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# THE FREETHINKER'S TEXT-BOOK

EDITED BY

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, ANNIE BESANT, AND  
CHARLES WATTS.

PART II.

## CHRISTIANITY.

BY ANNIE BESANT.

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*Issued by authority of the National Secular Society.*

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PART II.

CHRISTIANITY.

BY ANNIE BESANT.

10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25

# PART II.

# CHRISTIANITY.

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## SECTION I.—ITS EVIDENCES UNRELIABLE.

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THE origin of all religions, and the ignorance which is the root of the God-idea, having been dealt with in Part I. of this Text-Book, it now becomes our duty to investigate the evidences of the origin and of the growth of Christianity, to examine its morality and its dogmas, to study the history of its supposed founder, to trace out its symbols and its ceremonies ; in fine, to show cause for its utter rejection by the Freethinker. The foundation stone of Christianity, laid in Paradise by the Creation and Fall of Man 6,000 years ago, has already been destroyed in the first section of this work ; and we may at once, therefore, proceed to Christianity itself. The history of the origin of the creed is naturally the first point to deal with, and this may be divided into two parts : 1. The evidences afforded by profane history as to its origin and early growth. 2. Its story as told by itself in its own documents.

The most remarkable thing in the evidences afforded by profane history is their extreme paucity ; the very existence of Jesus cannot be proved from contemporary documents. A child whose birth is heralded by a star which guides foreign sages to Judæa ; a massacre of all the infants of a town within the Roman Empire by command of a subject king ; a teacher who heals the leper, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, and who raises the mouldering corpse ; a King of the Jews entering Jerusalem in triumphal proces-

sion, without opposition from the Roman legions of Cæsar ; an accused ringleader of sedition arrested by his own countrymen, and handed over to the imperial governor ; a rebel adjudged to death by Roman law ; a three hours' darkness over all the land ; an earthquake breaking open graves and rending the temple veil ; a number of ghosts wandering about Jerusalem ; a crucified corpse rising again to life, and appearing to a crowd of above 500 people ; a man risen from the dead ascending bodily into heaven without any concealment, and in the broad daylight, from a mountain near Jerusalem ; all these marvellous events took place, we are told, and yet they have left no ripple on the current of contemporary history. There is, however, no lack of such history, and an exhaustive account of the country and age in which the hero of the story lived is given by one of his own nation—a most painstaking and laborious historian. “ How shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses ? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence, of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature—earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of

the globe. A distinct chapter of Pliny is designed for eclipses of an extraordinary nature and unusual duration ; but he contents himself with describing the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Cæsar, when, during the greatest part of the year, the orb of the sun appeared pale and without splendour. This season of obscurity, which cannot surely be compared with the preternatural darkness of the Passion, had been already celebrated by most of the poets and historians of that memorable age" (Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," vol. ii., pp. 191, 192. Ed. 1821).

If Pagan historians are thus curiously silent, what deduction shall we draw from the similar silence of the great Jewish annalist? Is it credible that Josephus should thus have ignored Jesus Christ, if one tithe of the marvels related in the Gospels really took place? So damning to the story of Christianity has this difficulty been felt, that a passage has been inserted in Josephus (born A.D. 37, died about A.D. 100) relating to Jesus Christ, which runs as follows : "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him ; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" ("Antiquities of the Jews," book xviii., ch. iii., sect. 3). The passage itself proves its own forgery : Christ drew over scarcely any Gentiles, if the Gospel story be true, as he himself said : "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew xv. 24). A Jew would not believe that a doer of wonderful works must necessarily be more than man, since their own prophets were said to have performed miracles. If Josephus believed Jesus to be Christ, he would assuredly have become a Christian ; while, if he believed him to be God, he would have drawn full attention to so unique a fact as the incarnation of the Deity. Finally, the concluding remark that the Christians were "not extinct" scarcely coincides with the idea that Josephus, at Rome, must have

been cognisant of their increasing numbers, and of their persecution by Nero. It is, however, scarcely pretended now-a-days, by any scholar of note, that the passage is authentic. Sections 2 and 4 were manifestly written one after the other. "There were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded; and thus an end was put to this sedition. *About the same time another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder.*" The forged passage breaks the continuity of the history. The oldest MSS. do not contain this section. It is first quoted by Eusebius, who probably himself forged it; and its authenticity is given up by Lardner, Gibbon, Bishop Warburton, and many others. Lardner well summarises the arguments against its authenticity:—

"I do not perceive that we at all want the suspected testimony to Jesus, which was never quoted by any of our Christian ancestors before Eusebius.

"Nor do I recollect that Josephus has any where mentioned the name or word *Christ*, in any of his works; except the testimony above mentioned, and the passage concerning James, the Lord's brother.

"It interrupts the narrative.

"The language is quite Christian.

"It is not quoted by Chrysostom, though he often refers to Josephus, and could not have omitted quoting it, had it been then in the text.

It is not quoted by Photius, though he has three articles concerning Josephus.

"Under the article Justus of Tiberias, this author (Photius) expressly states that historian (Josephus) being a Jew, has not taken the least notice of Christ.

"Neither Justin in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, nor Clemens Alexandrinus, who made so many extracts from Christian authors, nor Origen against Celsus, have ever mentioned this testimony.

"But, on the contrary, in chapter xxxv. of the first book of that work, Origen openly affirms, that Josephus, who had mentioned John the Baptist, did not acknowledge Christ" (Answer to Dr. Chandler, as quoted in Taylor's "*Diegesis*," pp. 368, 369. Ed. 1844).

Keim thinks that the remarks of Origen caused the forgery; after criticising the passage he winds up: "For all these reasons, the passage cannot be maintained; it has first appeared in this form in the Catholic Church of the



Jews and Gentiles, and under the dominion of the Fourth Gospel, and hardly before the third century, probably before Eusebius, and after Origen, whose bitter criticisms of Josephus may have given cause for it" ("Jesus of Nazara," p. 25, English edition, 1873).

"Those who are best acquainted with the character of Josephus, and the style of his writings, have no hesitation in condemning this passage as a forgery interpolated in the text during the third century by some pious Christian, who was scandalised that so famous a writer as Josephus should have taken no notice of the Gospels, or of Christ their subject. But the zeal of the interpolator has outrun his discretion, for we might as well expect to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, as to find this notice of Christ among the Judaising writings of Josephus. It is well known that this author was a zealous Jew, devoted to the laws of Moses and the traditions of his countrymen. How then could he have written that *Jesus was the Christ*? Such an admission would have proved him to be a Christian himself, in which case the passage under consideration, too long for a Jew, would have been far too short for a believer in the new religion, and thus the passage stands forth, like an ill-set jewel, contrasting most inharmoniously with everything around it. If it had been genuine, we might be sure that Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Chrysostom would have quoted it in their controversies with the Jews, and that Origen or Photius would have mentioned it. But Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian (i., 11), is the first who quotes it, and our reliance on the judgment or even the honesty of this writer is not so great as to allow of our considering everything found in his works as undoubtedly genuine" ("Christian Records," by Rev. Dr. Giles, p. 30. Ed. 1854).

On the other side the student should consult Hartwell Horne's "Introduction." Ed. 1825, vol. i., p. 307-11. Renan observes that the passage—in the authenticity of which he believes—is "in the style of Josephus," but adds that "it has been retouched by a Christian hand." The two statements seem scarcely consistent, as such "retouching" would surely alter "the style" ("Vie de Jésus," Introduction, p. 10. Ed. 1863).

Paley argues that when the multitude of Christians living in the time of Josephus is considered, it cannot "be believed that the religion, and the transaction upon which it was

founded, were too obscure to engage the attention of Josephus, or to obtain a place in his history" ("Evid. of Christianity," p. 73. Ed. 1845). We answer, it is plain, from the fact that Josephus entirely ignores both, that the pretended story of Jesus was not widely known among his contemporaries, and that the early spread of Christianity is much exaggerated. But says Paley: "Be, however, the fact, or the cause of the omission in Josephus, what it may, no other or different history on the subject has been given by him or is pretended to have been given" (Ibid, pp. 73, 74). Our contention being that the supposed occurrences never took place at all, no history of them is to be looked for in the pages of a writer who was relating only facts. Josephus speaks of James, "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" ("Antiquities," book xx., ch. ix., sect. 1), and this passage shares the fate of the longer one, being likewise rejected because of being an interpolation. The other supposed reference of Josephus to Jesus is found in his discourse on Hades, wherein he says that all men "shall be brought before God the Word; for to him hath the Father committed all judgment; and he, in order to fulfil the will of his Father, shall come as judge, whom we call Christ" ("Works of Josephus," by Whiston, p. 661). Supposing that this passage were genuine, it would simply convey the Jewish belief that the Messiah—Christ—the Anointed, was the appointed judge, as in Dan. vii., 9—14, and more largely in the Book of Enoch.

The silence of Jewish writers of this period is not confined to Josephus, and this silence tells with tremendous weight against the Christian story. Judge Strange writes: "Josephus knew nothing of these wonderments, and he wrote up to the year 93, being familiar with all the chief scenes of the alleged Christianity. Nicolaus of Damascus, who preceded him and lived to the time of Herod's successor Archelaus, and Justus of Tiberias, who was the contemporary and rival of Josephus in Galilee, equally knew nothing of the movement. Philo-Judæus, who occupied the whole period ascribed to Jesus, and engaged himself deeply in figuring out the Logos, had heard nothing of the being who was realising at Jerusalem the image his fancy was creating" ("Portraiture and Mission of Jesus," p. 27).

We propose now to go carefully through the alleged testimonies to Christianity, as urged in Paley's "Evidences of Christianity," following his presentment of the argument

step by step, and offering objections to each point as raised by him.

The next historian who is claimed as a witness to Christianity is Tacitus (born A.D. 54 or 55, died A.D. 134 or 135), who writes, dealing with the reign of Nero, that this Emperor "inflicted the most cruel punishments upon a set of people, who were holden in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly called Christians. The founder of that name was Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was punished as a criminal by the procurator, Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again ; and spread not only over Judæa the source of this evil, but reached the city also : whither flow from all quarters all things vile and shameful, and where they find shelter and encouragement. At first, only those were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect ; afterwards, a vast multitude discovered by them ; all which were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their hatred of mankind. Their executions were so contrived as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered over with the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs ; some were crucified. Others, having been daubed over with combustible materials, were set up as lights in the night-time, and thus burned to death. Nero made use of his own gardens as a theatre on this occasion, and also exhibited the diversions of the circus, sometimes standing in the crowd as a spectator, in the habit of a charioteer ; at other times driving a chariot himself ; till at length these men, though really criminal, and deserving exemplary punishment, began to be commiserated as people who were destroyed, not out of regard to the public welfare, but only to gratify the cruelty of one man " ("Annals," book xv., sect. 44).

