and consisted of a great diversity of character, thereby affording the greatest obstacle to the spreading of an absurd story.

4. That these Churches did not merely accept the Resurrection as a bare fact, but that they considered that their existence as communities was based on its truth.

5. That they viewed the fact of the Resurrection not only as the great bond of union, but as the source of the moral power of the Christianity which they professed, and fully believed that their acceptance of it had exercised a mighty influence in turning them from the low and debasing pursuits of their previous life.

6. That their belief in the Resurrection was closely bound up with all the pursuits of their daily life.

7. That these Epistles not only afford indisputable proof that this state of things existed in the Churches within less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion, but they no less clearly show that the earliest Christian communities, such as the Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, entertained similar beliefs.

8. That it is an unquestionable historical fact that the belief in the Resurrection was co-eval with the restored life of the Church which had been extinguished by the crucifixion.

9. That the three pillar Apostles of the Church of Jerusalem believed that they had seen Jesus after His Resurrection, and that the entire body entertained a similar opinion.

10. That as late as A.D. 57 or 58 more than 250 persons were still living who believed that they had seen Jesus after His Resurrection; and that originally more than five hundred persons entertained a similar persuasion.

Such are plain facts of history. The question now before us is, how are they to be accounted for? Only three possible alternatives present themselves. Either:

Some of the followers of Jesus must have fancied that they saw Him risen from the dead, and have communicated this delusion to the rest. Or:

That He did not actually die, when He was supposed to have done so; and that His subsequent appearance, when partially recovered, was mistaken for a resurrection. Or:

That He rose from the dead in veritable reality, and was seen by His followers, and conversed with them.

I omit another possible supposition, that the belief in the Resurrection was due to a deliberate fraud, because no one capable of appreciating moral or historical evidence ventures to affirm it. The idea that the greatest and purest of human institutions can owe its origin to a deliberate imposture is a libel on human nature.

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Around one or other of these alternatives the contest lies. It is useless to attempt to becloud the question with a number of barren and indefinite generalities, such as myths and legends, vague charges of enthusiasm, fanaticism, and credulity, or general assertions of developments brought about by a succession of compromises between hostile parties. We are here in the presence of stern historical facts, which require a clear and definite

solution. The Christian Church exists as a fact. We can trace it up to its first origin. It asserts that its existence is due to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to nothing else. If unbelievers affirm that the fact is false, they are bound to offer some theory which is true to human nature, and lies within the possibilities of things, to show us how this belief originated, and how it was able to consolidate the life of this new community.

The idea that the greatest moral power which has ever appeared among mankind has had no other origin than a baseless delusion is supremely melancholy. That Christianity has been such a moral power will be disputed by few; and a large number of unbelievers will allow that notwithstanding the faults which they attribute to it, nothing has equally contributed to the civilization and elevation of the race. Yet if it be a delusion, it must be recognised as such, and we must submit to our hard fate. Still it is a terrible proposition to realize, that the noblest of human institutions has originated in a lie, even if it be one which was not deliberately intended as such.

It is evident that however great may be the general credulity of mankind, it is a very difficult matter to get any number of men to accept as a fact the assertion that a person who has actually died has returned again to bodily life. Such a belief will only be effected by the production of evidence which, if not true, is at all events in the highest degree plausible. This, as I have already observed, is fully established by the history of the past, for however numerous the narratives of marvellous occurrences may be, whether in histories or fictions, it is next to impossible to find reports of beliefs in the actual occurrence of a resurrection, or even in the possibility of one prior to that of Jesus Christ. Now St. Paul's conversion cannot be dated later than within ten years of the crucifixion; most probably it was earlier. It is clear that, prior to his conversion, communities of Jewish Christians must have existed in considerable numbers—in such numbers, in fact, as to raise his wrath and indignation to the highest point.

The spirit of persecution is aroused by a sense of danger. It is clear, therefore, from the fact of the persecution, that the persons in power saw danger from the progress of the new sect, and that its numbers most have been considerable. From St. Paul's testimony, it is also certain that Christianity had spread at least to one place beyond Judæa. The inference, therefore, seems irresistible that in the period which elapsed between the crucifixion and St. Paul's conversion, the number of the believers in the Resurrection of Jesus had increased to several thousands. Those, therefore, against whom I am reasoning, cannot help admitting that an interval of eight or ten years is a very short one for the conversion of such a large number of persons to the belief that a man who had been publicly executed, in the very city in which many of them lived, had been restored to life.

It is impossible that this belief could have been entertained by only a few solitary individuals who treasured it up secretly in their bosoms. On the contrary, the conditions of the case prove that it must have spread rapidly. It was not sufficient for the creation of the Church that a few solitary enthusiasts should believe that their Master was risen from the dead, but it was necessary that the Society, which Jesus had formed in his life-time, should be immediately reorganized on the basis of this belief. The belief in the Messiahship of Jesus constituted the original bond of union. A dead Messiah was, in the eyes of a Jew, an absurdity; still more so one who had been publicly crucified. With the death of Jesus, therefore, the bond of union among His followers must have been severed. Unless the Church was to perish in His grave, it was absolutely necessary that it should be re-constructed on the basis of His renewed life. The slowness with which any large number of even credulous people will accept the fact of a resurrection from the dead, must have formed an obstacle, the force of which it is impossible to over-estimate. Yet the work was done, and, within a period of seven or eight years, the belief had spread so widely that its adherents could be numbered [451]

by thousands. The truth of the Resurrection, founded on the direct testimony of a considerable number of persons who had had sufficient opportunity of testing it by the evidence of their senses, would fully account for the rapid growth of the belief. If, however, it originated in the brain of one or two crazed fanatics, if the belief of so prodigious an event could propagate itself at all, a considerable interval of time was absolutely necessary for its doing so. The memory of the Crucifixion was fresh and recent. What would have been the natural effect of announcing the fact of His Resurrection? Incredulity! What has become of His body? Why does He not appear to His former friends? The strangeness of the event must have prompted even the most credulous to make some inquiry about the matter, and the inquiry must have dissipated the delusion. Such a belief could only readily propagate itself after recent memories had grown dim, and a long interval of time had elapsed, sufficient for the Founder of Christianity to become surrounded with a halo of imaginary glory.

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Let us now consider the position in which the followers of Jesus must have found themselves on the night of the Crucifixion, and during the following days. Their hopes had been based on Him as the Messiah, who was to reign in the kingdom promised by the prophets; and they expected important places in that kingdom as the reward of their fidelity. These hopes must have been annihilated. The Messiah whom they expected to reign had perished at the hands of His enemies. What was to be hoped for more? Many could not help thinking that he had been a self-deceiver, if not an impostor. Was there any ground for hoping that He could be raised from the dead? Many of the prophets of the ancient Church had perished by the authority of former governments, or by the violence of the mob. But God had never interfered to vindicate the cause of one of them by raising him from the dead. The utmost that He had done was to raise up some new prophet to take his place. But this man was more

than a prophet—he was the Messiah. Did not all the old prophets promise Him a kingdom and a glory and a mighty triumph? Yet He had been cut off by His enemies, instead of triumphing over them; and His dead body was silent in the grave. Any hint that the Gospels allege Jesus to have given His followers of His own Resurrection is, according to the theory of those with whom I am reasoning, a late invention. On the days, therefore, which followed the Crucifixion, the Church must have presented the stillness of death, broken only by a few utterances of loving despair. [453]

But the Church did not perish; it set itself to the work of reconstruction. It expanded and grew. Within the space of eight years after the Crucifixion, the believers in the Resurrection could be numbered by thousands. This is an indisputable fact. Again it expanded and grew, and it never ceased to grow until in less than three hundred years after the public execution of its Founder by the authority of the Roman government, one of its professed adherents mounted the imperial throne, and found its strength sufficient to enable him to make it one of the institutions of the State. These facts are without a parallel in history. How are they to be accounted for? The followers of Jesus affirmed that their Master rose from the dead; and that He thus resumed His place as the Messiah of His Church. Unbelievers, in the face of the evidence before us, cannot deny that the great body of His followers must have believed that He had done so within the short interval of a few months after His public execution. Our documents on this point are distinct and definite. They affirm that He was not only seen but handled by many of His disciples after His Resurrection, that He ate with them, and that they had interviews with Him individually and collectively. I must now examine the alternative positions; and first, that His supposed appearances were delusions of the imagination.

The loose and general affirmation has been made that the followers of Jesus were so enthusiastically attached to Him that the

idea of His death was simply unbearable, and that they attempted to get rid of the fact by supposing that He had risen from the dead.

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I reply first: that all such general statements are worthless. We have specific facts before us; and these can only be accounted for by facts which are equally definite, and not mere fancies. The assertion before me is not only a bare supposition without one atom of evidence to rest upon, but it contradicts all the known facts of the case. So far is it from having been the case that the disciples were in such a state of enthusiastic exultation, that our own documents inform us that they had fallen into the lowest state of despondency.

But further: when a theory is propounded to account for an historical fact, the possibility of the supposition must be supported by some analogous cases in the history of man, more or less resembling it. All theories which are devoid of this support are worthless as history. Let those, therefore, who would urge this on our acceptance as an account of the origin of the greatest event in history, show that something like it has occurred in the records of the past. Let them show us one instance of a body of men whose enthusiasm for their leader was so great that, when he had been put to death by the authority of the government of the country, they got over this by fancying that he had been raised from the dead, and then took to persuading others of its truth. The enthusiasm of followers for their leaders has urged them to form plots, and even to make attempts to rescue them from the hands of their enemies. Such enthusiasm, however, is not even hinted at in the case of the disciples of Christ. No whisper of tradition has reached us that any of them formed a plot, or made a solitary attempt to rescue their Master. Are we then to believe that they imagined a resurrection to repair the damage of His Crucifixion? Such imaginative conceits would never have made a single convert to their story. They left their Master to perish in His agony, and when He had expired under the hands of His

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executioners, restored Him to an ideal life by imagining that He was risen from the dead. Such fictions may be safely dismissed without further notice.

Secondly: Let us suppose that some one of His disciples thought that he actually saw Him, and in the height of his enthusiasm converted a fancy into a fact; and persuaded the other disciples that He was risen from the dead: that these too, in turn, were wrought up into so high a state of enthusiasm that they likewise fancied that they saw Him: thus the delusion spread. I reply:—

First: As I have already observed, we are entitled to demand that some analogous case should be adduced before we can be rationally asked to accept such theories as to the solution of an unquestionable historical fact. Surely, if such are the workings of human nature under influences so general as enthusiasm and credulity, some similar occurrence must be no uncommon event in history. Let one therefore be adduced.

Secondly: Nothing is easier to affirm than that some credulous and enthusiastic follower of Jesus mistook a fancy of his imagination for a fact, thought that he had seen Him alive, and communicated his enthusiasm to the rest. Whatever may be said as to the possibility in fits of enthusiasm of a few half-crazy fanatics mistaking fancies for facts, it is clear that to communicate this enthusiasm to others is a very difficult undertaking, especially when they are in a depressed state of mind. As I have already shown, it is in the highest degree difficult, if not impossible, to persuade even very credulous persons of the occurrence of an actual resurrection, as all history and fiction prior to the Advent testify. A case of a person who professed to have seen, touched, conversed, and eaten with one who was raised from the dead is not on record. The belief in ghost stories and apparitions of the departed is to be met with at every turn. Sorcery professed to be able to bring departed spirits from the under-world, but it never attempted to restore to life a body which once was dead. [456]

Between these two classes of facts the distinction is most important. The enthusiasm or credulity which easily creates the one belief, refuses to accept the other. What we have to account for in this case is, not that some imaginative follower thought that he had seen the spirit of the crucified Jesus, come from the under-world to make a communication to his followers, and that the other disciples credulously accepted the report: but that the appearance was that of his body restored to the functions of animal life—in one word, a *Resurrection*, able to repair the damage which had been occasioned by his Crucifixion.

