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Gill, Charles.
The evolution of
Christianity

THE
EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

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CHRISTIANITY

‘It were better to have no opinion whatsoever of God,
than such an opinion as is unworthy of Him; for the one
is unbelief, the other is contumely’—BACON

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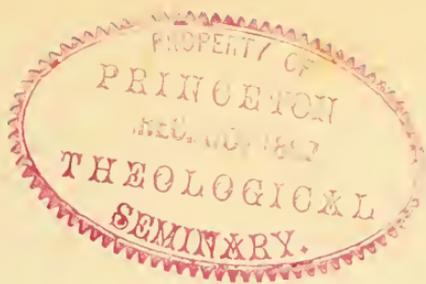
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Errata

- Page 22, lines 21 and 22 from top of page, *read* the fiction
of a vocal whirlwind *for* the fictiou vocal of a
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- „ 36, line 23 from top of page, *read* ideal *for* 'deal
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BOOK I.—JUDAISM.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

As we drift through the last quarter of the nineteenth century, amid the wreck of ancient superstitions, the time has come for all candid and impartial inquirers to determine their relationship with supernatural religion.

The most enlightened of modern communities accept some form of Christianity as the only possible religion assignable to divine revelation. If, therefore, its supernatural elements should perish in collision with scientific Rationalism, the theological vacuum cannot be filled by any other ancient or modern creed. We cannot become disciples of Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, or Mahomed; and the miraculous materials indispensable to the evolution of a new faith vanish at the touch of scientific analysis. A modern prophet, honestly believing and boldly proclaiming his supernatural mission in London, Paris, or New York, would find his signs and wonders so pitilessly tested by ruthless professors as to drive him in despair from the haunts of an uncongenial civilisation, in search of that primitive faith indispensable to the existence of miracles.

As our choice, therefore, lies between Christianity and Scepticism, we would forthwith hasten to study every word which fell from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth ; but as the religion established in his name is the offshoot of a more ancient theology, the supernatural pretensions of Judaism first claim our attention. Those who simply see in Jesus the illustrious Master of a great school in ethics may study the gospel apart from Moses and the prophets ; but, as a divine revelation, the kingdom of heaven is inseparable from the kingdom of Judah.

On the threshold of inquiry we are arrested by the startling coincidence that Judaism, Christianity, and the Reformation all originated in assumptions shown by the lapse of time to have been popular delusions.

I. The Hebrew religion rests on the promise of Jehovah that, in consideration of national adoption of the rite of circumcision, the descendants of Abraham should occupy the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.¹ If, therefore, the Hebrew patriarch could have foreseen Jehovah's violation of the solemn covenant, he would have, obviously, refused to ratify the fatal contract, which lured his descendants to destruction in the vain pursuit of a phantom empire ; and the world would never have heard of a Chosen Race or a Peculiar People.

II. Christianity originated in faith that the Messiah should reappear in the clouds within a generation, to restore the kingdom of Judah, or establish the kingdom of heaven. If, therefore, the simple-minded communists, who parted with all their earthly possessions in enthu-

¹ Gen. xvii. 8.

siastic expectation of the impending advent, had not been ignorant that nearly two thousand years would elapse without any tidings of Jesus, the supernatural claims of Christianity could not have survived the first century.

III. At the era of the Reformation, Protestant theologians disavowed the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, through faith in Scripture as the infallible criterion of divine truth. If, therefore, they could have foreseen the collapse of this pious illusion in the light of modern criticism, on what foundation could they have erected the superstructure of Protestantism? Devout Jews and Catholics, holding the faith of Moses or the creed of Rome in absolute independence of human reason, may smile at the conclusions of modern Scepticism; but Protestants, whose theological existence rests on the appeal to reason, can claim no exemption from inquiry into all which purports to be supernatural in their creed; and the old Puritan faith in an infallible Bible as the word of God, in the same sense as if uttered by a voice from heaven, is as incapable of rational proof as any Roman dogma rejected at the Reformation.