This was probably written, if authentic, about A.D. 107. The reasons against the authenticity of this passage are thus given by Robert Taylor : " This passage, which would have served the purpose of Christian quotation better than any other in all the writings of Tacitus, or of any Pagan writer whatever, is not quoted by any of the Christian Fathers.

" It is not quoted by Tertullian, though he had read and largely quotes the works of Tacitus : and though his argument immediately called for the use of this quotation with so loud a voice, that his omission of it, if it had really existed, amounts to a violent improbability.

"This Father has spoken of Tacitus in a way that it is absolutely impossible that he should have spoken of him, had his writings contained such a passage.

"It is not quoted by Clemens Alexandrinus, who set himself entirely to the work of adducing and bringing together all the admissions and recognitions which Pagan authors had made of the existence of Christ or Christians before his time.

"It has nowhere been stumbled on by the laborious and all-seeking Eusebius, who could by no possibility have missed of it.....

"There is no vestige nor trace of its existence anywhere in the world before the fifteenth century.

"It rests then entirely upon the fidelity of a single individual. And he, having the ability, the opportunity, and the strongest possible incitement of interest to induce him to introduce the interpolation.

"The passage itself, though unquestionably the work of a master, and entitled to be pronounced the *chef d'œuvre* of the art, betrays the *penchant* of that delight in blood, and in descriptions of bloody horrors, as peculiarly characteristic of the Christian disposition as it was abhorrent to the mild and gentle mind, and highly cultivated taste of Tacitus.

\*                     \*                     \*                     \*                     \*

"It is falsified by the 'Apology of Tertullian,' and the far more respectable testimony of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, who explicitly states that the Christians, up to his time, the third century, had never been victims of persecution; and that it was in provinces lying beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and not in Judæa, that Christianity originated.

"Tacitus has, in no other part of his writings, made the least allusion to Christ or Christians.

"The use of this passage as a part of the 'Evidences of the Christian Religion,' is absolutely modern" ("Diegesis," pp. 374—376).

Judge Strange—writing on another point—gives us an argument against the authenticity of this passage: "As Josephus made Rome his place of abode from the year 70 to the end of the century, there inditing his history of all that concerned the Jews, it is apparent that, had there been a sect flourishing in the city who were proclaiming the risen Jesus as the Messiah in his time, the circumstance was

one this careful and discerning writer could not have failed to notice and to comment on" ("Portraiture and Mission of Jesus," p. 15). It is, indeed, passing strange that Josephus, who tells us so much about false Messiahs and their followers, should omit—as he must have done if this passage of Tacitus be authentic—all reference to this additional false Messiah, whose followers in the very city where Josephus was living, underwent such terrible tortures, either during his residence there, or immediately before it. Burning men, used as torches, adherents of a Jewish Messiah, ought surely to have been unusual enough to have attracted his attention. We may add to these arguments that, supposing such a passage were really written by Tacitus, the two lines regarding Christus look much like an interpolation, as the remainder would run more connectedly if they were omitted. But the whole passage is of more than doubtful authenticity, being in itself incredible, if the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament be true; for this persecution is said to have occurred during the reign of Nero, during which Paul abode in Rome, teaching in peace, "no man forbidding him" (Acts xxviii. 31); during which, also, he wrote to the Romans that they need not be afraid of the government if they did right (Romans xii. 34); clearly, if these passages are true, the account in Tacitus must be false; and as he himself had no reason for composing such a tale, it must have been forged by Christians to glorify their creed.

The extreme ease with which this passage might have been inserted in all editions of Tacitus used in modern times arises from the fact that all such editions are but copies of one single MS., which was in the possession of one single individual; the solitary owner might make any interpolations he pleased, and there was no second copy by which his accuracy might be tested. "The first publication of any part of the 'Annals of Tacitus' was by Johannes de Spire, at Venice, in the year 1468—his imprint being made from a single MS., in his own power and possession only, and purporting to have been written in the eighth century.....from this all other MSS. and printed copies of the works of Tacitus are derived." ("Diegesis," p. 373.)

Suetonius (born about A.D. 65, died in second century) writes: "The Christians, a race of men of a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were punished." In another passage we read of Claudius, who reigned A.D. 41

—54: "He drove the Jews, who, at the suggestion of Chrestus, were constantly rioting, out of Rome." From this we might infer that there was at that time a Jewish leader, named Chrestus, living in Rome, and inciting the Jews to rebellion. His followers would probably take his name, and, expelled from Rome, they would spread this name in all directions. If the passage in Acts xi. 20 and 26 be of any historical value, it would curiously strengthen this hypothesis, since the "disciples were called Christians first in Antioch," and the missionaries to Antioch, who preached "unto the Jews only," came from Cyprus and Cyrene, which would naturally lie in the way of fugitives from Rome to Asia Minor. They would bring the name Christian with them, and the date in the Acts synchronises with that in Suetonius. Chrestus would appear to have left a sect behind him in Rome, bearing his name, the members of which were prosecuted by the Government, very likely as traitors and rebels. Keim's good opinion of Suetonius is much degraded by this Chrestus: "In his 'Life of Claudius,' who expelled the Jews from Rome, he has shown his undoubted inferiority to Tacitus as a historian by treating 'Christ' as a restless and seditious Jewish agitator, who was still living in the time of Claudius, and, indeed, in Rome" ("Jesus of Nazara," p. 33).

It is natural that modern Christians should object to a Jewish Chrestus starting up at Rome simultaneously with their Jewish Christus in Judæa, who, according to Luke's chronology, must have been crucified about A. D. 43. The coincidence is certainly inconvenient; but if they refuse the testimony of Suetonius concerning Chrestus, the leader, why should they accept it concerning the Christians, the followers? Paley, of course, although he quotes Suetonius, omits all reference at this stage to the unlucky Chrestus; his duty was to present evidences of, not against, Christianity. Most dishonestly, however, he inserts a reference to it later on (p. 73), where, in a brief *résumé* of the evidence, he uses it as a link in his chain: "When Suetonius, an historian contemporary with Tacitus, relates that, in the time of Claudius, the Jews were making disturbances at Rome, Christus being their leader." Why does not Paley explain to us how Jesus came to be leading Jews at Rome during the reign of Claudius, and why he incited them to riot? No such incident is related in the life of Jesus of Nazareth; and if Suetonius

be correct, the credit of the Gospels is destroyed. To his shame be it said, that Paley here deliberately refers to a passage, *which he has not ventured to quote*, simply that he may use the great name of Suetonius to strengthen his lamentably weak argument, by the pretence that Suetonius mentions Jesus of Nazareth, and thus makes him a historical character. Few more disgraceful perversions of evidence can be found, even in the annals of controversy. H. Horne refers to this passage in proof of the existence of Christ (Introduction, vol. i., page 202); but without offering any explanation of the appearance of Christ in Rome some years after he ought to have been dead.

Juvenal is next dragged forward by Paley as a witness, because he mentioned the punishment of some criminals: "I think it sufficiently probable that these [Christian executions] were the executions to which the poet refers" ("Evidences," p. 29.) Needless to say that there is not a particle of proof that they were anything of the kind; but when evidence is lacking, it is necessary to invent it.

Pliny the Younger (born A.D. 61, died A.D. 115) writes to the Emperor Trajan, about A.D. 107, to ask him how he shall treat the Christians, and as Paley has so grossly misrepresented this letter, it will be well to reproduce the whole of it. It contains no word of Christians dying boldly as Paley pretends, nor, indeed, of the punishment of death being inflicted at all. The word translated "punishment" is *supplicium* (acc. of *supplicium*) in the original, and is a term which, like the French *supplice*, derived from it, may mean the punishment of death, or any other heavy penalty. The translation of the letter runs as follows: "C. Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, Health.—It is customary with me to refer to you, my lord, matters about which I entertain a doubt. For who is better able either to rule my hesitation, or to instruct my ignorance? I have never been present at the inquiries about the Christians, and, therefore, cannot say for what crime, or to what extent, they are usually punished, or what is the nature of the inquiry about them. Nor have I been free from great doubts whether there should not be a distinction between ages, or how far those of a tender frame should be treated differently from the robust; whether those who repent should not be pardoned, so that one who has been a Christian should not derive advantage from having ceased to be one; whether the name itself of being a Christian should be punished, or only crimes atten-

dant upon the name? In the meantime I have laid down this rule in dealing with those who were brought before me for being Christians. I asked whether they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; if they persevered, I ordered them to be led off. For I had no doubt in my mind that, whatever it might be which they acknowledged, obduracy and inflexible obstinacy, at all events should be punished. There were others guilty of like folly, whom I set aside to be sent to Rome, because they were Roman citizens. In the next place, when this crime began, as usual, gradually to spread, it showed itself in a variety of ways. An indictment was set forth without any author, containing the names of many who denied that they were Christians or ever had been; and, when I set the example, they called on the gods, and made offerings of frankincense and wine to your image, which I, for this purpose, had ordered to be brought out, together with the images of the gods. Moreover, they cursed Christ; none of which acts can be extorted from those who are really Christians. I consequently gave orders that they should be discharged. Again, others, who have been informed against, said that they were Christians, and afterwards denied it; that they had been so once but had ceased to be so, some three years ago, some longer than that, some even twenty years before; all of these worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods; they also cursed Christ. But they asserted that this was the sum total of their crime or error, whichever it may be called, that they were used to come together on a stated day before it was light, and to sing in turn, among themselves, a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath—not to anything wicked—but that they would not commit theft, robbery, or adultery, nor break their word, nor deny that anything had been entrusted to them when called upon to restore it. After this they said that it was their custom to separate, and again to meet together to take their meals, which were in common and of a harmless nature; but that they had ceased even to do this since the proclamation which I issued according to your commands, forbidding such meetings to be held. I therefore deemed it the more necessary to enquire of two servant maids, who were said to be attendants, what was the real truth, and to apply the torture. But I found that it



was nothing but a bad and excessive superstition, and I consequently adjourned the inquiry, and consulted you upon the subject. For it seemed to me to be a matter on which it was desirable to take advice, in consequence of the number of those who are in danger. For there are many of every age, of every rank, and even of both sexes, who are invited to incur the danger, and will still be invited. For the infection of this superstition has spread through not only cities, but also villages and the country, though it seems possible to check and remedy it. At all events it is evident that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, which had been intermitted, are revived, and victims are sold everywhere, though formerly it was difficult to find a buyer. It is, therefore, easy to believe that a number of persons may be corrected, if the door of repentance be left open" (Ep. 97).