But for the purpose of arguing the question we must suppose that some one of the enthusiastic followers of Jesus fancied that he saw Him after His death, and mistook that fancy for a fact. I own that it is very difficult even to assume the existence of enthusiasm in the present instance, because all the known facts as well as the conditions of the case prove that whatever enthusiasm had once existed, it was at a very low ebb on the morning of the supposed Resurrection. Still, however, the assumption must be made, or argument will be impossible. As one enthusiast will be as good as another, let us assume that our supposed enthusiast was Mary Magdalene, who went early to the sepulchre, found the stone gone, saw the gardener in the dim light, mistook him for Jesus, and went and told her friends that she had seen Him risen from the dead: or to put the case more simply, that her excited brain created some spectral illusion; and that under its influence she thought she saw Him, and proceeded to convey the report to her friends.

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It at once strikes us as most unaccountable that, enthusiastic as she must have been, she did not do something to assure herself of the reality of the bodily presence of her Master. It was hard even for an enthusiast to believe that it was He. If she had spoken, and it was the gardener, she would have been at once cured of her delusion. If she had attempted to embrace Him and it had been a phantom, the same result would have followed. Surely

the intensity of her love, however credulous or fanatical she might be, would not have allowed her to leave the spot without some suitable demonstration. Equally incredible is it that she should have left Him, without inquiring whither He intended to betake Himself, or obtaining the promise of some future meeting at which His disconcerted friends might see Him. However enthusiastic she may have been, it is simply untrue to human nature, that she should have thought that her much loved Master had appeared to her in bodily reality, and that she should neither have spoken to Him, touched Him, nor endeavoured to ascertain the place of His proposed retreat, nor what His intentions were about the future. If she had done any of these things, it would have dissipated her delusions.

Let us suppose, however, that all these difficulties do not exist, and that she is gone to publish among the friends of Jesus that she had seen Him risen from the dead. His death had proved to them a stunning blow; but let us suppose that they were still eagerly desirous of the occurrence of something which might renew their old faith in their Master's Messiahship. It is clear that nothing short of a belief in His resurrection could have accomplished this. Yet however desirous they may have been of His return to life, they were confronted with the stern fact that He had been publicly executed, and that the credulity of the past had not succeeded in restoring dead men to life. Their despondency occasioned by the events of the last three days was extreme. Let us suppose that Mary Magdalene rushes in with the announcement: "I have seen the Lord,—the tomb is empty,—He is risen from the dead." However desirous they might be that the news should be true, it is evident that such an announcement must have filled the minds of even the most credulous with astonishment. What! not the apparition of His departed spirit, but a bodily reality, the very man himself? Is it possible that none of them suspected that it was the dream of an enthusiastic woman? Is it conceivable that men or women, passionately attached to their Master, asked

her no questions about the interview; what He had said to her; where He was to be found? Some replies to these and kindred questions were inevitable; and unless they were distinct and satisfactory, the rising enthusiasm must have been checked. Is it true to human nature that the most enthusiastic credulity could have accepted these things as facts, or that the dead Jesus could have straightway assumed His place of Messianic dignity in their minds, if He had made no appointment where He could meet His friends; or if that appointment was created by the imagination of the Magdalene, but when tested by the attempt to see him, it proved a delusion?

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But even credulity, when united with profound love and attachment to a departed friend, must have some farther satisfaction than a fancied sight. If the disciples, in the height of their enthusiasm, imagined that they saw Him, they surely would have spoken to Him. Could they have helped embracing Him on his return to life after His cruel sufferings and ignominious death? Above all, what about the future? Was He going to teach again in public? Was He not going to bring confusion on His enemies? Was He actually going to retire from public view out of their way? And if He did so, what about His Messianic claims? Who was to head the party for the future? Could they have no secret interviews with Him? If He henceforth retired into obscurity, what announcement were His friends to make to His opponents? The most fanatical enthusiasts must have asked some of these questions.

Either no answer was returned, and the delusions must have been immediately dispelled; or the enthusiasm which generated a phantom, and mistook it for a reality, invented an answer likewise. Any reply which fell short of a promise to appear for the future at their head, and either convince or confound His adversaries, must have extinguished their belief in His Messiahship. They either fancied they saw Him again, or they did not. If the former was the case, they must have had repeated interviews,

all created by the imagination, at which something definite must have been supposed to have passed sufficient to establish the belief that He was a Messiah returned to them from the grave. If His old Messianic character had ceased, some definite plan must have been propounded of the mode in which He was going to enter on a new one. If, however, we accept the alternative that He saw them no more, we shall possibly be told that His followers accounted for His absence by imagining that He had for a time been taken up into heaven, whence He was shortly coming again to destroy His enemies. But in that case it must have been a cruel blow to enthusiastic love. What! their much loved Master, [460] for whom they had sacrificed their all, to afford them one mute interview after His resurrection, immediately to go into heaven, and leave them without a head, exposed to the assaults of the opponents who had murdered Him?

But let us imagine all these difficulties got over, and that they fancied that they caught one solitary glimpse of Him, and that He was taken up into heaven, whence He would come again to revive His sinking cause. Was He to return in a few days, or months, or years? If the days became months, and the months years, what was to be done with the Church in the meantime? Was it to organize itself? If so, on what new basis? Was it to confront His foes? Was it to make converts; or quietly to await His return? If the latter, as months and years passed away, the Church must have simply died of inanition, and we should have heard no more of Christianity. If the former hypothesis be preferred, then it is plain that His followers must have determined to start His Messiahship on a new basis. But what was this? How was it to be propounded to the world? How were His other disciples to be persuaded to accept it? Instead of an earthly, the Church for the future must be headed by a heavenly Messiah, who was coming at some future day to take vengeance on His foes. Such a change of tactics must have been resolved upon, and that speedily; the whole plan must have been conceived and executed by a few

credulous enthusiasts, or the belief in the Messiahship of Jesus must have been extinguished in His grave.

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But further; the necessity of converting the other disciples to this belief was most urgent; for until this could be done, the society was dissolving into its individual elements. How was it to be accomplished? It is easy to say that these enthusiasts communicated their enthusiasm to the rest. But this little sentence conceals behind it whole mountains of difficulty. Every one to which I have already alluded, must have had to be surmounted in each individual case. There must have been many other disciples who dearly loved their Master. What must have been their feelings on hearing that He had appeared to only four or five of them, and had gone up into heaven? What! He, whom we loved, who dearly loved us, risen from the dead, and gone to heaven without affording us the consolation of a parting interview? Such a thought was enough to chill all ordinary enthusiasm. Was His mother one of those who fancied they saw Him come again from the grave? If she was, could she have been mistaken? If she did not see Him, what must have been her feelings at the thought that He had left the world, without allowing her to behold Him? What would have been the feelings of the women, whose beneficence had contributed to His support, or of His intimate friends among the Apostles? Surely all these would have thought it more certain that their companions' report originated in a heated imagination, than that Jesus should have acted thus.

But the idea that a few fanatics only fancied that they saw Jesus alive after His Crucifixion is negatived by an historical fact distinctly affirmed by St. Paul in the face of his opponents in the Corinthian Church. Having mentioned His appearance to Peter and the twelve, St. Paul asserts: "After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

Here then we are in possession of direct contemporaneous testimony. This assertion is boldly made in the face of the

powerful party who denied St. Paul's apostleship. It is clear that if they had not believed in the truth of his assertion, they would not have lost such an opportunity of throwing discredit upon him by convicting him of falsehood. The Apostle affirms in the presence of his adversaries that there were then living more than 250 persons who believed that they had seen Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead; and not only so, but that upwards of 500 persons had seen Him on one and the same occasion. If this assertion was false, nothing was easier than for the opponents of the Apostle to refute it. [462]

On the supposition, therefore, that the belief in the Resurrection originated in a delusion, it must have been one on a prodigiously large scale. Unless St. Paul, and the opposing section of the Corinthian Church, who must have represented the opinions of the Church at Jerusalem, were misinformed on this subject, it is necessary to frame an hypothesis which shall not only account for three or four fanatics, fancying that they saw Jesus Christ alive, when it was nothing but the creation of a disordered imagination, but for the fact that more than five hundred persons laboured under a similar delusion. The assertion of the Apostle is express, not that more than five hundred persons were persuaded to believe that some others had seen Jesus Christ after He was risen from the dead, but that they had actually seen Him themselves.

The only way of evading the force of this testimony is either by directly impugning St. Paul's veracity, or by supposing that he made an assertion based on a vulgar rumour. The whole character of the Apostle renders the supposition of a deliberate falsehood incredible, besides the danger already alluded to of certain detection by his opponents. Nor is the other alternative more tenable, that on such a subject he adopted a mere idle rumour. No subject more occupied his mind than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Him he sacrificed everything. To Him he devoted his entire life. Is it conceivable that such a man would [463]

not, under the influence of common curiosity, have inquired into the alleged facts of his Master's Resurrection? But these letters prove that he was a man of far more than ordinary curiosity. It is clear from them that he kept himself acquainted with the details of the events which took place in the Churches which he had planted. Messengers were sent by him to supply him with all necessary information. Even in so distant a Church as that of Rome, which he had not even visited, he knew no small number of the chief Christians by name, and took the deepest interest in their affairs. Are we to believe that such a man received such a fact connected with the dearest interests of his life without taking the trouble to ascertain its truth? Moreover, his former character as a persecutor must have rendered it necessary that he should institute a diligent inquiry into the alleged Resurrection of one whom he considered an impostor, and whose adherents he was endeavouring to compel to renounce their allegiance. We must, therefore, conclude that what St. Paul here affirms must have been true, that on one definite occasion several hundreds of persons thought that they had seen Jesus Christ after He was risen from the dead.

But if it is in the highest degree difficult to account for the possibility of three or four of the disciples of Jesus fancying they saw their risen Master, when they saw nothing but a creation of their own imagination, what theory can be framed to account for the fact of several hundreds of persons having become the prey of a similar delusion? Large numbers of persons do not fall into delusions of this kind. Are we to suppose that some of them affirmed that some distant object which they saw was Jesus, and that the remainder accepted the assertion without inquiry? If He had not come near to them, would they not have rushed up to a man, who was believed to have come up again from the grave, and endeavoured to converse with him? Let all history be searched for any fact at all like this. Until something like it can be found, we are justified in pronouncing such a delusion

impossible. Nay: however common the belief in ghost stories, it would be impossible to find a case of several hundred persons who believed that, on some one definite occasion, when they were all assembled, they had seen the ghost of a person who had recently been executed, appear before them, and on the strength of this belief, constituted themselves into a new society;—a society which has endured through eighteen centuries? However cynical our views may be, it is impossible to believe that human nature is a lie.

Again: If for the purposes of the argument we accept the impossible supposition that a few deluded fanatics persuaded themselves that they had seen their Master risen from the dead, and that they set themselves to persuade others that this was a fact, then it is clear that the wish of making converts to their belief must have been a very gradual and slow process. This, in the face of all the evidence supplied by history, does not require further proof. It would be impossible to make converts at all, without adducing some overwhelming evidence of the truth of their assertion. But on the supposition that it was a delusion of the imagination, such evidence could not be forthcoming. Such beliefs are only possible after the lapse of very considerable intervals of time, if they are possible even then.

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But in the present case recollections were all fresh. Will the attempt to persuade persons who live in the city where a public execution has taken place, that the man executed is alive again, succeed? Will it succeed anywhere in the neighbourhood, while the events are still in everybody's recollection? Living actors must have died out, memories of the past must have become faint, before such things can be made to wear even the semblance of possibility. But the plain historical facts refuse to concede the requisite interval during which such a belief could slowly grow up. While the belief was growing, the Church would have been perishing from want of a Messiah to step into the place of the dead Jesus. On the contrary, the growth of the belief was

rapid. The Church speedily rose from its ruins. Before St. Paul's conversion, it had increased to such numbers as to be worth persecuting. There was a Church at Jerusalem; there were Churches in Judæa; there were Christians in Damascus. Before this event the small knot of deluded fanatics had persuaded thousands; they had formed the Society which subverted the religion and institutions of the Roman empire, and of which all the progressive races of men profess—now in the 19th century of its existence—to be still members. The facts of unquestionable history utterly refuse to the advocates of this theory the time necessary for imparting to it even a passing plausibility.