Modern research, gleaning historical fragments from generations remote from the pious traditions of the Reformation, sees in ancient Hebrew literature nothing more than the unattested compilations of Ezra, Nehemiah, and a succession of editorial scribes, who exercised free discretion in correcting, interpolating, and transposing the contents of ancient records; and in even canonising the recent compositions of anonymous authors in the names of ancient prophets. Thus, the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah are not the work of

that eminent Nâbi, but of some unknown bard of the Captivity, to whom the name of his predecessor was, doubtless, given to sustain the patriotic and pious fiction that a Hebrew seer had, centuries previously, named Cyrus as the anointed of Jehovah, predestined to restore the Israelites to Palestine.¹

In 2 Esdras xiv. we read that the law, having been burnt, was reproduced by Ezra under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This version of the editorial work of the Restoration was adopted by primitive Christians, as shown in the following words of Clement of Alexandria : ‘ The Scriptures having been destroyed in the Captivity of Nebuchadnezzar, Ezra, the Levite, inspired as a prophet, reproduced the whole of the Sacred Scriptures in the time of Artaxerxes, the king of the Persians.’² This pious fiction, obviously originating in the desire to invest recent compositions with the authority of ancient records, gives traditional confirmation to the post-Babylonian compilation of Hebrew Scripture.

That Ezra and later canon-makers merely accomplished editorial work, subject to all the errors of human judgment, is shown in the incongruous mass of materials collected within the pages of the book known to us as the Old Testament. Zealous and learned theologians have exhausted the resources of criticism in the vain attempt to unravel the enigma of authorship, dates, and verifiable text, with no more satisfactory result than the development of interminable controversies, establishing nothing more clearly than universal ignorance on the subject.

In reviewing the work of Hebrew scribes, it is diffi-

¹ Isa. xliv. 28, xlv. 1-4.

² Strom. i. 22.

cult to judge the actions of men who, some five-and-twenty centuries ago, committed literary forgery as a pious duty ; let us, however, acquit them of wilfully perverting divine revelation, by assuming that they worked in absolute ignorance of the modern theory of an infallible Bible.

If Ezra and his successors had, however, possessed and faithfully transcribed existing manuscripts, even then, according to the weighty evidence of Jeremiah, no reliance could be placed on the text of Hebrew Scripture : ‘ How do we say, We are wise and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly the false pen of the scribes worketh for falsehood.’¹ If we thus learn, on the authority of so great a prophet, that the Divine Oracles may reach us in a perverted form, may not revelation prove a greater danger than a blessing to Humanity?

The acceptance of the Mosaic fiction of Deuteronomy as the autogram of the great Hebrew Prophet, although disclosing its later authorship in language, ideas, and narrative, is one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of pseudonymous literature ; and its prescriptive right to a place among the five books of Moses betrays the poverty of primitive and mediæval criticism. It has now, however, been identified by modern research as the mysterious Book of the Law said to have been found in the Temple in the reign of Josiah,² composed about the period of its alleged discovery by Jeremiah or some other zealous prophet who, in pious collusion with the High Priest, sought to awaken, through the male-

¹ Jer. viii. 8.

² 2 Kings xxii

dictions of Moses, a more enthusiastic religious revival than attainable through his own exhortations.

The coincidence of patriarchal life and Persian theosophy in the pages of Job remains to this day an unsolved enigma in the hands of puzzled theologians. But, when we abandon the fiction of its divine inspiration, we at once detect in the work a dramatic adaptation, in the style of Æschylus, of some ancient Hebrew legend to the dual principle of antagonism between Good and Evil—between Auramazda and Ahriman, obviously borrowed by the unknown author from Persian theology, at a much later period than the age of the patriarchs.

If the Book of Enoch had been extant at the time of Ezra, it would have doubtless found a place in the Hebrew canon; and its most marvellous episodes would have made no more unreasonable demand on faith than the canonised legend of Jonah swallowed by a whale. This important work, ostensibly written by Enoch and Noah, although excluded from all but the Ethiopic canon, held an imposing position as Scripture among primitive Christians. The apostle Jude quotes Enoch as a prophet; and Tertullian (A.D. 160–240), whilst admitting the absence of the book from the Hebrew canon, maintains its divine inspiration as a work of the most ancient prophet Enoch, containing important revelations respecting the Messiah.¹ By a singular fatality, this remarkable book disappeared in the early centuries of Christianity, and was supposed to have been irretrievably lost, until the distinguished traveller Bruce brought three copies of the Ethiopic version from Abyssinia, A.D. 1773, and deposited one in the Bodleian Library at

¹ Tertullian *On Dress*, chap. iii.