It is urged by Christian advocates that this letter at least shows how widely Christianity had spread at this early date; but we shall later have occasion to draw attention to the fact that the name "Christian" was used before the reputed time of Christ to describe some extensively-spread sects, and that the worshippers of the Egyptian Serapis were known by that title. It may be added that the authenticity of this letter is by no means beyond dispute, and that R. Taylor urges some very strong arguments against it. Among others, he suggests: "The undeniable fact that the first Christians were the greatest liars and forgers that had ever been in the whole world, and that they actually stopped at nothing.....The flagrant atopism of Christians being found in the remote province of Bithynia, before they had acquired any notoriety in Rome.....The inconsistency of the supposition that so just and moral a people as the primitive Christians are assumed to have been, should have been the first to provoke the Roman Government to depart from its universal maxims of toleration, liberality, and indifference.....The use of the torture to extort confession.....The choice of women to be the subjects of this torture, when the ill-usage of women was, in like manner, abhorrent to the Roman character" ("Diegesis," pp. 383, 384).

Paley boldly states that Martial (born A.D. 43, died about A.D. 100) makes the Christians "the subject of his ridicule," because he wrote an epigram on the stupidity of admiring

any vain-glorious fool who would rush to be tormented for the sake of notoriety. Hard-set must Christians be for evidence, when reduced to rely on such pretended allusions.

Epictetus (flourished first half of second century) is claimed as another witness, because he states that "It is possible a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to these things from madness, or from habit, as the Galileans" (Book iv., chapter 7). The Galileans, *i.e.*, the people of Galilee, appear to have had a bad name, and it is highly probable that Epictetus simply referred to them, just as he might have said as an equivalent phrase for stupidity, "like the Bœotians." In addition to this, the followers of Judas the Gaulonite were known as Galileans, and were remarkable for the "inflexible constancy which, in defence of their cause, rendered them insensible of death and tortures" ("Decline and Fall," vol. ii., p. 214).

Marcus Aurelius (born A.D. 121, died A.D. 180) is Paley's last support, as he urges that fortitude in the face of death should arise from judgment, "and not from obstinacy, like the Christians." As no one disputes the existence of a sect called Christians when Marcus Aurelius wrote, this testimony is not specially valuable.

Paley, so keen to swoop down on any hint that can be twisted into an allusion to the Christians, entirely omits the interesting letter written by the Emperor Adrian to his brother-in-law Servianus, A.D. 134. The evidence is not of an edifying character, and this accounts for the omission: "The worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and those are consecrated to the god Serapis, who, I find, call themselves the bishops of Christ" (Quoted in "Diegesis," p. 386).

Such are the whole external evidences of Christianity until after A.D. 160. In a time rich in historians and philosophers one man, Tacitus, in a disputed passage, mentions a Christus punished under Pontius Pilate, and the existence of a sect bearing his name. Suetonius, Pliny, Adrian, possibly Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, casually mention some people called Christians.

The Rev. Dr. Giles thus summarises the proofs of the weakness of early Christian evidences in "profane history:"—

"Though the remains of Grecian and Latin profane literature which belong to the first and second centuries of our era are enough to form a library of themselves, they

contain no allusion to the New Testament.....The Latin writers, who lived between the time of Christ's crucifixion and the year A.D. 200, are Seneca, Lucan, Suetonius, Tacitus, Persius, Juvenal, Martial, Pliny the Elder, Silius Italicus, Statius, Quintilian, and Pliny the Younger, besides numerous others of inferior note. The greater number of these make mention of the Jews, but not of the Christians. In fact, Suetonius, Tacitus, and the younger Pliny, are the only Roman writers who mention the Christian religion or its founder" ("Christian Records," by Rev. Dr. Giles, p. 36).

"The Greek classic writers, who lived between the time of Christ's crucifixion and the year 200, are those which follow: Epictetus, Plutarch, Ælian, Arrian, Galen, Lucian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ptolemy, Marcus Aurelius (who, though a Roman emperor, wrote in Greek), Pausanias, and many others of less note. The allusions to Christianity found in their works are singularly brief" (Ibid, p. 42).

What does it all, this "evidence," amount to? One writer, Tacitus, records that a man, called by his followers "Christ"—for no one pretends that Christ is anything more than a title given by his disciples to a certain Jew named Jesus—was put to death by Pontius Pilate. And suppose he were, what then? How is this a proof of the religion called Christianity? Tacitus knows nothing of the miracle-worker, of the risen and ascended man; he is strangely ignorant of all the wonders that had occurred; and, allowing the passage to be genuine, it tells sorely against the marvellous history given by the Christians of their leader, whose fame is supposed to have spread far and wide, and whose fame most certainly must so have spread had he really performed all the wonderful works attributed to him. But no necessity lies upon the Freethinker, when he rejects Christianity, to disprove the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth, although we point to the inadequacy of the evidence even of his existence. The strength of the Freethought position is in no wise injured by the admission that a young Jew named Joshua (*i.e.* Jesus) may have wandered up and down Galilee and Judæa in the reign of Tiberius, that he may have been a religious reformer, that he may have been put to death by Pontius Pilate for sedition. All this is perfectly likely, and to allow it in no way endorses the mass of legend and myth encrusted round this tiny nucleus

of possible fact. This obscure peasant is not the Christian Jesus, who is—as we shall later urge—only a new presentation of the ancient Sun-God, with unmistakable family likeness to his elder brothers. The Reverend Robert Taylor very rightly remarks, concerning this small historical possibility: “These are circumstances which fall entirely within the scale of rational possibility, and draw for no more than an ordinary and indifferent testimony of history, to command the mind’s assent. The mere relation of any historian, living near enough to the time supposed to guarantee the probability of his competent information on the subject, would have been entitled to our acquiescence. We could have no reason to deny or to doubt what such an historian could have had no motive to feign or to exaggerate. The proof, even to demonstration, of these circumstances would constitute no step or advance towards the proof of the truth of the Christian religion; while the absence of a sufficient degree of evidence to render even these circumstances unquestionable must, *à fortiori*, be fatal to the credibility of the less credible circumstances founded upon them” (“Diegesis,” p. 7).

But Paley pleads some indirect evidence on behalf of Christianity, which deserves a word of notice since the direct evidence so lamentably breaks down. He urges that: “there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.” Nearly 200 pages are devoted to the proof of this proposition, a proposition which it is difficult to characterise with becoming courtesy, when we know the complete and utter absence of any “satisfactory evidence” that the original witnesses did anything of the kind.

It is pleaded that the “original witnesses passed their lives in labours, etc., in attestation of the accounts they delivered.” The evidence of this may be looked for either in Pagan or in Christian writings. Pagan writers know literally nothing about the “original witnesses,” mentioning, at the utmost, but “the Christians;” and these Christians, when put to death, were not so executed in attestation of any accounts delivered by them, but wholly and solely

because of the evil deeds and the scandalous practices rightly or wrongly attributed to them. Supposing—what is not true—that they had been executed for their creed, there is no pretence that they were eye-witnesses of the miracles of Christ.

Paley's first argument is drawn "from the nature of the case"—*i.e.*, that persecution ought to have taken place, whether it did or not, because both Jews and Gentiles would reject the new creed. So far as the Jews are concerned, we hear of no persecution from Josephus. If we interrogate the Christian Acts, we hear but of little, two persons only being killed. We learn also that "many thousands of Jews" belonged to the new sect, and were propitiated by Christian conformity to the law; and that, when the Jews rose against Paul—not as a Christian, but as a breaker of the Mosaic law—he was promptly delivered by the Romans, who would have set him at liberty had he not elected to be tried at Rome. If we turn to the conduct of the Pagans, we meet the same blank absence of evidence of persecution, until we come to the disputed passage in Tacitus, wherein none of the eye-witnesses are said to have been concerned; and we have, on the other side, the undisputed fact that, under the imperial rule of Rome, every subject nation practised its own creed undisturbed, so long as it did not incite to civil disturbances. "The religious tenets of the Galileans, or Christians, were never made a subject of punishment, or even of inquiry" ("Decline and Fall," vol. ii., p. 215).

This view of the matter is thoroughly corroborated by Lardner: "The disciples of Jesus Christ were under the protection of the Roman law, since the God they worshipped and whose worship they recommended, was the God of the heavens and the earth, the same God whom the Jews worshipped, and the worship of whom was allowed of all over the Roman Empire, and established by special edicts and decrees in most, perhaps in all the places, in which we meet with St. Paul in his travels" ("Credibility," vol. i., pt. 1, pp. 406, 407. Ed. 1727). He also quotes "a remarkable piece of justice done the Jews at Doris, in Syria, by Petronius, President of that province. The fact is this: Some rash young fellows of the place got in and set up a statue of the Emperor in the Jews' synagogue. Agrippa the Great made complaints to Petronius concerning this injury. Whereupon Petronius issued a very sharp precept to the magistrates of Doris.

He terms this action an offence, not against the Jews only, but also against the Emperor; says, it is agreeable to the law of nature that every man should be master of his own places, according to the decree of the Emperor. I have, says he, given directions that they who have dared to do these things contrary to the edict of Augustus, be delivered to the centurion Vitellius Proculus, that they may be brought to me, and answer for their behaviour. And I require the chief men in the magistracy to discover the guilty to the centurion, unless they are willing to have it thought, that this injustice has been done with their consent; and that they see to it, that no sedition or tumult happen upon this occasion, which, I perceive, is what some are aiming at..... I do also require, that for the future, you seek no pretence for sedition or disturbance, but that all men worship [God] according to their own customs" (Ibid, pp. 382, 383). After giving some other facts, Lardner sums up: "These are authentic testimonies in behalf of the equity of the Roman Government in general, and of the impartial administration of justice by the Roman presidents toward all the people of their provinces, how much soever they differed from each other in matters of religion" (Ibid, p. 401).