I infer, therefore, that the theory that one or more credulous enthusiasts among the disciples of Jesus fancied that they saw their Master risen from the dead, while in reality they were labouring under some mental hallucination, and that they communicated their enthusiasm to the rest, and that these created the Christian Church, is unsound in philosophy, contradicts the facts of history, and the phenomena of human nature, as testified to by past experience, and is destitute of the possibility of verification, and also is contrary to analogy. It follows, therefore, that this portion of the alternative before us must be pronounced utterly inadequate as a solution of the facts.

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Let us now consider the other alternative, that Jesus did not actually die, but, although He had been crucified, escaped with His life; that His disciples saw Him after His crucifixion; and, being persuaded that He had expired, mistook His appearance for a restoration to life.

This alternative need not detain us long. It is involved in a considerable number of the difficulties which are connected with the assumption that some one or more of the disciples fancied that they saw Him when they did not really see Him, and that they persuaded the others that He was risen from the dead. These difficulties I have already disposed of. But it has in addition some difficulties peculiarly its own, which I will now briefly notice.

I admit that it was possible to recover from the effects of crucifixion, if taken down from the cross in time. This we learn from Josephus, who, on his return one day from going to examine a place for the encampment of the Roman forces, found that three of his friends had been crucified during his absence. By his entreaties, he obtained the orders of Titus for their being taken down. Two died under cure; one recovered. Josephus is silent as to whether they had been scourged before they were crucified. This was no doubt an important point in reference to the possibility of recovery. Such was the usual practice; although when the Romans crucified the Jews in large numbers, as they had now been in the habit of doing for some time, it may be a question whether it was always inflicted. These persons had probably been suspended on the cross for some hours before they were taken down. They were treated with the utmost care, with a view to their recovery; yet two out of the three died. Such are the facts, as related by Josephus. [467]

It has been suggested that Jesus was only in a swoon when taken down from the cross; that in the sepulchre He recovered His consciousness, to which the large quantity of spices used at His burial might have contributed; that He managed to creep out of the grave to some place of security, where He was seen by a few of His disciples, but that He died not long after. This, it is said, the disciples mistook for a Resurrection, and that it formed the basis of the renewed life of the Church. Let it be observed that there would be the same difficulties in re-constituting the Church on such a basis, and in procuring converts to this belief, as there would have been on the other alternative, which I have shown to be untenable. These, therefore, I need not consider.

This theory pre-supposes not only that the body of Jesus was interred, but that it was committed to the custody of His friends. This fact we have from the Gospels; as well as the additional fact that the time during which He was suspended on the cross did not exceed six hours at the utmost. But we also learn from

them that, before Pilate ordered the body to be delivered up, he took care to ascertain, from those in charge, the certainty of the death; and the fourth Gospel affirms that one of the soldiers, in order to remove all doubt on the subject, pierced his side with a spear. Now without the aid of the Gospels it would not have been known that the body was committed to the custody of His friends. If, therefore, their historical testimony is good for this fact, it is absurd to refuse them credence when they testify to the other facts. We say distinctly: if the truth of the one set of facts is denied, because the Gospels are unhistorical, the truth of the other set (for the Gospels are the sole authorities) must not be assumed on their testimony. Apart from this, we are only at liberty to assume that the crucifixion was conducted in the usual manner; and that the bodies were disposed of accordingly, *i.e.* that, if the crucified persons were buried at all, they were buried ignominiously. It has also been affirmed that Pilate sacrificed Jesus by compulsion, and that the centurion on guard was not ill-disposed towards him. This again, I say, we only learn from our present Gospels, and I must again protest against the practice of accepting their testimony on one side and ignoring it on the other. The Romans, moreover, were not the sort of men to allow a crucified victim to be taken down from the cross until they were well assured that he had hung there long enough to extinguish life; and from the frequency of such executions they would learn how long it would require, and what on such occasions were the symptoms of death; nor did they concede to persons so executed an honourable burial.

But further: It never occurred to the Jews that it was possible that the crucified Jesus had escaped with His life, and that this fact was really at the bottom of the announcement of His resurrection. If it was known to any person concerned that He had thus escaped, nothing could have been more dangerous on the part of His followers than to announce that He was risen from the dead. This was the very thing to promote inquiry, and to

arouse a suspicion among His enemies that He had not really died, and thus to induce them to make every effort to ascertain the place of His retreat. The quickest way to put an end to the story of the Resurrection was to produce the living Jesus, weak and exhausted from His wounds; or, if He had really died, to produce His body. But not a single whisper has come down to us from the opponents of Christianity that He did not really die. If such an idea had afforded even a probable account of the story of the Resurrection, it would certainly have occurred to Paul when a persecutor, and he would have had recourse to it as a means of dissipating the delusion. Such are some of the first difficulties which surround this mode of accounting for the story of the Resurrection. A sepulchre was a place ill-fitted for a man, exhausted by scourging and crucifixion, to recover in; nor was there a retreat at hand. But, as we scrutinize the matter more closely, these difficulties become impossibilities. [469]

It is clear that from the hour of His supposed death on the cross, Jesus disappears from history, except in the form of Jesus the Messiah raised again from the dead, the great Founder of the Christian Church. If, therefore, His supposed Resurrection was nothing but a recovery from a swoon, one of two things is certain: either He died shortly after from exhaustion, or He lived somewhere in deepest retirement, only receiving visits from those of His followers who were in the secret, and in due course He expired. Perhaps it may be urged that His friends succeeded in carrying Him off into some distant country, and that some one or more of His followers, who had seen Him slowly recovering, mistook this for a resurrection, and propagated the story.

We must keep steadily in view that what we have to account for is not a mere story of a resurrection propagated by a crazed fanatic, but the erection of the Christian Church on its basis. It is a plain fact that Jesus appeared no more in public, and that His earthly history ends with His crucifixion. What became of Him? It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this question. [470]

Let us take the first supposition that He recovered from a swoon, but died shortly afterwards from exhaustion. This theory involves the necessity that some one or more of His followers should have seen Him alive and dying of exhaustion. Was it possible, I ask, for the most deluded fanaticism to mistake such a condition for a resurrection from the dead? Was this a basis on which to revive the hopes of the disciples, and to re-construct the Church? Would any amount of enthusiastic credulity mistake such a person for the Messiah of the future? If He died shortly afterwards, what became of His Messiahship? Did His other followers pay Him no visits during His illness? Did they see Him die, or attend His burial? Surely such positions do not require serious argument.

But let us suppose that He recovered, lived in retirement and only received the secret visits of a few followers, and that out of this the story of the Resurrection grew. How grew? I again ask. Such growths require considerable periods of time, and these, history utterly refuses to grant. Would it be possible, I ask, for any deluded follower to mistake such facts for a resurrection from the dead? Could Jesus himself have so mistaken it? or, however well the secret might be kept, would a Messiah, living in privacy, out of the sight of friends and foes, be a possible Messiah, who could impart a new life to the Church? In such a case it is impossible to exonerate the persons concerned from fraud, even the Great Teacher himself. Are we to suppose that He himself actually mistook His recovery from a swoon for a resurrection, and justified His followers in publishing a report of it? Why then did He not appear in public and assert His Messianic claims? But could His followers have persuaded themselves that a man who must have shown distinct indications of slow recovery, and who never ventured to appear again in public, was raised again from the dead to continue His Messianic work? If this is the true account of the matter, it was not a delusion but an imposture. If we suppose that a few friends only visited Him, what did

His other disciples say about the matter? Did the few, with the concurrence of their Master, propagate the belief that He was gone into heaven, knowing that He was still on earth? Be these things as they may (and those who have started the idea should solve it), if the real basis of the story of the Resurrection be a recovery from a swoon and a subsequent life of privacy, Jesus must have shared the common fate of humanity and died. This must have been known to those with whom He lived; it must have been known to those who visited Him. His death must have dispelled their delusions. Henceforth the propagation of their story must have been due to wilful fraud—a fraud for which it is impossible to assign a motive, and which it is not the modern practice to charge on the first propagators of Christianity.

The remaining supposition, that Jesus, after having been seen by one or two of His followers alive and slowly recovering, was conveyed away to some distant place, where they saw Him no more, and that out of this grew the story of His Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, is not only in itself intrinsically incredible, but it offends against every one of the principles which I have established. I need not, therefore, discuss it further.

The existence of the Church is a fact. It is professedly based on another fact, namely, the Resurrection of Christ. If this be true, it fully accounts for the existence, origin, and growth of the Church. No other theory can account for it. The Resurrection is a fact, or a delusion. If it is not a fact, two suppositions respecting its origin are alone possible. These have been proved, on the strongest historical evidence, to be impossible. It follows, therefore, that the only remaining alternative is the true one: that JESUS CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD. Its attestation is stronger than that of any other fact in history.

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## Chapter XXI. The Historical Value Of The Gospels As Deduced From Previous Considerations.

I have proved in the preceding chapters that one of the miracles recorded in the Gospels is substantiated by the highest form of historical testimony, on evidence quite independent of their contents. I have adopted this course because unbelievers affirm that the miraculous narratives contained in them are alone sufficient to prove them to be unhistorical. It has therefore become necessary to prove the truth of the greatest miracle which they narrate, without any reference to their assertions. Christianity unquestionably existed before the Gospels were written, and the all-important fact on which it rests can be substantiated without their aid, on data which are conceded by our opponents. Its truth or falsehood therefore does not rest on any mere question as to what was their actual date, or who were their authors. Still they are the only records of the life of Jesus Christ that the Church possesses. The question therefore as to whether they are true in all their chief outlines, is one of such importance as to render a few observations on this subject indispensable.

There can be no doubt that no one would have ever thought of denying their general authenticity, except on account of the miraculous narratives they contain. This has made them the battle-field of Christianity, because it has been supposed that if their historical character can be shaken, Christianity would be disproved as resting on no other basis. For this purpose every variation in them, even the smallest, has been noted, and these variations have been magnified into contradictions. There is

no weapon which criticism has not employed for the purpose of impugning their veracity. But the real ground of offence is the miraculous narrative. As, however, I have proved that the most important miracle recorded in them can be established on grounds quite independent of their testimony, we can now approach their consideration with this great antecedent difficulty removed. If the Resurrection of Jesus is an actual occurrence, the other miraculous events recorded in them no longer stand in the way of their acceptance as genuine histories. This one miracle is sufficient to carry all the rest; not, of course, that it proves that they occurred, but it gets rid of the entire *à priori* difficulty with which their acceptance is attended. Nay, further, if Christ rose from the dead, it is more probable than not, that this was not the only miracle connected with Him: or, in other words, if the authors of the Gospels attributed to Him no other miraculous action, it would rather afford a presumption against them as credible historians. It follows therefore, that although the proof of the Resurrection does not by itself establish the reality of the other miracles recorded as having been performed by Him, it renders them so far probable, that the same amount of evidence, which is sufficient to establish the ordinary facts of history, is sufficient to establish the general truth of the events recorded in the Gospels. I do not mean to affirm that some miracle may not have been incorrectly attributed to Christ in the traditions of the Church, from which the narratives in the Gospels have been derived, in the same manner as some inaccurate reports of facts have obtained admission into ordinary histories. But as these latter do not affect the general credibility of history, so errors of this description would not affect the general credibility of the Gospel narratives. All that I claim for them is that they should be both alike tried by the historical canons of criticism applicable to the same species of documents. Let me state once for all the position that I occupy. I am not called upon to prove that no error can have crept into their accounts; that events are all arranged in

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their true order of sequence; that variations do not exist in them which with our present knowledge of the details, it is difficult to reconcile, or even that the Evangelists themselves may not have misconceived their true order, or grouped them in one that was the result of religious considerations. The determination of such questions may affect our views as to the nature of the inspiration under which we suppose the Gospels to have been written, but it is one wholly foreign to an historical discussion. The question which I have to consider is, not the extent of the inspiration of their authors; but whether they do or do not contain genuine history; and if they do, to what class of historical writings they belong, and to estimate their testimony accordingly.

I will consider this last question first. The Gospels most distinctly affirm that they do not belong to the class of professed histories, but to that of memoirs. This is a very important consideration; for if they only claim to be memoirs and not histories it is absurd to demand of them an accuracy of arrangement and of detail, which would be essential to a history, but which forms no portion of the plan of a memoir. But they not only affirm that they are memoirs, but memoirs of a peculiar character; that is to say, religious memoirs, composed with a double purpose, viz. that of setting forth the events of a life, and at the same time of teaching a religion.