Oxford, where it remained in obscurity until Archbishop Laurence published an English translation in 1821, followed by second and third editions, in 1833 and 1838, long since out of print.

Notwithstanding apostolic and patristic faith in the remote origin of the Book of Enoch, modern criticism assigns its date to the century immediately preceding the Christian era; and its authorship to some unknown Hebrew exile, who borrowed the name of an antediluvian patriarch to authenticate his own enthusiastic forecast of the future glories of the Messianic kingdom. But when and by whomsoever written, in the contents of this long-neglected work we now trace the source from which Jesus of Nazareth drew His conception of the second advent of the Messiah. Some passages in the Book of Enoch are so closely followed in the utterances of Jesus that Tertullian imagined the book was, for this reason, rejected by the Jews, and some modern theologians suggest that the Messianic passages are the interpolated additions of primitive Christianity—conclusions equally embarrassing for modern believers; for, if the Book of Enoch, in its present form, was in the hands of Jesus, the extent to which he borrows from the Messianic passages indicates his acceptance of the illusory dreams of an imaginary prophet; and if, on the contrary, these disputed passages were introduced into the text subsequent to the death of Jesus, this corrupt or fanatical tampering with real or imaginary Scripture necessarily discredits all the primitive literature of Christianity. We adopt the conclusions of Archbishop Laurence by assigning the Book of Enoch to the century immediately preceding

the Christian era ; and further progress in our inquiries will disclose the important influence exercised by its contents on the evolution of Christianity.

As the claims of Hebrew Scripture to supernatural authority are, therefore, historically unattested, it remains for us to seek, in internal evidence, some reasonable proof of divine inspiration. It is futile to appeal for enlightenment to antagonistic sects or anathematic Churches, for their conflicting creeds practically annul revelation. Let us therefore rather rely on the modern ideal of an omnipotent, omniscient, and beneficent Deity as an infallible criterion for testing the pretensions of all sacred literature ; for if ancient records of providential action conflict with modern conceptions of Divinity, we must inevitably reject their claims to inspiration, or admit the mutability, and consequent imperfection, of the Deity. We accordingly submit Moses and the prophets to the ordeal involved in following unsectarian questions :—

I. Are the thoughts, words, and actions of Jehovah consistent with the attributes of infinite Divinity ?

II. Is the divine origin of Hebrew morality attested by superiority to all merely human systems of ethics ?

III. Do Hebrew annals sustain the theory of a chosen race, so highly favoured as to possess the supreme Deity as their temporal Ruler ?

CHAPTER II.

THE HEBREW DEITY.

I. ARE the thoughts, words, and actions of Jehovah consistent with the attributes of infinite Divinity?

Modern research discovers in the Book of Genesis a composite work: Mosaic, not as the autogram of the Hebrew legislator, but as the editorial patchwork of the Restoration, mingling Semitic legends with cosmopolitan myths, and at once disclosing in the original the presence of at least two authors through distinctive names of the Deity—Elohim, equally applicable to heathen gods, and Jehovah, the personal name of the Hebrew Deity, unknown at least before the exodus, if not assignable to even a later period.¹

No knowledge of Hebrew is necessary for the discovery of two distinct narratives of the creation, divergent not only in the name but in the character of the Deity. The cosmogony of the first or Elohist writer, ending with the third verse of the second chapter, is the sublime conception of some ancient bard, attributing the phenomena of nature to the personal action of the Deity accomplishing in days the work of ages.

Orthodox chronology has, until quite recently, assured us that this globe has not yet attained the age

¹ Exod. vi. 3.

of six thousand years. But the unorthodox earth, yielding up its secrets to the curiosity of modern geologists, confronts inspired records with material evidence that countless ages elapsed during the evolution of the earth and its successive inhabitants, and that prehistoric man lived and died upon its surface in ages unknown to Mosaic chronology.