The evidence of persecution which consists in quotations from the Christian books ("Evidences," pages 33—52) cannot be admitted without evidence of the authenticity of the books quoted. The Acts and the Pauline epistles so grossly contradict each other that, having nothing outside themselves with which to compare them, they are mutually destructive. "The epistle to the Romans presents special difficulties to its acceptance as a genuine address to the Church of Rome in the era ascribed to it. The faith of this Church, at this early period, is said to be 'spoken of throughout the whole world; and yet when Paul, according to the Acts, at a later time visited Rome, so little had this alleged Church influenced the neighbourhood, that the inquiring Jews of Rome are shown to be totally ignorant of what constituted Christianity, and to have looked to Paul to enlighten them'" ("Portraiture and Mission of Jesus," p. 15). 2 Cor. is of very doubtful authenticity. The passage in James shows no fiery persecution. Hebrews is of later date. 2 Thess. again very doubtful. The "suffering" spoken of by Peter appears, from the context, to refer chiefly to reproaches, and

a problematical "if any man suffer as a Christian." Had those he wrote to been then suffering, surely the apostle would have said: "*When* any man suffers.....let him not be ashamed." The whole question of the authenticity of the canonical books will be challenged later, and the weakness of this division of Paley's evidences will then be more fully apparent. Meanwhile we subjoin Lardner's view of these passages. He has been arguing that the Romans "protected the many rites of all their provinces;" and he proceeds: "There is, however, one difficulty which, I am aware, may be started by some persons. If the Roman Government, to which all the world was then subject, was so mild and gentle, and protected all men in the profession of their several religious tenets, and the practice of all their peculiar rites, whence comes it to pass that there are in the Epistles so many exhortations to the Christians to patience and constancy, and so many arguments of consolation suggested to them, as a suffering body of men? [Here follow some passages, as in Paley.] To this I answer: 1. That the account St. Luke has given in the Acts of the Apostles of the behaviour of the Roman officers out of Judæa, and in it, is confirmed not only by the account I have given of the genius and nature of the Roman Government, but also by the testimony of the most ancient Christian writers. The Romans did afterwards depart from these moderate maxims; but it is certain that they were governed by them as long as the history of the Acts of the Apostles reaches. Tertullian and divers others do affirm that Nero was the first Emperor that persecuted the Christians; nor did he begin to disturb them till after Paul had left Rome the first time he was there (when he was sent thither by Festus), and, therefore, not until he was become an enemy to all mankind. And I think that, according to the account which Tacitus has given of Nero's inhumane treatment of the Christians at Rome, in the tenth year of his reign, what he did then was not owing to their having different principles in religion from the Romans, but proceeded from a desire he had to throw off from himself the odium of a vile action—namely, setting fire to the city—which he was generally charged with. And Sulpicius Severus, a Christian historian of the fourth century, says the same thing" ("Credibility of the Gospel History," vol. i., pages 416—420). Lardner, however, allows that the Jews persecuted the Christians where they could, although they were

unable to slay them. They probably persecuted them much in the same fashion that the Christians have persecuted Freethinkers during the present century.

But Paley adduces further the evidence of Clement, Hermas, Polycarp, Ignatius, and a circular letter of the Church of Smyrna, to prove the sufferings of the eye-witnesses ("Evidences," pages 52—55). When we pass into writings of this description in later times, there is, indeed, plenty of evidence—in fact, a good deal too much, for they testify to such marvellous occurrences that no trust is possible in anything which they say. Not only was St. Paul's head cut off, but the worthy Bishop of Rome, Linus, his contemporary (who is supposed to relate his martyrdom), tells us how, "instead of blood, nought but a stream of pure milk flowed from his veins;" and we are further instructed that his severed head took three jumps in "honour of the Trinity, and at each spot on which it jumped there instantly struck up a spring of living water, which retains at this day a plain and distinct taste of milk" ("Diegesis," pp. 256, 257). Against a mass of absurd stories of this kind, the *only evidence* of the persecution of Paley's eye-witnesses, we may set the remarks of Gibbon: "In the time of Tertullian and Clemens of Alexandria the glory of martyrdom was confined to St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. James. It was gradually bestowed on the rest of the Apostles by the more recent Greeks, who prudently selected for the theatre of their preaching and sufferings some remote country beyond the limits of the Roman Empire" ("Decline and Fall," vol. ii., p. 208, note). Later there was, indeed, more persecution; but even then the martyrdoms afford no evidence of the truth of Christianity. Martyrdom proves the sincerity, *but not the truth*, of the sufferer's belief; every creed has had its martyrs, and as the truth of one creed excludes the truth of every other, it follows that the vast majority have died for a delusion, and that, therefore, the number of martyrs it can reckon is no criterion of the truth of a creed, but only of the devotion it inspires. While we allow that the Christians underwent much persecution, there can be no doubt that the number of the sufferers has been grossly exaggerated. One can scarcely help suspecting that, as real martyrs were not forthcoming in as vast numbers as their supposed bones, martyrs were invented to fit the wealth-producing relics, as the relics did not fit the historical martyrs. "The total disregard of



truth and probability in the representations of these primitive martyrdoms was occasioned by a very natural mistake. The ecclesiastical writers of the fourth and fifth centuries ascribed to the magistrates of Rome the same degree of implacable and unrelenting zeal which filled their own breasts against the heretics, or the idolators of their own time.....But it is certain, and we may appeal to the grateful confessions of the first Christians, that the greatest part of those magistrates, who exercised in the provinces the authority of the Emperor, or of the Senate, and to whose hands alone the jurisdiction of life and death was entrusted, behaved like men of polished manners and liberal education, who respected the rules of justice, and who were conversant with the precepts of philosophy. They frequently declined the odious task of persecution, dismissed the charge with contempt, or suggested to the accused Christian some legal evasion by which he might elude the severity of the laws. (Tertullian, in his epistle to the Governor of Africa, mentions several remarkable instances of lenity and forbearance which had happened within his own knowledge.) .....The learned Origen, who, from his experience, as well as reading, was intimately acquainted with the history of the Christians, declares, in the most express terms, that the number of martyrs was very inconsiderable.....The general assertion of Origen may be explained and confirmed by the particular testimony of his friend Dionysius, who, in the immense city of Alexandria, and under the rigorous persecution of Decius, reckons only ten men and seven women who suffered for the profession of the Christian name" ("Decline and Fall," vol. ii., pp. 224—226. See throughout chap. xvi.). Gibbon calculates the whole number of martyrs of the Early Church at "somewhat less than two thousand persons;" and remarks caustically that the "Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels" (pp. 273, 274). Supposing, however, that the most exaggerated accounts of Church historians were correct, how would that support Paley's argument? His contention is that the "eye-witnesses" of miraculous events died in testimony of their belief in them; and myriads of martyrs in the second and third centuries are of no assistance to him. So we will retrace our steps to the eye-witnesses, and we find the position of Gibbon—as to the lives and labours of the Apostles

being written later by men not confining themselves to facts—endorsed by Mosheim, who judiciously observes: "Many have undertaken to write this history of the Apostles, a history which we find loaded with fables, doubts, and difficulties, when we pursue it further than the books of the New Testament, and the most ancient writers in the Christian Church" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 27, ed. 1847). What "ancient writers" Mosheim alludes to it is difficult to guess, as may be judged from his criticisms quoted below, on the "Apostolic Fathers," the most ancient of all; and in estimating the worth of his opinion, it is necessary to remember that he was himself an earnest Christian, although a learned and candid one, so that every admission he makes, which tells against Christianity, is of double weight, it being the admission of a friend and defender.

To the credit of Paley's apostolic evidences (Clement, Hermas, Polycarp, Ignatius, and letter from Smyrna), we may urge the following objections. Clement's writings are much disputed: "The accounts which remain of his life, actions, and death are, for the most part, uncertain. Two *Epistles to the Corinthians*, written in Greek, have been attributed to him, of which the second has been looked upon as spurious, and the first as genuine, by many learned writers. But even this latter seems to have been corrupted and interpolated by some ignorant and presumptuous author.....The learned are now unanimous in regarding the other writings which bear the name of Clemens (Clement).....as spurious productions ascribed by some impostor to this venerable prelate, in order to procure them a high degree of authority" (Ibid, pp. 31, 32).

"The first epistle, bearing the name of Clement, has been preserved to us in a single manuscript only. Though very frequently referred to by ancient Christian writers, it remained unknown to the scholars of Western Europe until happily discovered in the Alexandrian manuscript.....Who the Clement was, to whom these writings are ascribed, cannot with absolute certainty be determined. The general opinion is, that he is the same as the person of that name referred to by St. Paul (Phil. iv. 3). The writings themselves contain no statement as to their author..... Although, as has been said, positive certainty cannot be reached on the subject, we may with great probability conclude that we have in this epistle a composition of that

Clement who is known to us from Scripture as having been an associate of the great apostle. The date of this epistle has been the subject of considerable controversy. It is clear from the writing itself that it was composed soon after some persecution (chapter 1) which the Roman Church had endured ; and the only question is, whether we are to fix upon the persecution under Nero or Domitian. If the former, the date will be about the year 68 ; if the latter, we must place it towards the close of the first century, or the beginning of the second. We possess no external aid to the settlement of this question. The lists of early Roman bishops are in hopeless confusion, some making Clement the immediate successor of St. Peter, others placing Linus, and others still Linus and Anacletus, between him and the apostle. The internal evidence, again, leaves the matter doubtful, though it has been strongly pressed on both sides. The probability seems, on the whole, to be in favour of the Domitian period, so that the epistle may be dated about A.D. 97" ("The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers." Translated by Rev. Dr. Roberts, Dr. Donaldson, and Rev. F. Crombie, pp. 3, 4. Ed. 1867). "Only a single manuscript copy of the work is extant, at the end of the Alexandrian manuscript of the Scriptures. This copy is considerably mutilated. In some passages the text is manifestly corrupt, and other passages have been suspected of being interpolations" (Norton's "Genuineness of the Gospels," vol. i, p. 336. Ed. 1847).

The second epistle is rejected on all sides. "It is now generally regarded as one of the many writings which have been falsely ascribed to Clement.....The diversity of style clearly points to a different writer from that of the first epistle" ("Apostolic Fathers," page 53). "The second epistle.....is not mentioned at all by the earlier Fathers who refer to the first. Eusebius, who is the first writer who mentions it, expresses doubt regarding it, while Jerome and Photius state that it was rejected by the ancients. It is now universally regarded as spurious" ("Supernatural Religion," pp. 220, 221). "There is a second epistle ascribed to Clement, but we know not that this is as highly approved as the former, and know not that it has been in use with the ancients. There are also other writings reported to be his, verbose and of great length. Lately, and some time ago, those were produced that contain the dialogues of Peter and Apion, of which,

however, not a syllable is recorded by the primitive Church" (Eusebius' "Eccles. Hist." bk. iii., chap. 38) "The first Greek Epistle alone can be confidently pronounced genuine" (Westcott on the Canon of the New Testament," p. 24. Ed. 1875). The first epistle "is the only piece of Clement that can be relied on as genuine" ("Lardner's Credibility," pt. ii., vol. i., p. 62. Ed. 1734). "Besides the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians there is a fragment of a piece, called his second epistle, which being doubtful, or rather plainly not Clement's, I don't quote as his." (Ibid, p. 106.)

This very dubious Clement (Paley quotes, be it said, from the first—or least doubtful—of his writings) only says that *one* of Paley's original witnesses was martyred, namely Peter; Paul, of course, was not an eye-witness of Christ's proceedings.

The *Vision of Hermas* is a simple rhapsody, unworthy of a moment's consideration, of which Mosheim justly remarks: "The discourse which he puts into the mouths of those celestial beings is more insipid and senseless than what we commonly hear among the meanest of the multitude" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 32). Its date is very doubtful; the Canon of Muratori puts it in the middle of the second century, saying that it was written by Hermas, brother to Pius, Bishop of Rome, who died A.D. 142. (See "Norton's Genuineness of the Gospels," vol. i., pp. 341, 342.) "The *Epistle to the Philippians*, which is ascribed to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who, in the middle of the second century, suffered martyrdom in a venerable and advanced age, is looked upon by some as genuine; by others as spurious; and it is no easy matter to determine this question" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 32). "Upon no internal ground can any part of this Epistle be pronounced genuine; there are potent reasons for considering it spurious, and there is no evidence of any value whatever supporting its authenticity" ("Sup. Rel.," p. 283).