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This point is so important, and is so generally overlooked in the arguments both of those who affirm and of those who deny their historical character, that it will be necessary to prove it. It is not only evident from the general nature of their contents, but three of the Evangelists directly affirm it, and two of them, Luke and John, in express terms. The former distinctly asserts that he composed his Gospel in order that a person called "Theophilus" might know the certainty of the things in which he had been instructed. "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth a declaration of these things that are most surely believed among us; even as they delivered them unto us, which from the begin-

ning were eye witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having perfect understanding of all things from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things in which thou hast been instructed.” (Luke i. 1-4.)

Here we have the purpose of the writer definitely affirmed. It is to set forth a statement of the leading facts of the life of Jesus, for the purpose of communicating instruction in the Christian religion. In one word, the author proposed to teach a religion by means of a narrative of facts. It is hardly possible to give a more accurate description of a memoir as distinguished from a history. He also tells us that he meant to compose it in an orderly arrangement, but he does not tell us whether the order was intended to be strictly chronological, or merely regulated by the avowed religious purpose of the work. It is quite possible for a writer to adopt an orderly arrangement, who arranges his matter as much by religious considerations as by chronological ones. According to the statement of this preface, the religious purpose is clearly the predominant one; and it is therefore only reasonable to suppose that it has exerted considerable influence on the grouping. [477]

We learn also from this preface that the things most surely believed among Christians consisted of a number of facts, which had been delivered to them by persons who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word. Several persons had already set forth written accounts of them before the author composed this Gospel. It is implied that he did so because he possessed better and more accurate sources of information than previous writers. The object, however, is clear; it was that Theophilus might know the certainty of those things, *i.e.* the great facts on which the Christianity, in which he had been instructed, was based.

The assertion of this religious purpose in the composition of the fourth Gospel, and that the materials are a selection from a

large mass of others is even more distinct and definite. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life through his name." (John xx. 30, 31.)

Words could hardly have been framed which more definitely assert that this Gospel is a memoir, and not a history; and that the religious purpose, in its composition, was the predominant idea of the writer.

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The assertions of the author of St. Mark's Gospel, although not equally full, are sufficiently definite. He designates it as "The beginning of the gladsome message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Here, again, the religious idea is plainly the predominant one in the writer's mind, and the obvious conclusion is that he intended his work to be a memoir, and not a history.

We have no such direct affirmation by the author of St. Matthew's Gospel, unless the opening words, "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," are intended to cover the entire work. The nature of its contents, however, leave not the smallest doubt that his design in writing was precisely the same as that of the other Evangelists, viz. to teach Christianity by setting forth a memoir of the life of Jesus Christ.

Such, then, is the avowed purpose of the authors of the four Gospels. Each of them is a religious memoir. This being so, it is absurd to demand of such writings what can only be found in regularly composed histories.

In what, then, does a history differ from a memoir? The object of the historian is not only to give an account of the events which he narrates precisely as they occurred; but the order of his narrative is regulated by the definite sequences of time and place. The writer of a memoir, on the contrary, is not bound to observe this order, but he is entitled to vary it in reference to the special object he has in view, and the points which he requires to

illustrate.

But the religious purpose is most definitely affirmed to have been the predominant one in the minds of the authors of the Gospels. It would therefore have an important influence on their arrangement of their materials. We should expect to find them grouped far more in reference to this end, than to the mere sequences of time and place. When certain of the actions or portions of the teaching of our Lord illustrated the particular subject which each Evangelist had before him, he would neglect the exact historical order, and group them in reference to this special purpose. [479]

In writings of this description, therefore, while all the chief points of his life and his discourses ought to present a substantial agreement, we should naturally expect to find a considerable number of minor divergencies. While we have the fullest right to expect that the facts will be accurately reported, we have no right to demand that the writer should observe no other order in his narrative than the mere sequences of time and place. It is on the assumption that the authors of the Gospels intended to set forth an exact historical account of the ministry of Christ, instead of taking them for what they have affirmed them to be, religious memoirs of that ministry, that no inconsiderable number of their alleged discrepancies have originated.

The presence of variations, or if it is preferred to call them contradictions, in writings of this description by no means invalidates their historical character. It has been well observed by a writer in the "Westminster Review," that they are to be found in every historical writing from Herodotus to Mr. Froude. As these discrepancies in the Gospels are so largely dwelt on by unbelievers, I subjoin a passage from Dean Stanley's account of the murder of Thomas a Becket, in his "Memorials of Canterbury Cathedral," as showing the existence of such inaccuracies even in the accounts of persons who were actual eye-witnesses of events in which they were deeply interested. Speaking of the number of

existing accounts of the murder, he says:—

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“Of these thirty narrators, four, Edward Grimes, William Fitzstephen, John of Salisbury, who unfortunately supplies but little, and the anonymous author of the Lambeth manuscript, claim to have been eye-witnesses. Three others were monks of the convent, and although not present at the massacre, were probably somewhere in the precincts. Three others, though not in England at the time, had been on terms more or less intimate with Becket, and two of them seem to have taken the utmost pains to ascertain the truth of the facts which they narrate. From these several accounts, we can recover the particulars of the death of Archbishop Becket to the minutest details. It is true that having been written by monastic and clerical historians, after the national feeling had been raised to enthusiasm in his behalf, allowance must be made for exaggeration, suppression, and every kind of false colouring which could set off their hero to advantage. It is true, also, that *in some points the various authorities are hopelessly irreconcilable*. But still a minute comparison of the narrators with each other, and with the localities, leads to a conviction that on the whole the facts have been substantially preserved; and as often happens, the truth can be ascertained in spite and even in consequence of attempts to distort and suppress it.”

It is clear, therefore, that the presence of variations, nay even *hopeless contradictions* in such narratives, does not interfere with their general historical character. It appears that from narratives which contain “exaggeration, suppression, and every kind of false colouring,” we can ascertain the particulars of the death of Becket to the minutest particular. Why do not unbelievers apply the same rule to the Gospels? Why are their minor variations in details alleged to prove that the entire narrative is unhistorical? One thing respecting them is clear: instead of presenting indications of “exaggeration, suppression, and false colouring,” they are characterized by a uniform sobriety in their statements.

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They offer no comments, and allow the facts to produce their own impression on the reader.

It follows therefore that if the Gospels were ordinary biographies, the variations in them would not interfere with their historical character, and that differences in mere details would leave the main facts unaffected. Still more true is this with respect to memoirs, and especially with those composed with the object of teaching a religion. Attention to this obvious fact will get rid of a large number of the objections which have been so pertinaciously urged against them.

With respect to their general credibility, it is important to observe that even if the date of the Synoptics be placed as late as that assigned to them by those critics who deny their historical character, viz. somewhere between A.D. 90 and 115, still the time when they must have been composed lies, according to the rule of Sir G. C. Lewis, within the period of trustworthy historical tradition. In this case the earliest of them would bear date about sixty, and the latest of them about eighty-five years after the events they narrate. Renan is of opinion that their internal evidence proves them to have been composed before the destruction of Jerusalem. Be this as it may; even at the date assigned to them by the most sceptical critics, good traditional information lay within the reach of their respective authors. The interval is about the same in the one case as that which separates us from the invasion of France by the allies in 1814, and in the other case from the outbreak of the French Revolution. Many persons are still alive who can remember the former event; and although nearly everyone who could remember the latter has passed away, yet large numbers of the existing generation, whose recollections will be good for twenty years to come, have conversed with those who took the deepest interest in the scenes in question. While this generation lives, it would be impossible for the whole outline of the facts to become falsified. Minor errors might creep into the details; their precise order and sequence might not be

accurately preserved; yet their general outline would be handed down correctly, and it would be impossible to hide the true history behind a set of legends. If the authors of the Synoptic Gospels were only separated by this interval of time from the events that they narrate, they must have had all the materials of true history within their reach. Persons must have been living when the first Gospel was written who could accurately remember the events in question; and even at the latest date which can be assigned to the other Gospels, large numbers of persons must have been living who had heard narratives of them from their fathers, which, as unspeakably interesting, they would treasure up with the liveliest recollection.

It follows, therefore, that even if we assume the latest date which has been assigned for the publication of the Synoptic Gospels it lies considerably within the period of accurate historical recollection, even if we suppose that their authors composed them from traditional sources only, and were not assisted by written documents. But the existence of documents is expressly asserted by the author of St. Luke's Gospel. And even if we were devoid of this testimony, we might infer it from the inherent probability of the case. This was inevitable, as the basis of the religion was placed on a personal history. The system of instruction must have involved a constant reference to the details of that history. When, therefore, the members of the Churches heard them from the lips of original witnesses, the interest of the subject must have induced those who were able to write, to compose brief memoranda for the purpose of assisting their recollections. In this way a considerable amount of Christian literature in connection with the life of Jesus must have grown up in the course of years, and the necessity for it would become the more urgent in proportion as the original disciples who had heard His discourses and seen His actions passed away from the scene. This is exactly in conformity with the statement made by the author of St. Luke's Gospel.

It is clear, therefore, that even if the publication of our present Gospels did not take place before the time assigned to them by unbelievers, the historical materials at the command of their authors must have been ample. It would have been impossible that facts and legendary inventions should have become blended together within so short a period. Consequently nothing but neglect to use the materials at hand, or a deliberate purpose of falsification could have prevented them from giving an account of the ministry of Jesus which would be substantially accurate in all its main features. If on the other hand we suppose these Gospels to have been written for the purpose of falsification, then their contradiction to the accounts which had been hitherto accepted by the Church must have destroyed their credit. It would have been impossible for the authors to have succeeded in concealing the facts behind a mass of myths and legends while they formed the very groundwork of the daily life of the community. Under the peculiar circumstances of the Christians of the first century some portion of the events of the life and teaching of Christ must have been brought to their minds every day. The hostility of the Pagan world around them was alone sufficient to ensure this. Moreover, the religion was not one [484] which was committed to the custody of a caste or priesthood; but it appealed directly to the individual. As distinguished from the other religions of the world Christianity may be not incorrectly defined as the religion of the individual. It awoke emotions of the profoundest nature in the hearts of even its humblest followers, addressing itself both to their consciences and their affections. These emotions were all centered in a personal life. If one fact is more certain than another, it is that Jesus was viewed by the early Christians as their religious King, to whom they owed a personal allegiance. This must have rendered it necessary for them to treasure up all the facts of His history with the deepest care.

Further: the early Christians not only lived in the midst of a

society extremely hostile to them, but were also zealous proselyters. This alone would have been sufficient to compel them to keep in lively remembrance the chief events in the history of Jesus. How else was it possible for them to persuade others that He was the Christ? The Church was not a school of philosophy, but consisted of a body of men whose bond of union was adherence to a leader. To make converts to such a religion would have been impossible without an accurate acquaintance with the facts on which His claims were grounded.

Corporate bodies possess a power of handing down a traditional knowledge of events in a far greater degree than individuals. The Christian Church consisted of a set of communities which had not only an individual, but also the strongest corporate life. Although it contained no priesthood, properly so called, the cohesion of these communities, placed as they were in the midst of a hostile population, in Jewish or Gentile cities, was of the strongest character, and in proportion to their smallness, the action of each individual member would be important. Each separate Church therefore formed a corporation as opposed to the Jewish and heathen world by which it was surrounded; and each separate unit felt himself animated by a similar life, which dictated to him the necessity of conquering or perishing. From this arose an intense desire of making new converts and of increasing the number of the faithful. How was this to be accomplished? An organization was necessary. Each of the communities had one which was suitable to its need. One of its most important functions must have been to instruct new converts in its principles, and to keep actively burning the zeal of its original members. But as the existence of the community was founded on an adhesion to a person, the course of instruction must have consisted to a considerable extent of details of the actions and teaching of Jesus. "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?" was a pertinent question of St. Paul, "or how shall they hear without a preacher?" No society

has ever existed in the world which has had an equal inducement to hand down accurately the events of its founder's life, or had equal facilities for detecting any attempt to substitute a fictitious account of him for the true one.