This inconvenient discrepancy between oracles traditionally divine and facts practically irrefutable has taxed the ingenuity of piety to originate theories of reconciliation between Scripture and geology, with no more satisfactory result than may be found in the suggestion that Mosaic records mean something very different from what they have been telling the world, in God's name, for more than two thousand years. A single day, clearly identified by morning and evening as four-and-twenty hours, is now accepted by Orthodoxy as a geologic age of indefinite duration; and so startling an error on the part of a divinely inspired author is explained by the theory that the instruction of mankind in the science of geology is not included in the work of the Holy Ghost.

But Mosaic cosmogony *has* instructed the world in geology for more than two thousand years; and, if modern professors had lived in the age of Galileo, its divine authority would have condemned them to torture and death, unless prepared to admit, in penitential recantation, that the evidence of the rocks had been falsified by Satan himself, with the diabolical design of ensnaring the souls of presumptuous men impiously questioning Nature on subjects already set at rest, for ever, by the word of the Deity Himself.

If a human standard of truth demands words from human lips, imparting to the listener the veritable ideas in the mind of the speaker, shall we expect less from the voice of God, and accept as divine the Mosaic negation of natural law involved in the conception of Divinity accomplishing in a few hours the mighty works on which Nature has expended millions of years—a negation deemed infallible until the genius of man had extracted the secrets of Nature from the depths of the ocean and the bowels of the earth? How much more prudent for the modern worshippers of a personal Deity to recognise in Elohistic cosmogony the poetic version of an ancient tradition, sublime in conception of divine power, but disclosing its merely human authorship in ignorance of Nature's laws, rather than stamp divine revelation with the character of Delphian oracles, uttering equivocating words susceptible of adaptation to the course of events!

If the compilers of Genesis had wisely restricted its contents to the narrative of the Elohist, they would have transmitted to posterity a conception of Divinity worthy of Hebrew genius; but, through the injudicious fusion of his work with that of the more credulous Jehovist, they debased the majestic image of Elohim by legends more characteristic of Olympian mythology than divine revelation.

Jehovah is a name prolific in interminable controversies, as to pronunciation, origin, and date of adoption by the Hebrews. It is variously written by modern Hebrew scholars—Yahvôh—Yehëveh—Yehveh—Yah-ävâh, and Yahweh—a conflict of opinions which renders it quite unnecessary to disturb the equanimity of the

English Bible-reader by changing the familiar sound of Jehovah.

The work of the Jehovist begins with the fourth verse of the second, and is carried to the end of the fourth chapter; to be again renewed through the interpolation of the Elohist narrative. His version of the Creation and Fall of Man, borrowed through Persian from still more ancient mythologies, receives no confirmation from the Elohist, who tells us that 'Elohim said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness . . . So Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him, male and female created he them.' And again, 'This is the book of the generation of Adam. In the day that Elohim created man, in the likeness of Elohim made he him, male and female created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.'

Elohim, being a plural noun, has been accepted by imaginative piety as the primeval annunciation of the Trinity. It is, however, a general term applied by other nations to the collective gods, inclusive of the Hebrew Deity; and the context, furthermore, indicates plurality of divinity through the androgynous essence of Elohim, who, in harmony with Egyptian and Indian theosophy, was personally masculine and feminine: 'In the image of Elohim created he him, male and female created he them . . . and called their name Adam.'

In the eyes of the Elohist, woman is not, therefore, the second-hand product of an Adamite rib, but an original creation after the same Divine Archetype as

man, and equally sharing with him the benediction of Elohim and the possession of the earth.

The Jehovist knows nothing of Humanity fashioned in the image of a God. Adam is simply vitalised dust, and Eve a mere after-thought devised for his comfort and convenience. There can be no affinity with the gods in the mental and moral blindness which sees no difference between good and evil, and is therefore unconscious of responsibility in thought or action.

Let us imagine the sudden awaking of primeval man to startled consciousness of the external world, confused by sensation, alarmed by sound, dazzled by light, absorbed in the mysterious sympathy of sex, and yet unconsciously entrusted, in this condition of mental imbecility, with the future destinies of Humanity, staked on his unintelligent obedience to an arbitrary command, sustained by a death-penalty conveying no meaning to his infantine ignorance.