The editors of the "Apostolic Fathers" dispute this assertion, and say: "It is abundantly established by external testimony, and is also supported by the internal evidence" (p. 67). But they add: "The epistle before us is not perfect in any of the Greek MSS. which contain it. But the chapters wanting in Greek are contained in an ancient Latin version. While there is no ground for supposing, as some have done, that the whole epistle is spurious, there

seems considerable force in the arguments by which many others have sought to prove chap. xiii. to be an interpolation. The date of the epistle cannot be satisfactorily determined. It depends on the conclusion we reach as to some points, very difficult and obscure, connected with that account of the martyrdom of Polycarp which has come down to us. We shall not, however, be far wrong if we fix it about the middle of the second century" (Ibid, pp. 67, 68). Poor Paley! this weak evidence to the martyrdom of his eye-witnesses comes 150 years after Christ; and even then all that Polycarp may have said, if the epistle chance to be authentic, is that "they suffered," without any word of their martyrdom!

The authenticity of the letters of Ignatius has long been a matter of dispute. Mosheim, who accepts the seven epistles, says that, "Though I am willing to adopt this opinion as preferable to any other, yet I cannot help looking upon the authenticity of the epistle to Polycarp as extremely dubious, on account of the difference of style; and, indeed, the whole question relating to the epistles of St. Ignatius in general seems to me to labour under much obscurity, and to be embarrassed with many difficulties" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 22).

"There are in all fifteen epistles which bear the name of Ignatius. These are the following: One to the Virgin Mary, two to the Apostle John, one to Mary of Cassobelæ, one to the Tarsians, one to the Antiochians, one to Hero (a deacon of Antioch), one to the Philippians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Magnesians, one to the Trallians, one to the Romans, one to the Philadelphians, one to the Smyrnians, and one to Polycarp. The first three exist only in Latin; all the rest are extant also in Greek. It is now the universal opinions of critics that the first eight of these professedly Ignatian letters are spurious. They bear in themselves indubitable proofs of being the production of a later age than that in which Ignatius lived. Neither Eusebius nor Jerome makes the least reference to them; and they are now, by common consent, set aside as forgeries, which were at various dates, and to serve special purposes, put forth under the name of the celebrated Bishop of Antioch. But, after the question has been thus simplified, it still remains sufficiently complex. Of the seven epistles which are acknowledged by Eusebius ("Eccles. Hist.," bk. iii., chap 36), we possess two Greek recensions, a shorter

and a longer. It is plain that one or other of these exhibits a corrupt text ; and scholars have, for the most part, agreed to accept the shorter form as representing the genuine letters of Ignatius.....But although the shorter form of the Ignatian letters had been generally accepted in preference to the longer, there was still a pretty prevalent opinion among scholars that even it could not be regarded as absolutely free from interpolations, or as of undoubted authenticity..... Upon the whole, however, the shorter recension was, until recently, accepted without much opposition.....as exhibiting the genuine form of the epistles of Ignatius. But a totally different aspect was given to the question by the discovery of a Syriac version of three of these epistles among the MSS. procured from the monastery of St. Mary Deipara, in the desert of Nitria, in Egypt [between 1838 and 1842].....On these being deposited in the British Museum, the late Dr. Cureton, who then had charge of the Syriac department, discovered among them, first, the epistle to Polycarp, and then again the same epistle, with those to the Ephesians and to the Romans, in two other volumes of manuscripts" ("Apostolic Fathers," pp. 139—142). Dr. Cureton gave it as his opinion that the Syriac letters are "the only true and genuine letters of the venerable Bishop of Antioch that have either come down to our times or were ever known in the earliest ages of the Christian Church" ("Corpus Ignatianum," ed. 1849, as quoted in the 'Apostolic Fathers,' p. 142).

"I have carefully compared the two editions, and am very well satisfied upon that comparison that the larger are an interpolation of the smaller, and not the smaller an epitome or abridgment of the larger. I desire no better evidence in a thing of this nature.....But whether the smaller themselves are the genuine writings of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, is a question that has been much disputed, and has employed the pens of the ablest critics. And whatever positiveness some may have shown on either side, I must own I have found it a very difficult question" ("Credibility," pt. 2, vol. ii., p. 153). The Syriac version was then, of course, unknown. Professor Norton, the learned Christian defender of the Gospels, says: "The seven shorter epistles, the genuineness of which is contended for, come to us in bad company.....There is, as it seems to me, no reasonable doubt that the seven shorter epistles ascribed to Ignatius are equally, with all the rest, fabrications of a

date long subsequent to his time." "I doubt whether any book, in its general tone of sentiment and language, ever betrayed itself as a forgery more clearly than do these pretended epistles of Ignatius" ("Genuineness of the Gospels," vol. i., pp. 350 and 353, ed. 1847).

"What, then, is the position of the so-called Ignatian epistles? Towards the end of the second century Irenæus makes a very short quotation from a source unnamed, which Eusebius, in the fourth century, finds in an epistle attributed to Ignatius. Origen, in the third century, quotes a few words, which he ascribes to Ignatius, although without definite reference to any particular epistle; and, in the fourth century, Eusebius mentions seven epistles ascribed to Ignatius. There is no other evidence. There are, however, fifteen epistles extant, all of which are attributed to Ignatius, of all of which, with the exception of three, which are only known in a Latin version, we possess both Greek and Latin versions. Of seven of these epistles—and they are those mentioned by Eusebius—we have two Greek versions, one of which is very much shorter than the other; and, finally, we now possess a Syriac version of three epistles, only in a form still shorter than the shorter Greek version, in which are found all the quotations of the Fathers, without exception, up to the fourth century. Eight of the fifteen epistles are universally rejected as spurious (ante, p. 263). The longer Greek version of the remaining seven epistles is almost unanimously condemned as grossly interpolated; and the great majority of critics recognise that the shorter Greek version is also much interpolated; whilst the Syriac version, which, so far as MSS. are concerned, is by far the most ancient text of any letters which we possess, reduces their number to three, and their contents to a very small compass indeed. It is not surprising that the vast majority of critics have expressed doubt more or less strong regarding the authenticity of all these epistles, and that so large a number have repudiated them altogether. One thing is quite evident—that, amidst such a mass of falsification, interpolation, and fraud, the Ignatian epistles cannot, in any form, be considered evidence on any important point.....In fact, the whole of the Ignatian literature is a mass of falsification and fraud" ("Sup. Rel.," vol. i., pp. 270, 271, 274). The student may judge from this confusion, of fifteen reduced to seven long, and seven long reduced to seven short, and seven short reduced to three, and those

three very doubtful, how thoroughly reliable must be Paley's arguments drawn from this "contemporary of Polycarp." Our editors of the "Fathers" very frankly remark: "As to the personal history of Ignatius, almost nothing is known" ("Apostolic Fathers," p. 143). Why, acknowledging this, they call him "celebrated," it is hard to say. Truly, the ways of Christian commentators are dark!

Paley's quotation is taken from the epistle to the Smyrnæans (not one of the Syriac, be it noted), and is from the shorter Greek recension. It occurs in chap. iii., and only says that Peter, and those who were with him, saw Jesus after the resurrection, and believed: "for this cause also they despised death, and were found its conquerors." Men who believed in a resurrection might naturally despise death; but it is hard to see how this quotation—even were it authentic—shows that the apostles suffered for their belief. What strikes one as most remarkable—if Paley's contention of the sufferings of the witnesses be true, and these writings authentic—is that so very little mention is made of the apostles, of their labours, toils, and sufferings, and that these epistles are simply a kind of patchwork, chiefly of Old Testament materials, mixed up with exhortations about Christ.

The circular epistle of the Church of Smyrna is a curious document. Paley quotes a terrible account of the tortures inflicted, and one would imagine on reading it that many must have been put to death. We are surprised to learn, from the epistle itself, that Polycarp was only the twelfth martyr between the two towns of Smyrna and Philadelphia! The amount of dependence to be placed on the narrative may be judged by the following:—"As the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within, not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour, as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been burning there. At length, when those men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near, and pierce him with a dagger. And on his doing this,



there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished" ("Apostolic Fathers," p. 92). What reliance can be placed on historians (?) who gravely relate that fire does not burn, and that when a man is pierced with a dagger a dove flies out, together with sufficient blood to quench a flaming pile? To make this precious epistle still more valuable, one of its transcribers adds to it:—"I again, Pionius, wrote them (these things) from the previously written copy, having carefully searched into them, and the blessed Polycarp having manifested them to me through a revelation [!] even as I shall show in what follows. I have collected these things, when they had almost faded away through the lapse of time" (Ibid, p. 96). If this is history, then any absurd dream may be taken as the basis of belief. We may add that this epistle does not mention the martyrdoms of the eye-witnesses, and it is hard to know why Paley drags it in, unless he wants to make us believe that his eye-witnesses suffered all the tortures he quotes; but even Paley cannot pretend that there is a scintilla of proof of their undergoing any such trials. Thus falls the whole argument based on the "twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known," dying for the persistent assertion of "a miracle wrought before their eyes," who are used as a parallel of the apostles, as an argument against Hume. For we have not yet proved that there were any eye-witnesses, or that they made any assertions, and we have entirely failed to prove that the eye-witnesses were martyred at all, or that the death of any one of them, save that of Peter, is even mentioned in the alleged documents, so that the "satisfactory evidences" of the "original witnesses of the Christian miracles" suffering and dying in attestation of those miracles amount to this, that in a disputed document Peter is said to have been martyred, and in another, still more doubtful, "the rest of the apostles" are said to have "suffered." Thus the first proposition of Paley falls entirely to the ground. The honest truth is that the history of the twelve apostles is utterly unknown, and that around their names gathers a mass of incredible and nonsensical myth and legend, similar in kind to other mythological fables, and entirely unworthy of credence by reasonable people.

Not is proof less lacking of submission "from the same motives, to new rules of conduct." Nowhere is there a sign that Christian morality was enforced by appeal to the

miracles of Christ ; miracles were, in those days, too common an incident to attract much attention, and, indeed, if they could not win belief in the mission from those Jews before whom they were said to have been performed, what chance would they have had when the story of their working was only repeated by hearsay? Again, the rules of conduct were not "new;" the best parts of the Christian morality had been taught long before Christ (as we shall prove later on by quotations), and were familiar to the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, from the writings of their own philosophers. There would have been nothing remarkable in a new sect growing up among these peoples, accustomed as they were to the schools of the philosophers, with their various groups of disciples distinguished by special names. Why is there anything more wonderful in these Christian societies with a high moral code, than in the severe and stately morality inculcated and practised by the Stoics? For the submission of conduct to the "new rules," the less said the better. 1 Corinthians does not give us a very lofty idea of the morality current among the Christians there, and the angry reproaches of Jude imply much depravity; the messages to the seven Churches are generally reproofing, not to dwell on many scattered passages of the same character. Outsiders, moreover, speak very harshly of the Christian societies. Tacitus—whose testimony must be allowed some weight, if he be quoted as a proof of the existence of the sect—says that they were held in abhorrence for their crimes," and were condemned for their "enmity to mankind" (the expression of Tacitus may either mean *haters of mankind*, or *hated by mankind*), expressions which show that the adherents of the higher and purer morality were, at least, singularly unfortunate in the impressions of it which they conveyed to their neighbours by their lives; and we find, further, the most scandalous crimes imputed to the Christians, necessitating the enforcement against them of edicts passed to put down the shameful Bacchanalian mysteries. And here, indeed, is the true cause of the persecution to which they were subjected under the just and merciful Roman sway, and this is a point that should not be lost sight of by the student.