It follows therefore that at the period in question it would have been simply impossible that a fictitious or legendary account of the life of Jesus should have taken the place of the one which these Churches had accepted at the time when they first came into existence. I have already proved that the Epistles of St. Paul put it beyond the possibility of question that an account of the chief facts in the ministry of Jesus formed the foundation of the religious life of the Churches at the time when he wrote them, and that it had done so from the first. The difficulty therefore of introducing an entirely new version of it must have been insurmountable. A doubtful fact or two might have become incorporated, but while the religious life of the community was thus strong, it would have been utterly impossible to give a new colouring to the whole. [486]

But further: this difficulty must have been greatly increased by the wide separation of such Churches as those of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Jerusalem, and others, from one another. Each Church must have had an account of its own of the chief facts of our Lord's ministry. If one of them could have been induced to accept a new set of facts, there would have been the greatest difficulty in persuading the others to follow its example. Daily experience teaches us how very slow religious bodies are in changing the fundamental articles of their belief. However much the sentiments of individuals may have changed, the original confessions of faith are retained with the utmost tenacity, even after they have ceased to embody the religious life of the community. What confessions of faith are to modern Churches, the chief facts of the ministry of our Lord must have been to the primitive one; the only difference being that these latter lived with a far greater tenacity in the minds of the early Christians than the former

have in modern Churches. If therefore a single Church could have been induced to accept a new version of its Founder's life, the separation of these different communities from one another, would have placed an insuperable barrier in the way of imposing such an account on the other Churches. The inquiry must have at once arisen, Whence has this Church derived its new Gospel, thus fundamentally different from that which has from the first formed the basis of our religious life?

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It is clear therefore that even if we accept the latest date which had been assigned to the publication of the Synoptic Gospels, their authors must have been in possession of abundance of materials for setting forth an account of the ministry of Jesus, which would have been correct in all its great outlines; and that even if they had been so minded it would have been impossible for them to have succeeded in palming off a previously unknown set of facts in place of those which had hitherto formed the groundwork of the life of the different Churches. We have seen also that when St. Paul wrote his Epistles, the different Churches were in possession of an outline of the ministry of Jesus Christ which contained within it, as a matter of the highest importance, the most remarkable miraculous fact which is recorded in the Gospels. Is it to be believed that this was the only one; or, is it possible that a set of miraculous narratives could have succeeded in taking the place of the account of His life and teaching which was in possession of the Churches, within the interval of time which separates St. Paul's Epistles from the publication of the first of the Synoptic Gospels?

I conclude, therefore, that the original narratives must have attributed a number of miracles to Jesus Christ; that the accounts of them must have been handed down to the time when our opponents allow that the Gospels were published, and that by this means they have been incorporated into them. Not only has the alleged late date of the publication of the Gospels been urged as a reason for discrediting them as reports of historical facts, but

also the uncertainty of their authorship. It will not fall within the scope of this work to examine the value of the testimony by which each Gospel has been assigned to its respective author. It will be sufficient here to observe that it is as strong as that by which the authorship of any other ancient writing is ascertained. The internal character of two of these Gospels fully agrees with the traditionary account. Although the assertions of the early Fathers vary as to the precise relation in which Mark stood to Peter, the ancient traditions are unanimous in connecting him in some way or other with the Apostle. The phenomena of this Gospel are precisely such as we should expect if this was the case. In nearly every case where we can ascertain, either from this or from one of the other Gospels, that Peter was an eye-witness of an event recorded in it, St. Mark gives precisely such a description of it as we might expect would be given by a man of the peculiar temperament of Simon Peter. We know, both from the Acts of the Apostles and from the Epistles of St. Paul, that St. Luke was a companion of that Apostle. The peculiarities of the Gospel that bears his name are precisely such as we should have expected if its author was a companion of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. There is also every reason for believing that Luke was not an eye-witness of the ministry of Jesus. The author of the Gospel affirms that he was not an eye-witness. In conformity with this the Gospel bears the most distinctive marks of compilation. So far the internal structure of these two Gospels entirely agrees with the external testimony as to their authorship. We know also on the authority of the early Fathers that Matthew composed a Gospel in the Hebrew language which was designed for the use of Jewish Christians. Now whoever is the author of the present Greek Gospel which bears his name, it is distinguished by precisely the same characteristics as those which are described as appertaining to the Hebrew Gospel of St. Matthew, that is to say, that the proportion which the discourses bear to the narrative portions of it is very large; and its contents make it evident that

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it was chiefly designed for the use of Christians of the Jewish race. If therefore our present Gospel was not set forth by the Apostle himself in Greek, both the external testimony and the internal evidence prove that it is a representation of its contents sufficiently accurate for all the practical purposes of history.

But the question as to the names of the persons who actually set forth our Gospels has been made of far more importance than it deserves, both by the defenders and the opponents of Christianity. The all important point is, are they faithful accounts of the primitive traditions of the Church respecting the chief events of its Founder's ministry; and were they composed within that period of time, when the recollections of it must have been so fresh as to render it impossible to substitute a body of fictitious and legendary narratives in place of those which had been handed down in the Church from the beginning? Unless we know enough about an author from external sources of information, to enable us to form a definite opinion as to his judgment and means of information, our mere knowledge of his name will help us little. The information which ecclesiastical tradition affords us respecting the authors of the Synoptic Gospels is little beyond that which is contained in the New Testament itself, and is insufficient to enable us to form a judgment respecting their character. That judgment must be formed exclusively from the writings themselves, and can only be arrived at after a careful examination of their contents.

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It will be urged that if our present Greek Matthew could be shown to have been the work of the Apostle, we should then have the testimony of an eye-witness of the ministry of Jesus; and if we have no certain evidence that it was composed by him, then none of the events recorded in the Synoptics rest on autoptic testimony. The truth of this position I entirely deny. The real question is, do the events recorded in them faithfully represent the traditions of the Church? Have we evidence that the traditions which were current when these Gospels were composed, are ac-

curate representations of the accounts of the ministry of Jesus, which were handed down by our Lord's original disciples? If so, they must rest on autoptic testimony, as they could only have been derived from our Lord's companions. The mere knowing the name of one of them, unless we knew a great deal about his judgment and discretion, is of far less importance than the assurance that we are in possession of the general testimony of the entire body. Nor does it necessarily follow that any one follower of Jesus, even an Apostle, was in constant attendance on His person. We know from the Gospels themselves that this was not always the case. If such a person had narrated events which occurred during his absence, he must have been indebted for his knowledge of them to the testimony of others. If therefore the present Greek Matthew could be proved to be the work of the Apostle, still it by no means follows that he was an eye-witness of every one of the events recorded in it. If, however, it was set forth in its present form by some other hand, I fully admit that neither of the Synoptics was composed by an Apostle. But this is a wholly different point from the consideration whether they do or do not embody the testimony of the eye-witnesses of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This does not depend on our knowledge of the names of their respective authors, but whether we have good evidence that they faithfully embody the primitive apostolical traditions. [491]

A careful perusal of the Synoptics will convince the reader that neither of them professes to embody a set of personal reminiscences. On the contrary, they bear the strongest indications of being a collection of apostolic traditions. Of this I shall offer distinctive proof in the next chapter. The only Gospel which embodies such personal reminiscences as indicate the authorship of an eye-witness is that of St. John. But the indications of the presence of an individual personality in St. Matthew's Gospel are almost entirely wanting. In its general structure it forms a striking contrast to that of John. Supposing it to have been composed

by the Apostle, he has entirely hidden his individuality in his narrative.

The question, therefore, really turns on the conclusion at which we are able to arrive as to whether the Synoptic Gospels are faithful representations of the primitive apostolic traditions. I have proved that even at the latest date to which opponents assign their publication, they must have been written within the period when all the requisite materials existed for composing a substantially correct account of all the leading facts; that such a traditionary account was certainly handed down in the Church; that it formed the ground-work of its existence; that it must have been derived from apostolic men, who had ample means of knowing the facts; that the Church possessed the means of transmitting them accurately, such as were never possessed by any other Society; and that it was under the necessity of doing so as the condition of its life; and that while this account remained fresh in the recollections both of the community and of its individual members, it would have been impossible to foist on them a fictitious story. I shall now proceed to inquire how far the phenomena of the Gospels tend to establish these positions.

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## Chapter XXII. The Historical Character Of The Gospels As Deduced From Their Internal Structure.

This subject is an extremely extensive one. The utmost, therefore, that I can do is to notice a few of the most important points which bear on the argument. I have already shown that the general principles of historical evidence point to the conclusion that the Synoptic Gospels are three different versions of the primitive apostolical traditions respecting the actions and the teaching of Jesus Christ, and that even on the assumption that the dates assigned to them by the opponents are the correct ones (which however I would by no means be understood as conceding, for all the internal evidence points to a much earlier period), they were still composed within the period when such traditions possess the highest historical value. I must now inquire whether the general structure of these Gospels confirms this conclusion.

The question therefore at once arises, what is their general character? Do they present the marks of traditionary history; or of being three works composed by three different authors, who not only wrote independently of each other, but who used no common source of information? Do their narratives present us with the characteristics of historical truth or of fictitious invention? The facts before us are ample, and they ought to enable us to return a definite answer to these questions. [494]

The most remarkable trait which first strikes the reader is the presence of a common narrative interwoven with a considerable

amount of matter peculiar to each Gospel. Many of the events, and several of the discourses are narrated by all three Evangelists; others by only two. Besides these common narratives and discourses, which form the larger portion of the Gospels, each of them contains narratives and discourses peculiar to itself. While they possess much that is common, it is clear that each writer had a distinct object in view in the compilation of his Gospel; that of St. Matthew being chiefly designed for Jewish Christians; that of St. Luke for Gentile converts, and that of St. Mark occupying an intermediate place between the two. It was also obviously the object of the author of St. Matthew's Gospel to set forth the discourses; of that of St. Mark's to give a graphic description of the actions of our Lord. Each of these Gospels is also distinguished by a number of minor peculiarities.

When the common narrative comes to be closely scrutinized, it presents us with phenomena more remarkable than any that can be found elsewhere in literature. These narratives are couched to a considerable extent in the same words and phrases, closely interwoven with a number of most singular variations, which have an important bearing on their historical character. As far as the words are identical, they force on us the conclusion that they must have been derived from some common origin. These identities are more striking in the narrative than in the discourses. Three independent writers, if they intended to hand down the general sense of a body of discourses, on the supposition that they were in possession of accurate information, would repeat them to a great extent in the same words. But that three independent writers, who used no common source of information in narrating the same occurrences, should have employed the same words to the extent to which it has been done by the authors of these Gospels is simply impossible.

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But if they had all copied from the same document, these identities of expression must inevitably have been more complete. It would have been impossible that they could have been of the

capricious character which they present to us in the pages of the Evangelists. Even in the narratives, frequent as is the use of the same words, the variations are numerous; nor are they much less so in the discourses. They are of the most singular character, and without the smallest apparent purpose. Sometimes they are simple changes in grammatical construction, or a word of nearly the same meaning is substituted for another. Then we find one or more lines, sometimes a whole sentence, transposed. Sometimes words or lines which are inserted by one Evangelist are omitted by another, the omission obscuring, and the insertion throwing light on the sense. At other times, a whole incident is omitted which, if it had been inserted, would have made an obscure context plain. In the discourses it occasionally happens that a part of one which we read in the same context in another Evangelist, and which seems to be required by the connection, is omitted, when words of nearly the same import have been attributed to our Lord elsewhere. Again: sayings are reported in which, while many words are the same, others are varied without any conceivable reason for the variation. In one or two instances, when words are put into the mouths of persons different from those to whom they are attributed by another Evangelist, the grammatical structure is altered to suit the variation. Of this we have two remarkable examples in the account of the healing of the Centurion's servant, and in the narrative of the request which the two sons of Zebedee and Salome presented to our Lord. The words are precisely the same, while the grammatical forms differ, according as the one or the other is regarded as the speaker. [496]

Such are the chief phenomena. But the full extent and character of these variations, in the closest union as they are with identities of expression, can only be appreciated by a careful comparison of the parallel narrative of the Gospels. Numerous, however, as are the variations, it must be observed that they exert scarcely any appreciable influence on the general sense. They utterly negate the idea that they can have originated in any set

or deliberate purpose. Let us take for example the account of the feeding of the five thousand. The Synoptics employ the very remarkable expression, that after the performance of the miracle, our Lord *constrained* the disciples to embark, without giving us a hint of the reason of so unusual an occurrence. We turn to St. John's Gospel; he says not one word about our Lord's constraining the disciples to embark, but tells us that the multitude were designing to come and take Jesus by force and make Him a king. This notice, which is of the most incidental character, gives as the fullest explanation of an event which would otherwise have been extremely obscure.