At this supreme crisis, Jehovah retires from the scene ; and a mysterious serpent, detected by later theologians as Satan in masquerade, tempts poor simple-minded Eve with an apple from the tree of knowledge ; unless, therefore, divine assistance is at hand, the Fall of man is a foregone conclusion. A sudden inspiration, a voice from heaven, an angel's visit, may defeat ophidian or Satanic design, and snatch mankind from mortality or perdition ; but, alas ! no miraculous portent arrests the hand of Eve, the fatal fruit is gathered, tasted, held to the lips of Adam, and the simplicity, which knows no difference between the command of a God and the advice of a serpent, yields inevitable victory to the wiles of snake or demon.

The heat of the day is past ; Jehovah walks through the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening ; discovers man's disobedience ; curses the serpent with the bodily motion evolved by ages ; condemns Adam to the labour by which prehistoric man had existed for countless generations ; decrees the degradation of Humanity through the domestic bondage of woman, henceforth dependent for her social position on the prejudice, caprice, and passion of her lord and master ; and finally pronounces the sentence of death, in apparent unconsciousness that mortality had reigned supreme on earth throughout ages remote from the chronology of Eden.

‘ And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us to know good and evil, and now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever.’¹ These are the words of Jehovah. If, therefore, Eve had chanced to pluck an apple from that *other* tree, Adam, contrary to the design of his Creator, would have been enrolled among the gods, and this diminutive earth would have long since failed to hold the countless multitude of his immortal descendants.

Modern research, however, redeems us from bondage to this superstition. As the evidence of the rocks records the remote antiquity of the earth, so also the evidence of the fossils proclaims the countless generations of man ; and as we trace his footsteps to prehistoric ages, and discern his gradual ascent from lower to higher conditions of life, we necessarily assign the legend of Eden its legitimate place among the myths of antiquity.

¹ Gen. iii. 22.

Let us briefly review some further legends from the pen of the Jehovist.

A tradition prevailed among the nations of antiquity, depicting their ancestors as men of gigantic stature, towering above the diminutive proportions of their degenerate descendants. The credulous Jehovist compromises revelation by this grotesque legend,¹ full details of which are found in the book of Enoch.²

Two hundred sons of heaven or angels descended upon Ardis, the top of Mount Armon, under the leadership of Samyaza, and selected wives among the most beautiful daughters of men, who became the mothers of monstrous giants, of appetites so destructive that they not only devoured birds, beasts, reptiles, and fishes, but even lived, as cannibals, on human flesh.

This appalling reign of violence and cruelty on earth at length aroused Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and other loyal members of the heavenly Host; and, on their appeal for retribution to the throne of God, the giant offspring of the apostate angels were supernaturally excited to destroy each other; and Samyaza, with his companions in crime, was hurled in fetters beneath the earth, to await in darkness the day of judgment, in which 'they shall be taken away in the lowest depths of the fire in torments, and in confinement shall they be shut up for ever.'³

The credibility of this legend is attested by apostles. In the second Epistle of Peter we read:⁴ 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to

¹ Gen. vi. 1-4.

³ Enoch x. 16.

² Enoch vii.-x.

⁴ 2 Pet. ii. 4.

be reserved unto judgment.' And again in Jude: ¹
 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting darkness unto the judgment of the great day.' Who can doubt that the authors of these epistles were familiar with, and accepted, the Book of Enoch as inspired Scripture, more especially as Jude forthwith names Enoch as a prophet?

The tragical episode of Cain and Abel is also from the pen of the Jehovist, who, by abruptly introducing the rite of sacrifice without one word of reference to its origin, unconsciously discloses an unrecorded past in man's career, remote from the fiction of recent creation.²

Malediction holds so important a place in religion that Anathema Maranatha is the appropriate motto of theology. This sacred institution, originating in Paradise and transmitted through Judaism to Christianity, still holds its ground in Athanasian curses and Papal imprecations. Sacerdotal denunciation of theological opponents may cause us no surprise, but we learn with amazement that the divinely ratified curse of Noah inflicted the appalling calamity of slavery on an important branch of the human family.³

The Elohist records the Deluge; and awakens hope, as Noah and his family go forth from the ark with the blessing of Elohim, that man may now be permitted to do his best on earth, in freedom from the depressing influence of malediction; but the Jehovist forthwith interferes with a legend which destroys this cheerful forecast of futurity. Noah drinks too freely of the

¹ Jude 6.