About 186 B.C., according to Livy (lib. xxxix. c. 8—19), the Roman Government, discovering that certain "Bacchanalian mysteries" were habitually celebrated in Rome, issued stern edicts against the participants in them, and

succeeding in, at least partially, suppressing them. The reason given by the Consul Postumius for these edicts was political, not religious. "Could they think," he asked, "that youths, initiated under such oaths as theirs, were fit to be made soldiers? That wretches brought out of the temple of obscenity could be trusted with arms? That those contaminated with the foul debaucheries of these meetings should be the champions for the chastity of the wives and children of the Roman people?" "Let us now closely examine how far the Eleusinian and Bacchanalian feasts resembled the Christian Agapæ—whether the latter, modified and altered a little according to the change which would take place in the taste of the age, originated from the former, or were altogether from a different source. We have seen that the forementioned Pagan feasts were, throughout Italy, in a very flourishing state about 186 years before the Christian era. We have also seen that about this time they were, at least, partially suppressed in Italy, and those who were wont to take part in them dispersed over the world. Being zealously devoted to the religion of which these feasts were part, it is very natural to suppose that, wherever the votaries of this superstition settled, they soon established these feasts, which they were enabled to carry on secretly, and, therefore, for a considerable time, undetected.....Both Pagans and Christians, in ancient times, were particularly careful not to disclose their *mysteries*; to do so, in violation of their oaths, would cost their lives" ("The Prophet of Nazareth," by E. P. Meredith, notes, pp. 225, 226). Mr. Meredith then points out how in Rome, in Lyons, in Vienne, "the Christians were actually accused of murdering children and others—of committing adultery, incest, and other flagrant crimes in their secret lovefeasts. The question, therefore, arises—were they really guilty of the barbarous crimes with which they were so often formally charged, and for the commission of which they were almost as often legally condemned, and punished with death? Is it probable that persons *at Rome*, who had once belonged to these lovefeasts, should tell a deliberate falsehood that the Christians perpetrated these abominable vices, and that other persons *in France*, who had also been connected with these feasts, should falsely state that the Christians were guilty of the very same execrable crimes? There was no collusion or connection whatever between these parties, and in making their statements, they could have no self-

interested motive. They lived in different countries, they did not make their statements within twenty years of the same time, and by making such statements they rendered themselves liable to be punished with death.....The same remark applies to the disclosures made, about 150 years after, by certain females in Damascus, far remote from either Lyons or Rome. These make precisely the same statement—that they had once been Christians, that they were privy to criminal acts among them, and that these Christians, in their very churches, committed licentious deeds. The Romans would never have so relentlessly persecuted the Christians had they not been guilty of some such atrocities as were laid to their charge. There are on record abundant proofs that the Romans, from the earliest account we have of them, tolerated all harmless religions—all such as were not directly calculated to endanger the public peace, or vitiate public morals, or render life and property unsafe.....So well known were those horrid vices to be carried on by all Christians in their nocturnal and secret assemblies, and so certain it was thought that every one who was a Christian participated in them, that for a person to be known to be a Christian was thought a strong presumptive proof that he was guilty of these offences. Hence, persons in their preliminary examinations, who, on being interrogated, answered that they were Christians, were thought proper subjects for committal to prison.....Pliny further indicates that while some brought before him, on information, refused to tell him anything as to the nature of their nocturnal meetings, others replied to his questions as far as their oath permitted them. They told him that it was their practice, as Christians, to meet on a stated day, before daylight, to sing hymns; and to bind themselves by a solemn oath that they would do no wrong; that they would not steal, nor rob, nor commit any act of unchastity; that they would never violate a trust; and that they joined together in a common and innocent repast. While all these answers to the questions of the Proconsul are suggestive of the crimes with which the Christians were charged, still they are a denial of every one of them.....The whole tenor of historical facts is, however, against their testimony, and the Proconsul did not believe them; but, in order to get at the entire truth, put some of them to the torture, and ultimately adjourned their trial [see ante, pp. 203—205]. The manner in which Greek and

Latin writers mention the Christians goes far to show that they were guilty of the atrocious crimes laid to their charge. Suetonius (in Nero) calls them, 'A race of men of new and villainous superstition' [see ante, p. 201]. The Emperor Adrian, in a letter to his brother-in-law, Servianus, in the year 134, as given by Vospiucs, says: 'There is no presbyter of the Christains who is not either an astrologer, a sooth-sayer, or a minister of obscene pleasures.' Tacitus tells us that Nero inflicted exquisite punishment upon those people who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were 'held in abhorrence for their crimes. He also, in the same place, says they were 'odious to mankind;' and calls their religion a 'pernicious superstition' [see ante, p. 199]. Maximus, likewise, in his letter, calls them 'votaries of execrable vanity,' who had 'filled the world with infamy.' It would appear, however, that owing to the extreme measures taken against them by the Romans, both in Italy and in all the provinces, the Christians, by degrees, were forced to abandon entirely in their Agapæ infant murders, together with every species of obscenity, retaining, nevertheless, some relics of them, such as the *kiss of charity*, and the bread and wine, which they contended was transubstantiated into real flesh and blood.....A very common way of repelling these charges was for one sect of Christians, which, of course, denounced all other sects as heretics, to urge that human sacrifices and incestuous festivals were not celebrated by that sect, but that they *were* practised by other sects; such, for example, as the Marcionites and the Capocratians. (Justin Mart., 'Apology,' i., 35; Iren., adv. Hær. i, 24; Clem. Alex., i., 3.) When Tertullian joined the Montanists, another sect of Christians, he divulged the criminal secrets of the Church which he had so zealously defended, by saying, in his 'Treatise on Fasting,' c. 17, that 'in the Agapæ the young men lay with their sisters, and wallowed in wantonness and luxury'.....Remnants of these execrable customs remained for a long time, and vestiges of them exist to this very day, as well in certain words and phrases as in practice. The communion table to this very day is called *the altar*, the name of that upon which the ancients sacrificed their victims. The word *sacrament* has a meaning, as used by Pliny already cited, which carries us back to the solemn oath of the Agapæists. The word *mass* carries us back still further, and identifies the present mass with that of the Pagans.....Formerly the consecrated

bread was called *host*, which word signifies a *victim* offered as *sacrifice*, anciently *human* very often..... Jerome and other Fathers called the communion bread—*little body*, and the communion table—*mystical table*; the latter, in allusion to the heathen and early Christian mysteries, and the former, in reference to the children sacrificed at the Agapæ. The great doctrine of transubstantiation directly points to the abominable practice of eating human flesh at the Agapæ..... Upon the whole, it is impossible, from the mass of evidence already adduced, to avoid the conclusion that the early Christians, in their Agapæ, were really guilty of the execrable vices with which they were so often charged, and for which they were sentenced to death. This once admitted, a reasonable and adequate cause can be assigned for the severe persecutions of the Christians by the Roman Government—a Government which applied precisely the same laws and modes of persecution and punishment to them as to the votaries of the Bacchanalian and Eleusinian mysteries, well known to have been accustomed to offer human sacrifices, and indulge in the most obscene lasciviousness in their secret assemblies; and a Government which tolerated all kinds of religions, except those which encouraged practices dangerous to human life, or pernicious to the morals of subjects. Nor can the facts already advanced fail to show clearly that the Christian Agapæ were of Pagan origin—were identically the same as those Pagan feasts which existed simultaneously with them” (Ibid, notes, pp. 227, 231).

There can be no doubt that the Christians suffered for these crimes whether or no they were guilty of them: “Three things are alleged against us: Atheism, Thyestean feasts, Œdipodean intercourse,” says Athenagoras (“Apology,” ch. iii). Justin Martyr refers to the same charges (“2nd Apology,” ch. xii). Monsters of wickedness, we are accused of observing a holy rite, in which we kill a little child and then eat it, in which after the feast we practise incest..... Come, plunge your knife into the babe, enemy of none, accused of none, child of all; or if that is another’s work, simply take your place beside a human being dying before he has really lived, await the departure of the lately-given soul, receive the fresh young blood, saturate your bread with it, freely partake (“Apology,” Tertullian, secs. 7, 8). Tertullian pleads earnestly that these accusations were false: “if you cannot do it, you ought not to believe it of others. For a Christian is a man as well as you” (Ibid).

Yet, when Tertullian became a Montanist, he declared that these very crimes *were* committed at the Agapæ, so that he spoke falsely either in the one case or in the other. "It was sometimes faintly insinuated, and sometimes boldly asserted, that the same bloody sacrifices and the same incestuous festivals, which were so falsely ascribed to the orthodox believers, were in reality celebrated by the Marcionites, by the Carpocratians, and by several other sects of the Gnostics. .... Accusations of a similar kind were retorted upon the Church by the schismatics who had departed from its communion; and it was confessed on all sides that the most scandalous licentiousness of manners prevailed among great numbers of those who affected the name of Christians. A Pagan magistrate, who possessed neither leisure nor abilities to discern the almost imperceptible line which divides the orthodox faith from heretical depravity, might easily have imagined that their mutual animosity had extorted the discovery of their common guilt" ("Decline and Fall," Gibbon, vol. ii., pp. 204, 205). It was fortunate, the historian concludes, that some of the magistrates reported that they discovered no such criminality. It is, be it noted, simultaneously with the promulgation of these charges that the persecution of the Christians takes place during the first century very little is heard of such, and there is very little persecution [see ante, pp. 209—213]. In the following century the charges are frequent, and so are the persecutions.

To these strong arguments may be added the acknowledgment in 1. Cor. xi., 17, 22, of disorder and drunkenness at these Agapæ; the habit of speaking of the communion feast as "the Christian *mysteries*," a habit still kept up in the Anglican prayer-book; the fact that they took place *at night*, under cover of darkness, a custom for which there was not the smallest reason, unless the service were of a nature so objectionable as to bring it under the ban of the tolerant Roman law; and lastly, the use of the cross, and the sign of the cross, the central Christian emblem, and one that, especially in connection with the mysteries, is of no dubious signification. Thus, in the twilight in which they were veiled in those early days, the Christians appear to us as a sect of very different character to that bestowed upon them by Paley. A little later, when they emerge into historical light, their own writers give us sufficient evidence whereby we may judge them; and we find them super-

stitious, grossly ignorant, quarrelsome, cruel, divided into ascetics and profligates, between whom it is hard to award the palm for degradation and indecency.