But further: in the account of the miracle itself, one of the Evangelists tells us, that the numbers who were fed were about five thousand, besides women and children. How then were the numbers ascertained? and how came it to pass that the men only were numbered, and neither the women, nor children? Another Evangelist tells us that the multitude were directed to sit down in companies by hundreds and by fifties. This at once explains how the numbers were arrived at. But if this was the case, how came it to be known that the men were about five thousand; and how came it to pass, that the women and children were excluded from the total enumeration? Here again another Evangelist comes to our help; and informs us that although the order was given to the whole multitude to sit down in companies, those who actually did so were the *ἄνδρες* not the *ἄνθρωποι*, *i.e.* that the men only sat down, but the women and children did not. This is told us in the most incidental form, appearing only in the Greek.

This last case is perhaps the most remarkable example in the Gospels, of the manner in which an incidental variation in one Evangelist throws light on the obscurities of another. Can such a narrative be otherwise than historical? This note of veracity is so entirely incidental that it has in all probability escaped the notice of nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of its readers. There are many others, though less striking, all of

which are of the same incidental character, and it is impossible to attribute them to design. Surely this can only have resulted from our being in the presence of facts and not of fiction.

But the variations in the discourses require a further notice. When variations occur in highly important discourses, it is open to the suspicion that they have originated in the deliberate purpose of giving a different doctrinal meaning to the words. But when we closely examine those in the Gospels, although they are very numerous, we find them of a purely incidental character, exerting a very inconsiderable influence on the sense. I am aware that attempts have been made to show that some few of these variations have originated in design; but these attempts only prove the straits to which those who make them are driven. Thus in the account of the Sermon on the Mount as we read it in St. Matthew, the passage runs: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In the corresponding passage in St. Luke it runs: "Blessed are *ye* poor," *i.e.* the poor people who were our Lord's disciples, for the Evangelist expressly tells us that these words were addressed, not to the multitude generally, but to them. The supposition that this variation indicates the presence of something resembling communistic views in the author of St. Luke's Gospel is too absurd to be worthy of serious discussion. Taking them as a whole, these discrepancies create no appreciable difference in the teaching of Jesus as reported by the different Evangelists. [498]

One thing respecting them is clear—they bear the strongest testimony to the historical character of the writings which contain them. It is simply inconceivable that the authors of the Gospels made them deliberately. They must have found them in the sources from which they drew their information. They form one of the strongest proofs that neither a forger, nor an accommodator of facts for the purpose of making them fit in with particular doctrinal theories, has had any hand in originating them. In simple changes in grammatical structure, purpose or design is

inconceivable.

But the variations in narratives, such as those above referred to, are even more important as constituting an attestation of their historical reality than variations in discourses. Four separate versions of a fictitious incident fail to clear up one another's obscurities. But the ability to do so is the distinctive mark of imperfect narratives of facts, told by different witnesses. When two things of a complicated mechanical construction exactly dovetail into each other, it is a proof that they have originated in the same mind. In a similar manner, when a number of distinct narratives, each of which is more or less incomplete, exactly fit into each other, this constitutes a proof, that they did not originate in a fiction but in a fact.

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An illustration will aid in showing the force of this reasoning. The early history of Rome is unquestionably of a highly legendary character. We have two versions of it, one by Livy, and another by Dionysius. These writers do not give us direct accounts of the primitive legends, but their narratives are compiled from authors of a much earlier date, who first reduced them to writing. Still these historians may be viewed as substantially accurate reporters of the legendary history, as it was compiled by the earlier writers. An important question therefore arises, does the twofold account which we possess of these legends, after all the efforts made by Livy and Dionysius to weave them into a consistent whole, bear the smallest analogy to the narratives contained in four Evangelists? It is clear that great disagreements existed among the original authorities. Let us take any account of the supposed events of three years—do the variations in the two accounts bear the smallest resemblance to the singular phenomena which we find in the Evangelists? Will they dovetail into one another? Will the small additions in one throw light on the obscurities of the other? Do the speeches present any indications of being copies of a common original? All these questions must be answered in the negative. Whence then comes

this difference between the narratives of the Evangelists and the legendary accounts of the origin of the Roman power? I answer, because the one is founded on fact and the other on fiction. [500]

It is not my intention to discuss the innumerable theories that have been propounded as to the origin of the Gospels, for the purpose of accounting for the common narrative, its variations, and the additions peculiar to each. Many of these theories violate the principle of common sense; and if the contrary were not known to be the fact they would suggest the idea that their authors had never practised the art of literary composition. Among them I shall only notice the theories which suppose that the Evangelists had before them one common document when writing their Gospels; or that one of them had before him the Gospel of another; that they deliberately copied the common words and phrases, and no less deliberately made the alterations, additions, and transpositions which the common narrative presents. Let us take for an illustration the supposition that the author of Mark's Gospel had that of Matthew before him, or the converse. In the one case he must have deliberately retained all the common words and phrases, after making the most capricious variations and suppressions. Next, he must have inserted all the little additions which distinguish the Gospel of St. Mark from that of St. Matthew, and made the requisite transpositions. But what is still more remarkable, he must also have taxed his invention to insert in the midst of its impersonal narrative all those graphic descriptions which impart to Mark's Gospel the appearance of ocular testimony. Besides all this he must of set purpose have omitted nearly all the discourses in which Matthew's Gospel is so full, or have placed them in a different context. If, on the other hand, we suppose that Mark's Gospel is the original and Matthew's the copy, the whole process must be reversed, and above all the author must have deliberately struck out the graphic portions of Mark, except in one or two instances, when he has added some of his own. All theories which are founded on the [501]

supposition that the authors of either Gospel used a common document and deliberately altered it, or that one of them formed his Gospel out of that of another by a number of additions and subtractions are simply incredible.

But the common narrative exists with the identities of expression interwoven with its variations. How are we to account for this remarkable fact? The identities of expression must have had a common origin. But what do the variations prove? Evidently that the narrative had passed through a period of oral transmission. No other theory can adequately account for them.

Such variations would naturally spring up in the course of oral transmission. We have already seen that the circumstances of the Church rendered such a mode of transmission necessary, as details of our Lord's life must have formed regular portions of Christian instruction. In doing this, variations would inevitably arise. After a while they would assume a distinctive type in different Churches. If then the Synoptic narratives are three versions of an oral Gospel handed down in as many Churches, and put together with additions by their respective authors, this affords a reasonable explanation of the phenomena which the common narrative presents. In this case the only thing which involves a difficulty is the large number of identities preserved by the Evangelists. This proves the strong hold which the words must have had on the minds of the members of the different Churches.

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The existence of a traditionary narrative is still further proved by the fourth Gospel. No one can deny that this is an independent record, and that its origin must have been wholly different from that of the other three. Yet in those portions which cover common ground with the Synoptics we meet with phenomena of a similar order, all proving that there must have been a narrative in existence which had impressed itself indelibly on the mind of the Church; so much so that an entirely independent writer fell into the same mode of expression when his subject led him to

narrate incidents common to the other three.

Every consideration which can be brought to bear on this subject tends to prove the existence of a traditionary narrative of the actions and teaching of Jesus which was handed down in the Churches prior to the publication of either of the Synoptic Gospels, and that their common matter must have passed through a period of oral transmission. It follows therefore that our three Synoptics are three different versions of the same oral Gospel modified in the course of transmission and supplemented by additional information introduced by their respective authors. We know as a fact that a traditionary narrative maintained its place in the Church far into the second century. Papias deliberately expressed his preference for it as compared with written records; and the writings of other Fathers show their acquaintance with it.

It is clear therefore that a number of traditionary narratives existed in the Church; and that if a number of persons had set themselves to reduce these accounts to writing, they would have presented phenomena analogous to those of the Synoptic Gospels. I have also shown that these Gospels present all the phenomena which distinguish this species of narrative. The substantial agreement of the three, both as to facts and as to the discourses, is a guarantee that the actual traditions of the Church have been accurately reported. Their diversities also afford the strongest proof that these reports were composed in perfect independence of each other. [503]

It is remarkable that the great majority of those against whom I am reasoning admit that the discourses in the Synoptic Gospels are fairly accurate representations of the actual utterances of Jesus, although they must have passed through a period of oral transmission. Yet it is certain that the accurate transmission of discourses by oral tradition is far more difficult than that of a report of facts through the same medium. The difficulty of preventing the intrusion of foreign elements is much greater. Slight alterations may materially affect their meaning. Yet the

discourses recorded in the Synoptics bear the indelible impress of a single mind, that of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> It follows therefore that if the traditions of the Church were able to hand down accurately the discourses of our Lord until the time when they were reduced to writing, still more easily would they transmit a correct account of His acts as narrated by His original followers. Except on account of the antecedent difficulty with which the miraculous element in the narrative is supposed to be attended, it would be absurd to accept the one and to reject the other as mere legendary invention. But having once established the fact of the Resurrection, the antecedent difficulty of the miracles is effectually disposed of, and the facts resume their place in history.

It forms no objection to the general argument that some of the Synoptics contain narratives of considerable length, which are omitted by others. It was precisely what was to be expected that the traditionary accounts would vary in this respect, and have incidents reported by different witnesses of our Lord's ministry incorporated into them. They abound in the Gospel of St. Luke, who distinctly states that it is a compilation.

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A careful study of the Gospel of St. Matthew must lead to the conclusion that its narrative portions are derived from the same general sources as those of the other two. We find in it precisely the same verbal identities which have been already noticed as affording proof of the existence of a common source of information, and the same variations which prove that it must have passed through a period of oral transmission. Nor are the indications of autoptic testimony stronger in Matthew than in the other two Evangelists; in fact, they are less so than in Mark. The discourses in Matthew, viewed as a whole, are a far more complete collection of the sayings of our Lord, than those in Mark or Luke. It seems to have been one of the chief purposes of the author of this Gospel to make a collection of them, and to unite

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<sup>6</sup> Mr. Mill, in his recently published *Essay on Theism*, has strongly expressed his belief that these discourses are the veritable utterances of Jesus.

them by a brief narrative of events. But even in the discourses, some of the variations found in Mark and Luke possess stronger claims to be regarded as the original form of the utterances of our Lord, than the corresponding ones in Matthew. In the parts which are common to the Synoptics, they are evidently founded on one common source of information; and in this respect neither of them can put in a higher claim to originality than the other.

Such are some of the chief characteristics of these Gospels, which have the most intimate bearing on their claims to be regarded as genuine historical productions. They are accounts of the traditions of the Church respecting the life and teaching of its Founder at the time when they were composed. I have already shown, that if they were composed at any time between the ministry of Jesus Christ and the first twenty years of the second century, it would have been impossible to have substituted a legendary narrative for the account which was handed down in the Church. I am not concerned to prove that no inaccuracies could have crept into these traditionary accounts. The only question of the smallest importance is, are they substantially historical? On this question mere minor details, the order and arrangement of events, or even the introduction of two or three erroneous accounts, has no more bearing than it has on the general credit of other histories. Our question is, what is their value as sources of history? This must be kept perfectly distinct from the question as to the nature and extent of the inspiration of the writers. [505]

With respect to a large number of alleged discrepancies, their whole force as objections to the historical character of the Gospels is disposed of by the simple consideration that their authors assert them to be memoirs, and not histories. No small number of others can be shown to exist only in the imagination of those who allege them. A few real difficulties will probably remain; but these no more invalidate their historical character, than similar ones which are to be found in every writer "from Herodotus to Mr. Froude."