² Gen. iv.

³ Gen. ix. 20-27.

newly discovered luxury of wine. His youngest son Ham is less thoughtfully respectful than his brothers, Shem and Japhet, who cloak, with filial piety, their father's vinous indiscretion, and Noah wakes up to reward their considerate delicacy with an emphatic benediction, and curse the irreverent Ham through the predestined slavery of his doomed descendants.

Such are scriptural views of the origin of slavery: an alcoholised brain susceptible of rash conclusions, an angry man disposed to malediction, a capricious Deity annulling the divine blessing in response to a human curse—fatal causes of deplorable results, the degradation of Humanity in human bondage! Well may the traditional descendants of Ham interrupt the 'Word of God,' as it flows from the lips of some zealous missionary, with the startling question—'Is this the God of the Christians who condemned the negro race to bondage? Let us therefore rather rely on some friendly fetich than on this hostile God.'

The Jehovist, in negation of the ever-shifting forms of words, affirms that, nearly two thousand years from the creation, mankind spoke but one language, and were deprived of this great social boon by a miraculous confusion of tongues.¹ 'And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.' If this design, as popularly assumed, meant a daring attempt to scale the heavens, it might well have been dealt with by the natural law of gravitation; but the Jehovist depicts the Deity aroused to jealousy of man's ambition, and hastening to interfere, rather as some

¹ Gen. xi.

petty heathen god, than as the Supreme Ruler of the Universe.

‘The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded. And the Lord said behold the people is one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do. Go to, let us go down and there confound their language that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off to build the city.’

If the credulous Jehovist could have foreseen the scientific audacity of modern times, annihilating time and space through a control of Nature’s forces outstripping the fabulous exploits of ancient gods—could he have forecast the future of comparative philology, tracing the evolution and divergence of language, as tribes became separated by forests, rivers, and mountains, how clearly he would have seen the folly of interpreting providential action through the unattested legends of traditional theosophy! And yet modern Piety still canonises this ancient myth, which, but for its accidental insertion in a book accepted as infallible, would have been, long since, classed among the fantastic creations of mythology.

The philologist may smile at the fiction of all mankind speaking but one language, so recently as four thousand years ago, but the zealous missionary, who spends a life in learning barbarous dialects, must sigh as he thinks of the priceless boon of a universal tongue, and marvel at the mysterious wisdom which multiplies the difficulties of apostolic labours through the miraculous confusion of tongues.

In a famous episode of patriarchal life, the Jehovist depicts the Deity tampering with the heathen abomination of human sacrifice to test the obedience of Abraham.¹ When Jehovah pronounced the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham protested against the possible punishment of the innocent, and even impressed on Jehovah the importance of consistency in the administration of divine justice;² and yet this man uttered no word of remonstrance when commanded to slay his only son, but hastened preparations for the hideous rites of human sacrifice. The anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews commends the conduct of the patriarch as a noble instance of faith in God,³ but in this narrative we find a fatal precedent for the commission of crimes supposed to be divinely sanctioned. The lamentable results of this pernicious superstition might be averted among a people enjoying the privilege of personal intercourse with the Deity, but when the priests of heathen gods appealed to parents for the blood of their children, no voice from heaven arrested the sacrifice of their firstborn, surrendered to the gods with a piety which rivalled the faith of Abraham.

We are told that in modern times the heavenly voices of antiquity have been replaced by the silent promptings of the Spirit; but those who hope for divine enlightenment also dread Satanic illusion; if it is therefore true that the Deity ever tampered with the human conscience by commanding the commission of crime, how shall we determine the source of our

¹ Gen. xxii.

² Gen. xviii. 23-33.

³ Heb. xi. 17.

temptations but by assigning to Reason the absolute control of Faith?