Having "proved"—in the above fashion—that a number of people in the first century advanced "an extraordinary story," underwent persecution, and altered their manner of life, because of it, Paley thinks it "in the highest degree probable, that the story for which these persons voluntarily exposed themselves to the fatigues and hardships which they endured, was a *miraculous* story; I mean, that they pretended to miraculous evidence of some kind or other" ("Evidences," p. 64). That the Christians believed in a miraculous story may freely be acknowledged, but it is evidence of the truth of the story that we want, not evidence of their belief in it. Many ignorant people believe in witchcraft and in fortune-telling now-a-days, but their belief only proves their own ignorance, and not the truth of either superstition. The next step in the argument is that "the story which Christians have *now*" is "the story which Christians had *then*," and it is urged that there is in existence no trace of any story of Jesus Christ "substantially different from ours" ("Evidences," p. 69). It is hard to judge how much difference is covered by the word "substantially." All the apocryphal gospels differ very much from the canonical, insert sayings and doings of Christ not to be found in the received histories, and make his character the reverse of good or lovable to a far greater extent than "the four." That Christ was miraculously born, worked miracles, was crucified, buried, rose again, ascended, may be accepted as "substantial" parts of the story. Yet Mark and John knew nothing of the birth, while, if the Acts and the Epistles are to be trusted, the apostles were equally ignorant; thus the great doctrine of the Incarnation of God without natural generation, is thoroughly ignored by all save Matthew and Luke, and even these destroy their own story by giving genealogies of Jesus through Joseph, which are useless unless Joseph was his real father. The birth from a virgin, then has no claim to be part of Paley's miraculous story in the earliest times. The evidence of miracle-working by Christ to be found in the Epistles is chiefly conspicuous by its absence, but it figures largely in post-apostolic works. The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are generally acknowledged, and these three incidents compose the whole story for which a consensus of testimony can be claimed; it will,



perhaps, be fair to concede also that Christ is recognised universally as a miracle-worker, in spite of the strange silence of the epistles. We need not refer to the testimony of Clement, Polycarp or Ignatius, having already shown what dependence may be placed on their writings. But we have now three new witnesses, Barnabas, Quadratus, and Justin Martyr. Paley says: "In an epistle, bearing the name of Barnabas, the companion of Paul, probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age, we have the sufferings of Christ," etc. (*Evidences* p. 75). "Probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age!" Is Paley joking with his readers, or only trading on their ignorance? "The letter itself bears no author's name, is not dated from any place, and is not addressed to any special community. *Towards the end of the second century, however, tradition began to ascribe it to Barnabas, the companion of Paul. The first writer who mentions it is Clement of Alexandria* [head of the Alexandrian School, A.D. 205] who calls its author several times the 'Apostle Barnabas'.....We have already seen in the case of the Epistles ascribed to Clement of Rome, and, as we proceed, we shall become only too familiar with the fact, the singular facility with which, in the total absence of critical discrimination, spurious writings were ascribed by the Fathers to Apostles and their followers..... Credulous piety which attributed writings to every Apostle, and even to Jesus himself, soon found authors for each anonymous work of an edifying character.....In the earlier days of criticism, some writers, without much question, adopted the traditional view as to the authorship of the Epistles, but the great mass of critics are now agreed in asserting that the composition, which itself is perfectly anonymous, cannot be attributed to Barnabas the friend and fellow worker of Paul. Those who maintain the former opinion date the Epistle about A.D. 70-73, or even earlier, but this is scarcely the view of any living critic" (*"Supernatural Religion,"* vol. i., pp. 237—239).

"From its contents it seems unlikely that it was written by a companion of Apostles and a Levite. In addition to this, it is probable that Barnabas died before A.D. 62; and the letter contains not only an allusion to the destruction of the Jewish temple, but also affirms the abnegation of the Sabbath, and the general celebration of the Lord's Day, which seems to show that it could not have been written before the beginning of the second century" (*"Westcott on*

the Canon," p. 41). "Nothing certain is known as to the author of the following epistle. The writer's name is Barnabas; but scarcely any scholars now ascribe it to the illustrious friend and companion of St. Paul.....The internal evidence is now generally regarded as conclusive against this opinion.....The external evidence [ascribing it to Barnabas] is of itself weak, and should not make us hesitate for a moment in refusing to ascribe this writing to Barnabas, the apostle.....The general opinion is, that its date is not later than the middle of the second century, and that it cannot be placed earlier than some twenty or thirty years or so before. In point of style, both as respects thought and expression, a very low place must be assigned it. We know nothing certain of the region in which the author lived, or where the first readers were to be found" ("Apostolic Fathers," pp. 99, 100). The Epistle is not ascribed to Barnabas at all until the close of the second century. Eusebius marks it as "spurious" ("Eccles. Hist.," bk. iii., chap. xxv). Lardner speaks of it as "probably Barnabas's, and certainly ancient" ("Credibility," pt. ii., vol. ii., p. 30). When we see the utter conflict of evidence as to the writings of all these "primitive" authors, we can scarcely wonder at the frank avowal of the Rev. Dr. Giles: "The writings of the Apostolical Fathers labour under a more heavy load of doubt and suspicion than any other ancient compositions, either sacred or profane" ("Christian Records," p. 53).

Paley, in quoting "Quadratus," does not tell us that the passage he quotes is the only writing of Quadratus extant, and is only preserved by Eusebius, who says that he takes it from an apology addressed by Quadratus to the Emperor Adrian. Adrian reigned from A.D. 117—138, and the apology must consequently have been presented between these dates. If the apology be genuine, Quadratus makes the extraordinary assertion that some of the people raised from the dead by Jesus were then living. Jesus is only recorded to have raised three people—a girl, a young man, and Lazarus; we will take their ages at ten, twenty, and thirty. "Some of" those raised cannot be less than two out of the three; we will say the two youngest. Then they were alive at the respectable ages of from 95—116, and from 105—126. The first may be taken as just within the limits of possibility; the second as beyond them; but Quadratus talks in a wholesale fashion, which quite destroys his credibility, and we can lay but little stress on

the carefulness or trustworthiness of a historian who speaks in such reckless words. Added to this, we find no trace of this passage until Eusebius writes it in the fourth century, and it is well known that Eusebius was not too particular in his quotations, thinking that his duty was only to make out the best case he could. He frankly says: "We are totally unable to find even the bare vestiges of those who may have travelled the way before us; unless, perhaps, what is only presented in the slight intimations, which some in different ways have transmitted to us in certain partial narratives of the times in which they lived..... *Whatsoever*, therefore, *we deem likely to be advantageous* to the proposed subject we shall endeavour to reduce to a compact body" ("Eccles. Hist.," bk. i., chap. i). Accordingly, he produces a full Church History out of materials which are only "slight intimations," and carefully draws out in detail a path of which not "even the bare vestiges" are left. Little wonder that he had to rely so much upon his imagination, when he had to build a church, and had no straws for his bricks.

Paley brings Justin Martyr (born about A.D. 103, died about A.D. 167) as his last authority—as after his time the story may be taken as established—and says: "From Justin's works, which are still extant, might be collected a tolerably complete account of Christ's life, in all points agreeing with that which is delivered in our Scriptures; taken, indeed, in a great measure, from those Scriptures, but still proving that this account, and no other, was the account known and extant in that age" ("Evidences," p. 77). If "no other" account was extant, Justin must have largely drawn on his own imagination when he pretends to be quoting. Jesus, according to Justin, is conceived "of the Word" ("Apol.," i. 33), not of the Holy Ghost, the third person, the Holy Ghost being said to be identical with the Word; and he is thus conceived by himself. He is born, not in Bethlehem in a stable, but in a "cave near the village," because Joseph could find no lodging in Bethlehem ("Dial." 78). The magi come, not from "the East," but from Arabia ("Dial." 77). Jesus works as a carpenter, making ploughs and yokes ("Dial." 88). The story of the baptism is very different ("Dial." 88). In the trial Jesus is set on the judgment seat, and tauntingly bidden to judge his accusers ("Apol.," i. 35). All the apostles deny him, and forsake him, after he is crucified ("Apol.," i. 50). These instances might be increased, and, as we shall see

later, Justin manifestly quotes from accounts other than the canonical gospels. Yet Paley pretends that "no other" account was extant, and that in the very face of Luke i. 1, which declares that "many have taken in hand" the writing of such histories. If Paley had simply said that the story of a miracle-worker, named the Anointed Saviour, who was born of a virgin, was crucified, rose and ascended into heaven, was told with many variations among the Christians from about 100 years after his supposed birth, he would have spoken truly; and had he added to this, that the very same story was told among Egyptians and Hindoos many hundreds of years earlier, he would have treated his readers honestly, although he might not thereby have increased their belief in the "divine origin of Christianity."

Before we pass on to the last evidences offered by Paley, which necessitate a closer investigation into the value of the testimony borne by the patristic, to the canonical, writings, it will be well to put broadly the fact, that these Fathers are simply worthless as witnesses to any matter of fact, owing to the absurd and incredible stories which they relate with the most perfect faith. Of critical faculty they have none; the most childish nonsense is accepted by them with the gravest face; no story is too silly, no falsehood too glaring, for them to believe and to retail, in fullest confidence of its truth. Gross ignorance is one of their characteristics; they are superstitious, credulous, illiterate, to an almost incredible extent. Clement considers that "the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection" by the following "fact," among others: "Let us consider that wonderful sign which takes place in Eastern lands—that is, in Arabia and the countries round about. There is a certain bird which is called a phoenix. This is the only one of its kind, and lives 500 years. And when the time of its dissolution draws near that it must die, it builds itself a nest of frankincense, and myrrh, and other spices, into which, when the time is fulfilled, it enters and dies. But, as the flesh decays, a certain kind of worm is produced, which, being nourished by the juices of the dead bird, brings forth feathers. Then, when it has acquired strength, it takes up that nest in which are the bones of its parent, and, bearing these, it passes from the land of Arabia into Egypt, to the city called Heliopolis. And in open day, flying in the sight of all men, it places them on the altar of the sun, and, having done this, hastens back to its