It must not be forgotten that a careful examination of the Gospels discloses a mass of additional evidence on this subject which is inconsistent with the idea that their narratives are a mere congeries of legendary inventions. It would be impossible to investigate it in a work like the present, or even to give an idea of its value, as shown in the intimate acquaintance of the authors with the events, ideas, customs, and general circumstances of the times. To compose such stories out of any materials which could have been at his hand at the beginning of the second century, supposing him to have been devoid of all personal knowledge on the subject, would defy any modern writer of fiction, even one possessed of the highest genius; not to speak of the incompetence of the ancient world in this class of literature, rendering the attempts of such writers as existed among the early Christians simply hopeless.

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There are two additional points to which I must draw attention here, in the internal structure of the Gospels, as establishing their historical character.

The strongest evidence which the Gospels afford of their being historical narratives is the unquestionable fact that they contain a delineation of the greatest of all characters, Jesus Christ our Lord. This character is there depicted, even in the opinion of unbelievers of the greatest eminence, with a matchless perfection. Why will they not grapple with the question of its origin, and show how it is possible that such a character should ever have found a place in the Gospels, on any theory which they have propounded to account for their origin? It does not originate in any formal sketch or delineation. This the Evangelists have nowhere given. It is the combined result of all the facts and the discourses which they contain. The whole subject matter of the Gospels is in fact the material out of which this great character is delineated. How came it there if the Gospels consist only of a mass of mythic and legendary stories which gradually accumulated in the Church? How is it possible that a bundle

of legends thus thrown together can have created the perfect character of Jesus Christ, forming, as it does, an harmonious whole? How has it come to pass that the authors of our Gospels, if they each composed their narratives from a mass of fictions which grew up during a period of seventy years, have each given us a delineation of the same Jesus? These are problems which have an intimate bearing on the question whether they belong to the order of historical or fictitious compositions, but with which unbelief has hitherto most prudently declined to grapple. I shall not pursue them further here, as I have discussed them fully in the work already referred to, and shown that the portraiture of Jesus Christ as delineated in our Gospels is inconsistent with any theory of their origin which has been propounded by our opponents. To this work I must refer the reader. [507]

But there is a second character which is harmoniously delineated in the Gospels, to which I have not alluded in the work above referred to, that of Simon Peter. This character, though a subordinate one, is also a perfect delineation of its kind, instinct with historic life. It differs from that of Jesus Christ in being that of a purely human character, possessed of many of the virtues and not a few of the frailties of ordinary human nature. No student of the Gospels can rise from their perusal without a lively conception of it. If they are historical, the account of the origin of this second character of which they present us so perfect a delineation is a very simple one. It is that of a genuine man, whose actions they have correctly recorded. But if the Gospels are such as my opponents affirm them to be, I must earnestly put to them the question, How came this character there also? Each Gospel presents us with a delineation of Peter. In each the same living man is before us, in all his virtues and in all his failings. How, I ask, is it possible that the author of each Gospel has succeeded in creating a character of Simon Peter—each true to nature and each manifestly a delineation of the same person—out of a number of fictions, myths, and legends? Can any one affirm [508]

that the Peter of the Gospels presents us with one single trait of a character formed by legend?

But the existence of this delineation in each of the Gospels involves those with whom I am reasoning in a yet further difficulty. The New Testament contains a fifth delineation of the character of Simon Peter, professedly drawn by himself. I allude to his first Epistle. This unbelievers say is not his genuine production, though the external evidence for it is strong. In either case it will be equally available for my argument. If it was written by him, it is separated by an interval of from thirty to forty years from the Peter of the Gospels. After such a period of time we ought to find the same substantial lineaments of character, but chastened, improved, and softened by the influence of Christianity. This is precisely what we do find. The Peter of the Epistle is the Peter of the Gospels, in all the substantial elements of his character, but raised to a greater moral elevation. The Peter of the Gospels is the Peter of youthful aspirations, who has had little experience of the trials and struggles of human life. The Peter of the Epistle while continually reminding us of the Peter of the Gospels, is a deeply softened man, with many of his infirmities changed into the graces to which they are allied.

Now if the four Peters of the Gospels are fictions, how have their inventors succeeded in delineating him true to his youthful character, and true to human nature? If, on the other hand, the Peters of the Gospels and of the Epistle are all five creations of the imagination, the difficulty is increased to impossibility. How was it possible for the forger of the Epistle to have delineated a Peter who should be true to the legendary character of the Peter of the Gospels, and at the same time such an improved version of it as would naturally result from the trials of between thirty and forty years spent in the service and in attempts to put in practice the teaching of his Master? It follows, therefore, that the five portraits of Simon Peter presented us in the New Testament, are so many distinctive proofs that the Gospels are historical

realities, and not the mere offspring of the imaginations of their respective authors.

I am now in a position to restore the Gospels to their place in history, and to estimate the value of their testimony. The Synoptics are so many versions of the traditions, preserved in the different Churches during the first century, of that portion of the life and teaching of Jesus which formed the groundwork of Christianity. Such an account, more or less full, must have been handed down from the first origin of the Church. This account received enlargements from different narrators who had been witnesses of different events of our Lord's life and ministry; but so completely was it interwoven with the daily course of Christian life, that it is impossible that matters inconsistent with its fundamental conception can have become incorporated with it. Moreover, the whole period lay within the limits of time during which traditions are strictly historical. No community ever existed which had equal facilities for handing down accurately the events of its Founder's life, or had stronger inducements to do so. The Church was struggling for existence, and seeking to assimilate to itself the elements by which it was surrounded. This alone must have kept steadily in its memory the leading events of the life of Jesus. These, as we have seen, must also have formed the subjects in which its converts were habitually instructed. Jesus Christ, to use the expressive language of St. Paul, must have been to the primitive Christian community from the hour of its birth "all and in all." [510]

From the various direct and indirect references in St. Paul's Epistles we can form a general idea of the life and teaching of Jesus, as it must have been accepted by the Churches to which he wrote. All the outlines furnished by these Epistles may be traced in our present Gospels. If we descend to a still later period, we shall find that accounts, substantially the same, were spread over the entire Church. Even if it is true that the early Ecclesiastical writers do not cite the Gospels, it is evident that they were in

possession of accounts, either written or unwritten, which were for all practical purposes the same. It follows, therefore, that as the Synoptics contain three versions of the ministry of Jesus which were handed down by the Churches of the first century, their claim to the character of historical documents substantially accurate in all their main features is unquestionable.

Nothing is more lamentable than the manner in which a number of minute verbal questions have been introduced into this great controversy. Both parties have freely indulged in it. The life of Christianity has been made to depend on whether some passage in a particular Father bears a precise verbal agreement with another passage to be found in our present Gospels. Such matters may be interesting as mere literary questions, but surely they are not worthy to be dignified by the title of historical ones. To represent the life of Christianity as depending on them, is to leave the broad basis of historical investigation, and descend to the mere technicalities of legal evidence, by which the parties who are most capable of throwing light on the case are excluded from giving evidence at all, while many minor points are debated with the utmost ardour. I desire to express no opinion as to whether this is right or wrong in judicial processes; but the principles of history are widely different. All evidence must be accepted for what it is worth, and for no more. The issues are great ones, and are not dependent on any mere set of barren technicalities.

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Christianity is not only one of the greatest facts in history, but the greatest; and its truth or falsehood can never be dependent on whether a passage more or less in Justin Martyr is an accurate citation of another in St. Matthew's Gospel. The only questions of real importance are: Do the numerous references of the early Christian writers to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ substantially agree with the accounts of that life and teaching given in our Gospels? Do they contain any account which gives a really different version of it? If such agreement exists, although there

may be minor differences, the matter is settled as an historical question. The Gospels, in all their great outlines, are virtually accurate accounts of the traditions of the primitive Church respecting the actions and the teaching of its Founder, and as such they satisfy all the conditions of history.

It is impossible that I should in this place enter on the question of the authorship or the date of the Fourth Gospel. The literature on this subject would fill a library of no mean size. I shall only refer to Mr. Sanday's able vindication of its historical character. One thing respecting it is clear. It is either the veritable work of an eye-witness of the facts which it records, or it is a consummate fiction, such as can be found nowhere else, either in the ancient or the modern world. Its author must have united a fixed determination to perpetrate a forgery on a most sacred subject, with one of the loftiest ideals of morality, and an inimitable power of simple description, and of inventing fictitious scenes in a manner which is in the highest degree true to human nature. If this work was really written by a person who was not a Jew, one hundred and fifty years after the events which are described in it, and a century after the destruction of Jerusalem, the accuracy of its descriptions is one of the most singular phenomena in literary history. [512] Wherever it runs parallel with the Synoptic Gospels, it throws light on their obscurities without the smallest apparent intention of doing so. In some places it helps to correct erroneous impressions into which the reader of the Synoptic narratives might otherwise have fallen. Even in that most striking disagreement between them, respecting the Paschal character of the Last Supper, we find in the Synoptics hints which corroborate St. John's account of it. One simple alternative, and one only, lies before us; either to accept this Gospel as a history of the highest authority, or to reject it as an audacious forgery.

It now remains for me very briefly to consider the value of the testimony of the Gospels to the truth of the Resurrection.

If one thing more than another is evident respecting them,

it is that they were not written for the purposes of controversy with unbelievers, but for the instruction of Christians. It is certain that the last thing which occurred to their authors was to guard their narratives against possible objections. This is made clear by every page. At the time when they were composed, the Resurrection had long been accepted by the entire body of believers, as the foundation of their faith. It was therefore not necessary for the Gospels to prove it, as it would have been if they had been composed with a direct view to unbelievers. This is a point which it is important to bear in mind in considering the nature of their testimony. Two of the narratives of it are entirely incidental; and it is quite clear that their authors never intended to give an exhaustive account of the facts. The other two, though giving us more details, participate largely in the same character. It is impossible to read either narrative with care and not feel that it was never intended to be a systematic account of all the facts with which the author was acquainted respecting the Resurrection.

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It is objected against these narratives that they abound with variations, amounting to contradictions. The variations are unquestionable, and it will readily be conceded that it is extremely difficult to piece together all the details of the existing accounts so as to weave them into an harmonious whole. In fact they are inevitable whenever the incidents described are of exciting interest. Such must have been the character of those connected with the Resurrection.

The chief difficulty is found in the details of the morning of that important day. They are in an extremely fragmentary form, and it is quite clear that we have not all the events before us. If we had, we should then be in a position to judge what is the precise nature of the variations in the minor details. But even if contradictions could be proved to exist, how does their presence invalidate the main facts, whose truth is established by wholly independent testimony? The only way in which it can be made to

do so is by mixing up questions involving particular theories of inspiration with considerations purely historical. Such discrepancies exist in connection with some of the most important facts of history in their minor details, without in the smallest degree invalidating their historical credibility.

This may be easily tested by examining a number of newspaper accounts of any exciting event, which are derived from reporters entirely independent of each other. One witnesses one thing, and one another; and it is often difficult to weave the whole into a perfectly consistent narrative. No one can doubt that the morning of the Resurrection must have been one in the last degree exciting to the disciples of our Lord. They were not mere reporters, but persons profoundly interested in the various occurrences. It would therefore have been inconsistent with the historical truth of their position, if their narratives had presented us with no variations. [514]

It is certain that several women accompanied our Lord on His last journey to Jerusalem. What was more likely than that they would visit the sepulchre at different times, and with different purposes? Can any one doubt that their excitement must have been great? What conceivable difference can it make to the great fact of the Resurrection, that one account mentions two Marys as going to the sepulchre; that the second adds to these Salome; that the third mentions several women; and that the fourth mentions Mary Magdalene alone? There might have been, as far as anything which appears in the narratives is concerned, several different visits; or the same person may have returned more than once. Or what is the use of urging that there is an apparent variation of about an hour between the different accounts, as to the precise time when these visits were made? Do variations of this description, which are found in accounts derived from eye-witnesses of Louis XVI's flight from Paris, in the smallest degree invalidate the fact? Or what conceivable difference does it make that one narrative represents the women as seeing one

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angel, and another two; and that one describes the appearance as taking place inside, and another outside the sepulchre? It is quite possible that all these accounts may be true, and that these occurrences took place on different occasions. If they were true, nothing was more unlikely than that the women could have given an orderly narrative of them. Variations must occur in all reports of events when the witnesses see only a portion of them. The great facts before us are plain and evident; and unless they are falsehoods, there could be no possibility of mistake respecting them. Different bodies of women found the sepulchre empty. Some of them affirmed that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, and that He sent a message by them to His disciples. Peter and John visited the sepulchre, and found it empty. Later in the same day, Peter affirmed that Jesus Christ appeared to him; on which day also two other disciples affirmed that they had seen Him on a journey, at first without recognizing Him, but that they did so afterwards. On the evening of the same day, these two disciples, ten of the Apostles, with other persons in company, saw Him in a body, and were permitted to test the reality of His Resurrection by handling His Person, and by seeing Him eat. About such facts there could be no mistake. Most of them were well known and accepted when St. Paul wrote his Epistles, when the means of testing their truth was ample. We know on the same authority that the whole apostolic body asserted that they had seen the Lord, and that as many as five hundred other persons made a similar assertion. These are the chief facts, and a number of minor variations such as those above referred to cannot affect their credibility.