Again, the Jehovist teaches us, through the story of Jacob's fraudulent personation of Esau, that successful treachery may win the blessing of God.¹ St. Paul explains the difficulty through the mystery of election.² Jehovah preferred Jacob to Esau, and revealed his choice to Rebecca. The mother and son were not, therefore, domestic traitors deceiving a husband and father, to rob a son and brother of the divine blessing, but pious conspirators co-operating with the Deity in the fulfilment of His providential designs. Abraham cheerfully obeyed the divine command to sacrifice his firstborn. Would not Isaac have proved equally compliant if instructed to disinherit Esau? Or could Jehovah devise no more suitable means for the accomplishment of this object than the sanction of human treachery? We answer that the compilers have deceived themselves and Paul by credulously accepting Semitic legends as divine revelation.

A candid and impartial consideration of these episodes in alleged revelation inevitably points to the conclusion that Genesis is not a divinely inspired work. The translators of our Authorised Version speak of the Deity in terms familiar to their contemporaries in association with Infinite Divinity, but if they had introduced the Creator as Elohim, and then abruptly debased Providential action in the name of Jehovah-Elohim, English students of Scripture would have long since detected the discrepancy, and sought some explanation of divergence in the name and policy of Divinity. But

¹ Gen. xxvii.

² Rom. ix. 11-16.

the translators of the Authorised Version worked in the infancy of biblical criticism, when the foregone conclusions of unreasoning Piety silenced the voice of Scepticism, and apostolic acceptance of Moses and the Prophets was quite sufficient to satisfy English divines of the infallibility of the Pentateuch. All this is now changed; and when we come into possession of the exhaustive labours of the eminent Hebrew scholars now at work on the contents of the Old Testament, even British piety will doubtless learn to question the prescriptive rights of Mosaic theosophy.

As Orthodoxy identifies the God of Israel with the God of Job, does Jehovah appear to greater advantage in dramatic revelation? The curtain rises on a scene of patriarchal happiness in the land of Uz,¹ where Job, the greatest of Eastern chieftains, pre-eminent in piety and virtue, enjoys in lavish profusion the temporal blessings assigned to righteousness in the age of the patriarchs. Anon we witness a scene in heaven. Satan attends, with other sons of God, a grand reception given by Jehovah, who asks him if he has considered the many virtues of the exemplary Job. But the sneering demon insinuates that this vaunted friend of God is simply righteous because he finds it pay, and in calamity would utter curses instead of praise. In refutation of this vile calumny, the Deity consents to test the piety of Job through the ordeal of affliction; and all that he possesses, except his very life, is placed at the disposal of Satanic cruelty.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the oft-told tale of the patience of Job under the trying platitudes of his too

¹ Job i.

candid friends. Our interest lies in the popular impression that the curtain falls on a vindicated Providence. But the afflicted patriarch had seven sons and three daughters, all of whom, with numerous herds and shepherds, perished by fire and sword and tempest. How, therefore, could divine justice be conclusively vindicated, unless through the miraculous restoration to life of the victims of unmerited but supernatural calamity? As Job witnessed the growth of a second family amid scenes of renewed prosperity, he may have been consoled for the loss of the dead, but it can have been no compensation to the slain daughters of Job that their sisters and successors were the most lovely women and the richest heiresses in the land of Uz,¹ whilst they rested in tombs on which might have been inscribed—The Victims of the Gods.

If all this seems impious to conscientious believers in an infallible Bible, let them consider whether the impiety does not rather lie with those who enrol the Deity with Satan among the *dramatis personæ* of the Semitic Æschylus, and accept the fiction vocal of a whirlwind as a voice from heaven, instead of the vain attempt of some presumptuous mortal to dramatise Divinity.

In what colours is the national Deity depicted in the pages of Exodus? Jehovah, having forgotten the children of Israel during the period in which they drifted into Egyptian bondage, suddenly remembered the unhappy heirs of Abraham, with whom He had ratified a solemn covenant lavish in prospective benefits?² Moses and Aaron were, therefore, accredited to the

¹ Job xlii. 13–15.

² Exod. iii.