former abode. The priests then inspect the registers of the dates, and find that it has returned exactly as the 500th year was completed" (1st Epistle of Clement, chap. xxv.). Surely the evidence here should satisfy Paley as to the truth of this story: "the open day," "flying in the sight of all men," the priests inspecting the registers, and all this vouched for by Clement himself! How reliable must be the testimony of the apostolic Clement! Tertullian, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Cyril of Jerusalem mention the same tale. We have already drawn attention to that which *was seen by* the writers of the circular letter of the Church of Smyrna. Barnabas loses himself in a maze of allegorical meanings, and gives us some delightful instruction in natural history; he is dealing with the directions of Moses as to clean and unclean animals: "'Thou shalt not,' he says, 'eat the hare.' Wherefore? 'Thou shalt not be a corrupter of boys, nor like unto such.' Because the hare multiplies, year by year, the places of its conception; for as many years as it lives, so many *foramina* it has. Moreover, 'Thou shalt not eat the hyæna.'.....Wherefore? Because that animal annually changes its sex, and is at one time male, and at another female. Moreover, he has rightly detested the weasel..... For this animal conceives by the mouth.....Behold how well Moses legislated" (Epistle of Barnabas, chapter x.). "'And Abraham circumcised ten and eight and three hundred men of his household.' What, then, was the knowledge given to him in this? Learn the eighteen first, and then the three hundred. The ten and the eight are thus denoted—Ten by I, and Eight by H. You have Jesus. And because the cross was to express the grace by the letter T, he says also Three Hundred. He signifies, therefore, Jesus by two letters, and the cross by one..... No one has been admitted by me to a more excellent piece of knowledge than this, but I know that ye are worthy" (Ibid, chapter ix.). And this is Paley's companion of the Apostles! Ignatius tells us of the "star of Bethlehem." "A star shone forth in heaven above all other stars, and the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star" (Epistle to the Ephesians, chap. xix.). Why should we accept Ignatius' testimony to the star, and reject his testimony to the sun and moon and stars singing to

it? Or take Origen against Celsus: "I have this further to say to the Greeks, who will not believe that our Saviour was born of a virgin: that the Creator of the world, if he pleases, can make every animal bring forth its young in the same wonderful manner. As, for instance, the *vultures propagate their kind in this uncommon way*, as the best writers of natural history do acquaint us" (chap. xxxiii., as quoted in "Diegesis," p. 319). Or shall we turn to Irenæus, so invaluable a witness, since he knew Polycarp, who knew John, who knew Jesus? Listen, then, to the reminiscences of John, as reported by Irenæus: "John related the words of the Lord concerning the times of the kingdom of God: the days would come when vines would grow, each with 10,000 shoots, and to each shoot 10,000 branches, and to each branch 10,000 twigs, and to each twig 10,000 clusters, and to each cluster 10,000 grapes, and each grape which is crushed will yield twenty-five measures of wine. And when one of the saints will reach after one of these clusters, another will cry: 'I am a better cluster than it; take me, and praise the Lord because of me.' Likewise, a grain of wheat will produce 10,000 ears, each ear 10,000 grains, each grain ten pounds of fine white flour. Other fruits, and seeds, and herbs in proportion. The whole brute creation, feeding on such things as the earth brings forth, will become sociable and peaceable together, and subject to man with all humility" ("Iren. Hær.," v., 33, 3—4, as quoted in Keim's "Jesus of Nazara," p. 45). What trust can be placed in the truth of facts to which these men pretend to bear witness when we find St. Augustine preaching that "he himself, being at that time Bishop of Hippo Regius, had preached the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to a whole nation of men and women that had no heads, but had their eyes in their bosoms; and in countries still more southerly he preached to a nation among whom each individual had but one eye, and that situate in the middle of the forehead" ("Syntagma," p. 33, as quoted in "Diegesis," p. 257).

Eusebius tells us of a man, named Sanctus, who was tortured until his body "was one continued wound, mangled and shrivelled, that had entirely lost the form of man;" and, when the tormentors began again on the same day, he "recovered the former shape and habit of his limbs" ("Eccles. Hist.," bk. v., chap. i.). He then was sent to the amphitheatre, passing down the lane of scourgers, was

dragged about and lacerated by the wild beast, roasted in an iron chair, and after this was "at last dispatched!" Other accounts, such as that of a man scourged till his bones were "bared of the flesh," and then slowly tortured, are given as history, as though a man in that condition would not speedily bleed to death. But it is useless to give more of these foolish stories, which weary us as we toil through the writings of the early Church. Well may Mosheim say that the "Apostolic Fathers, and the other writers, who, in the infancy of the Church, employed their pens in the cause of Christianity, were neither remarkable for their learning nor their eloquence" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 32). Thoroughly unreliable as they are, they are useless as witnesses of supposed miraculous events; and, in relating ordinary occurrences, they should not be depended upon in any matter of importance, unless they be corroborated by more trustworthy historians.

The last point Paley urges in support of his proposition is, that the accounts contained in "the historical Books of the New Testament" are "deserving of credit as histories," and that such is "the situation of the authors to whom the four Gospels are ascribed that, if any one of the four be genuine, it is sufficient for our purpose." This brings us, indeed, to the crucial point of our investigation, for, as we can gain so little information from external sources, we are perforce driven to the Christian writings themselves. If they break down under criticism as completely as the external evidences have done, then Christianity becomes hopelessly discredited as to its historical basis, and must simply take rank with the other mythologies of the world. But before we can accept the writings as historical, we are bound to investigate their authenticity and credibility. Does the external evidence suffice to prove their authenticity? Do the contents of the books themselves commend them as credible to our intelligence? It is possible that, although the historical evidence authenticating them be somewhat defective, yet the thorough coherency and reasonableness of the books may induce us to consider them as reliable; or, if the latter points be lacking from the supernatural character of the occurrences related, yet the evidence of authenticity may be so overwhelming as to place the accuracy of the accounts beyond cavil. But if external evidence be wanting, and internal evidence be fatal to the truthfulness of the writings, then it

will become our duty to remove them from the temple of history, and to place them in the fairy gardens of fancy and of myth, where they may amuse and instruct the student, without misleading him as to questions of fact.

The positions which we here lay down are :—

*a.* That forgeries bearing the names of Christ, and of the apostles, and of the early Fathers, were very common in the primitive Church.

*b.* That there is nothing to distinguish the canonical from the apocryphal writings.

*c.* That it is not known where, when, by whom, the canonical writings were selected.

*d.* That before about A.D. 180 there is no trace of *four* Gospels among the Christians.

*e.* That before that date Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not selected as the four evangelists.

*f.* That there is no evidence that the four Gospels mentioned about that date were the same as those we have now.

*g.* That there is evidence that two of them were not the same.

*h.* That there is evidence that the earlier records were not the Gospels now esteemed canonical.

*i.* That the books themselves show marks of their later origin.

*j.* That the language in which they are written is presumptive evidence against their authenticity.

*k.* That they are in themselves utterly unworthy of credit, from (1) the miracles with which they abound, (2) the numerous contradictions of each by the others, (3) the fact that the story of the hero, the doctrines, the miracles, were current long before the supposed dates of the Gospels; so that these Gospels are simply a patchwork composed of older materials.

Paley begins his argument by supposing that the first and fourth Gospels were written by the apostles Matthew and John, "from personal knowledge and recollection" ("Evidences," p. 87), and that they must therefore be either true, or wilfully false; the latter being most improbable, as they would then be "villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honour or advantage" (Ibid, page 88). But supposing that Matthew and John wrote some Gospels, we should need proof that the Gospels which we have, supposing them to be



copies of those thus written, have not been much altered since they left the apostles' hands. We should next ask how Matthew can report from "personal knowledge and recollection" all that comes in his Gospel *before he was called from his tax-gathering*, as well as many incidents at which he was not present? and whether his reliability as a witness is not terribly weakened by his making no distinction between what was fact within his own knowledge, and what was simple hearsay? Further, we remark that some of the teaching is the reverse of teaching "honesty," and that such instruction as Matt. v. 39—42 would, if accepted, exactly suit "villains;" that the extreme glorification of the master would naturally be reflected upon "the twelve" who followed him, and the authority of the writers would thereby be much increased and confirmed; that pure moral teaching on some points is no guarantee of the morality of the teacher, for a tyrant, or an ambitious priest, would naturally wish to discourage crime of some kinds in those he desired to rule; that such tyrant or priest could find no better creed to serve his purpose than meek, submissive, non-resisting, heaven-seeking Christianity. Thus we find Mosheim saying of Constantine: "It is, indeed, probable that this prince perceived the admirable tendency of the Christian doctrine and precepts to promote the stability of government, by preserving the citizens in their obedience to the reigning powers, and in the practice of those virtues that render a State happy" ("Eccles. Hist.," p. 87). We discover Charlemagne enforcing Christianity among the Saxons by sword and fire, hoping that it would, among other things, "induce them to submit more tamely to the government of the Franks" (Ibid, p. 170). And we see missionaries among the savages usurping "a despotic dominion over their obsequious proselytes" (Ibid, p. 157); and "St. Boniface," the "apostle of Germany," often employing "violence and terror, and sometimes artifice and fraud, in order to multiply the number of Christians" (Ibid, p. 169). Thus do "villains" very often "teach honesty." Nor is it true that these apostles were "martyrs [their martyrdom being unproved] without the least prospect of honour or advantage;" on the contrary, they desired to know what they would get by following Jesus. "*What shall we have, therefore?.....Ye which have followed me shall sit upon twelve thrones*" (Matt. xix. 27—30); and, further, in Mark ix. 28—31, we are told that any one who forsakes anything

for Jesus shall receive "an hundredfold *now in this time,*" as well as eternal life in the world to come. Surely, then, there was "prospect" enough of "honour and advantage"? These remarks apply quite as strongly to Mark and Luke, neither of whom are pretended to be eye-witnesses. Of Mark we know nothing, except that it is said that there was a man named John, whose surname was Mark (Acts xii. 12 and 25), who ran away from his work (Acts xv. 38); and a man named Marcus, nephew of Barnabas (Col. iv. 10), who may, or may not, be the same, but is probably somebody else, as he is with Paul; and one of the same name is spoken of (2 Tim. ii.) as "profitable for the ministry," which John Mark was not, and who (Philemon 24) was a "fellow-labourer" with Paul in Rome, while John Mark was rejected in this capacity by Paul at Antioch. Why Mark, or John Mark, should write a Gospel, he not having been an eye-witness, or why Mark, or John Mark, should be identical with Mark the Evangelist, only writers of Christian evidences can hope to understand.

**A.** *That forgeries, bearing the names of Christ, of the apostles, and of the early Fathers, were very common in the primitive Church.*

"The opinions, or rather the conjectures, of the learned concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times" (Mosheim's "Eccles. Hist.," p. 31). These difficulties arise, to a great extent, from the large number of forgeries, purporting to be writings of Christ, of the apostles, and of the apostolic Fathers, current in the early Church. "For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared which were imposed upon the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles" (Ibid, p. 31). "Another erroneous practice was adopted by them, which, though it was not so universal as the other, was yet extremely pernicious, and proved a source of numberless evils to the Christian Church. The Platonists and Pythagoreans held it as a maxim, that it was not only lawful, but

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