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It has been objected that the author of St. Matthew's Gospel was ignorant of some of these appearances. On what ground is the objection made? On the fact that he has not mentioned them? Does a writer always report all he knows, especially when his writing is intended for the use of those who firmly believe the fact already? Nothing can exceed the fragmentary character of

this portion of his narrative. If this Gospel was composed at the late period assigned to it by those against whom I am reasoning, namely, A.D. 90, it is incredible that these were the only facts known to the writer, at least thirty years after St. Paul wrote his Epistles. The charge of ignorance might be sustained with far greater plausibility if it were admitted that St. Matthew was the author of this Gospel, because it might have been expected that he would mention the first occasion on which his Master had appeared to him rather than the third. But his authorship is denied, and the publication of the Gospel assigned to the last ten years of the century, when it was impossible that the author, whoever he may have been, could be ignorant that it was alleged that our Lord had appeared on other occasions besides those mentioned by him.

I will now consider the threefold account of the great appearance on the morning of Easter-day. One of them is contained in the supplement to St. Mark's Gospel; the other two are those in Luke and John. Let us first carefully observe the mode in which they are narrated in the supplement.

Its author seems to have entertained a stronger view of the indisposition of the disciples to believe the truth of the Resurrection than the other two narratives appear to warrant. He first notices the appearance to Mary Magdalene on the morning of that day, and says that the disciples refused to credit her report. Next, he tells us of the appearance to the two disciples as they went into the country; and states that on their return they told it to the remainder, "*Neither believed they them.*" "Afterward," he adds, [517] "*he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not those who had seen him after he was risen.*" It is evident that the author of the supplement entertained a strong view of the incredulity of the disciples when their companions reported to them the fact of the Resurrection.

Let us now examine how the facts stand in Luke's narrative.

It opens with a detailed account of the journey into the country of Cleopas and his companion, and of our Lord's appearance to them. Our Lord addresses them in the following words: "*O fools and slow of heart,*" (Ὁ ἀνόητοι, καὶ Βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία) "*to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*" After their recognition of Jesus, they are described as immediately returning to Jerusalem, "*and find the eleven gathered together and those that were with them, saying, the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon.*" "*And they*" (i.e. Cleopas and his companion) "*told what things were done on the way, and how he was known unto them in the breaking of bread.*" The narrative then proceeds: "*And as they thus spake,*" (i.e. Cleopas and his companion) "*Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, Peace be unto you.*" It then informs us that they were terrified and supposed that the appearance was that of a spirit. On this our Lord reasons with them: "*Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet.*" The writer then adds: "And when they yet believed not for joy and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honey-comb, and he took it and did eat before them." The author then proceeds with his narrative: "These are the words that I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things might be fulfilled that are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me." And he adds: "*Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*"

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The following is the account given of the same meeting in St. John's Gospel. After having given a full description of the appearance to Mary Magdalene, he thus describes our Lord's appearance on the evening of Easter-day: "Then the first day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,

*came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."*

The difference between the supplement of Mark's Gospel and the narratives of Luke and John is very remarkable. Are the variations such as would be found in different reports of a set of fictions, or are they such as distinguish brief but inexact reports of actual occurrences? This is a very important question.

First: the three accounts bear the clearest indications of being independent. It is incredible that any one of the three writers having before him one or both of the other two accounts should have composed his own as it now stands.

Secondly: the author of the supplement uses very strong language in describing the unbelief of the disciples. He says that when they told it to the others, they did not believe their report. St. Luke, on the other hand, informs us that as soon as Cleopas and his companion entered the room where on their return they found the Apostles and others assembled together, they were received with the exclamation: "*The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon.*" [519]

Again: the author of the supplement says that when Jesus appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat "*he upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart (ὠνείδισε τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν καὶ σκληροκαρδίαν) because they did not believe them that had seen him after he was risen.*" St. Luke tells us that not only were Cleopas and his companion received with the joyful exclamation, "*The Lord is risen indeed,*" but instead of upbraiding them Jesus addressed them with the words "*Peace be unto you;*" which is confirmed by the author of the fourth Gospel, who, if St. John was really the author, must have been present.

In neither of these Gospels is there one word of “upbraiding the disciples with unbelief;” while both affirm that Jesus proceeded to give them rational grounds for believing that He was actually risen from the dead, by showing them, according to one, “his hands and his feet,” according to the other, “his hands and his side.” It is quite probable that He may have done both. St. John adds, “*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*”

But St. Luke's account is more specific. He tells us that immediately on His entry fear took possession of their minds. “*They were terrified and affrighted,*” and supposed that it might be a spirit, and not Jesus actually raised from the dead. Our Lord therefore before showing them His hands and His feet proceeded to reason with them as to the reality of His appearance. “*Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.*” Here there is nothing of reproach, such as is suggested by the supplement to St. Mark's Gospel. Yet there was incredulity of a certain kind in the room, but not one which was worthy of reproach. We learn from St. Luke that it was not the incredulity of *unbelief, but of joy*; in other words, that the news seemed too good to be true, and they dared scarcely trust the evidence of their senses. On this however nothing in the form of a *reproach* passes the lips of Jesus; but for their further satisfaction, *he asks for food and eats it before them.*

[520]

On all these points the narratives of St. Luke and St. John throw light on each other, as such accounts, if founded on fact, ought to do, while their independence is indisputable. According to those with whom I am reasoning, the Gospel of St. John is much the latest written. If therefore the author had borrowed from Luke, it is incredible that a writer who had such powers of setting forth fictions in the garb of facts, should have omitted the other remarkable incidents mentioned by St. Luke, and not have dressed them up with the art of which he was so consummate a master, for these would have communicated a striking reality to the scenes. It is therefore unquestionable that these two accounts

present all the phenomena of history, and none of those of fiction.

But how stands the continuation of St. Mark's Gospel, which affirms that our Lord upbraided the eleven with their unbelief and hardness of heart on the occasion of His appearance on Easter evening?

The author of the supplement was probably not aware that Cleopas and his companion were present in the room when our Lord appeared to the eleven, or even that others besides the eleven were present, as is expressly affirmed by St. Luke to have been the case. The impression which it leaves on the mind is [521] that they reported the Resurrection to the disciples generally on their return, and that it was disbelieved by them, and that the appearance to the eleven was a subsequent event.

We are now in a position to see how this misapprehension may have originated; and that instead of invalidating the account, it forms a strong confirmation of its truth. There were persons in the room whom our Lord had actually reproached for their unbelief, viz. Cleopas and his companion; though He reproached none who were present on the occasion of His appearance. The words stated by St. Luke to have been used by Him were,  $\Omega$   $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\eta\tau\omicron\iota$   $\kappa\alpha\iota$   $\beta\rho\alpha\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$   $\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$   $\kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ , "O fools and slow of heart." Those used in St. Mark in describing the address to the eleven are  $\acute{\omega}\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\sigma\epsilon$   $\tau\eta\grave{\nu}$   $\acute{\alpha}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha\upsilon$   $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$   $\kappa\alpha\iota$   $\sigma\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\kappa\alpha\rho\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\upsilon$ , "He upbraided their unbelief and hardness of heart." The one expression is the very counterpart of the other. There were persons present who had been thus reproached but a few hours before: the author of the continuation was aware of the fact that some had been thus reproached, and he supposed that the reproach was addressed to all the assembled disciples, instead of the salutation of peace with its attendant circumstances.

Then as to their having been received with expressions of incredulity on their return, St. Luke tells us that they returned to Jerusalem, "*and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them.*" Now as they had set out early in the day,

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it was necessary on their return that they should make some inquiry as to where the Apostles were to be found. In doing this it is probable enough that they went to inquire of some disciples who received their account with incredulity, and that then this incredulity may through misapprehension have been transferred to the whole assembly. I submit therefore that notwithstanding this disagreement between the three accounts, that of the continuation of St. Mark's Gospel gives a strong corroboration of the statements of the other two. These are precisely the kind of variations which we find in reports of events after they have passed through a few stages of oral transmission.

The narratives of St. Luke and St. John furnish us with one more very incidental confirmation of each other. St. Luke informs us that on the occasion of this interview our Lord "*opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*" St. John says that "*He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*" The words and the mode of expression differ greatly; but both statements point to one and the same fact, that on this occasion the persons present supposed that they received a supernatural enlightenment. St. Luke describes the effect produced on the minds of the disciples; St. John gives the actual medium of its production. Coincidences of this kind prove that the narratives must be founded on facts, and are beyond the skill of a forger to imitate.

I have now considered a few of the leading features of the Gospels, which establish the general historical character of their contents. A close examination of them would put us in possession of a large amount of additional evidence, but to enter on such an inquiry here would be inconsistent with the limits of the present work. As I have already observed, the minute scrutiny of a number of minor details, as far as the great historical question is concerned, would be a needless expenditure of labour. The real question at issue is: Is the account of our Lord's life and teaching, as it is handed down in our present Gospels, substantially true in

its great outlines, or has one of a wholly different character been substituted for the true one, and usurped its place in the teaching of the Church? On a broad question of this kind, minor discrepancies in the accounts have no real bearing. If the narrative is true in its great outlines, it follows that our Lord's character must have been beyond all question superhuman, and justifies us in affirming that He must have been a "teacher come from God." Such a conclusion will still leave open a number of questions of the deepest importance, but they belong to the province of theology to investigate, and form no necessary portion of an historical inquiry. If the Gospels *in their broad outlines* are historical; above all, *if Jesus Christ rose from the dead*, it follows that the New Testament must contain a divine revelation. [523]

As this last fact forms the central position of Christianity, I have made its historical truth the chief subject of my investigation. In doing this I have relied only on documents which are contained in the New Testament itself, and chiefly on those whose genuineness is conceded by opponents. I have shown that no species of documents can possess a higher historical value than these, and that the circumstances under which they were written, the nature of their contents, and the persons to whom they were addressed, form an attestation to the truth of the facts asserted in them, which is unrivalled in the whole course of literature. By means of these I have firmly established the fact that the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the foundation on which the Church rested as a community from the first dawning of its existence, and the basis of the life of its individual members; and that considerable numbers of the followers of Jesus Christ affirmed that they had seen and conversed with Him after He had risen from the dead. I have shown that these facts rest on the highest form of historical attestation. This being so, there can be only two alternatives respecting them. Either the belief in the Resurrection was founded on the fact that He actually rose from the dead; or it must have originated in the delusions of His [524]

followers. I have shown that the various theories which have been propounded to account for it on the latter supposition, when tested by the actual facts, are untrue both to human nature and to the possibilities of the case. From this it results, as a necessary consequence, that JESUS CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD. If He rose from the dead, the truth of His divine mission is established, and His claim to be the King and supreme Legislator of the Church is vindicated. This claim may be fully set forth in two sayings of His own, recorded in St. John's Gospel: "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (xiii. 12.) "Thou sayest that I am a king. For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." (xviii. 37.)

The practical conclusion which this investigation suggests cannot be better expressed than in the words of the same divine Teacher: "He that believeth, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me; and he that seeth me seeth Him that sent me. I am come, a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

THE END.

## Footnotes



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