Egyptian court, not to proclaim Jehovah as the supreme Ruler of the universe claiming the worship of all mankind, but as the national God of Israel, admitting the existence, and competing for superiority over rival deities holding local jurisdiction in Egypt.

If the ambassadors of Jehovah could change a lifeless rod into a living serpent, the representatives of Egyptian gods could accomplish similar results, varying only in the inferior species of reptile produced.¹ And if Moses and Aaron changed the water in all the rivers, streams, ponds, pools, buckets, and pitchers into blood, the Egyptians accomplished the still greater miracle of changing blood to water, and water to blood.²

Jehovah possessed the power of influencing the heart of Pharaoh, and could therefore have thus accomplished the immediate deliverance of the Israelites, but he postponed the Exodus that he might be personally glorified through the appalling suffering inflicted on the innocent inhabitants of Egypt, because their king did not do that which Jehovah Himself prevented.

Let us try to form some faint conception of this revolting tragedy, enacted among men and women formed of the same flesh and blood as modern Humanity, and living the life of social refinement depicted on the monuments. Water changed to blood, houses filled with frogs, air swarming with flies, cattle destroyed by murrain, vegetation devoured by locusts, land swept by mingled fire and hail, day and night confounded in impenetrable darkness; men, women, and children covered by vermin, or festering with loathsome ulcers, and death finally destroying all the first-born in the

¹ Exod. vii. 10, 11.

² Exod. vii. 19-22.

land! For what purpose these hideous plagues? Why these appalling sufferings of tender women, of innocent children, of defenceless age? To prove that the Deity, who can inflict the greatest calamities on mankind, exceeds in glory the gods who, although successful producers of frogs, fail in the creation of vermin!

Truly, if the author of Exodus had been possessed of the genius of Swift, and designed a malignant satire on the God of the Hebrews, he could have produced nothing more terribly true to his malicious purpose than the grotesque parody of divine intervention in human affairs, depicted in the revolting details of the Ten Plagues ruthlessly inflicted on the Egyptian nation.

Are not our sympathies, however, wasted on imaginary sufferings? Are not the miraculous plagues of Egypt as mythical as the Fall of man or the reign of the giants? And if not the fantastic creations of a barbarous piety, would not the annals of antiquity record the total depopulation of Egypt by famine and pestilence, inevitably following the appalling sufferings of the doomed inhabitants?

Can we trace a higher ideal of providential action in the career of famous prophets?

Ahaziah, King of Israel, having met with a serious accident, sent messengers to inquire from Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he should recover.¹ The Angel of the Lord instructed Elijah to meet the messengers, and announce a fatal termination to the illness of the king, who therefore sent one of his captains with fifty men to arrest the unfriendly prophet. The captain and his troop were simply fulfilling the duty of obedi-

¹ 2 Kings i.

ence to the command of their king, but were nevertheless consumed by fire evoked from heaven by the frightened Nâbi, who repeated the tragedy with a second troop, and would have even massacred a third captain with all his men, but that the Angel of the Lord assured him of personal safety. Thus, avenging thunderbolts were placed at the disposal of a rash and erring mortal, and supernatural injustice but tardily arrested by a voice from heaven. And yet this was the crowning act of Elijah's career, who was forthwith transported by a whirlwind to heaven.

Elisha, however, proved more cruel than his master ;¹ for he had but just received the mantle of Elijah when he summoned, by imprecation, two providential bears, to vindicate prophetic claims on the vengeance of God, through the slaughter of Innocents guilty of making merry at his eccentric appearance—a tragedy which he witnessed with such callous indifference that he forthwith departed for Mount Carmel, leaving the mangled bodies of his victims in the highway. Well may we ask, is this a page from revelation, or the interpolated fiction of some malignant old scribe who hated children, and desired to establish among them a reign of terror as durable as the annals of Judaism ?

Thus far we have shown that 'the thoughts, words, and actions of the Hebrew Jehovah are not consistent with the attributes of Infinite Divinity ;' but this conclusion will receive further confirmation in the ensuing chapters.

¹ 2 Kings ii.

CHAPTER III.

HEBREW MORALITY.

II. Is the divine origin of Hebrew morality attested by superiority to all human systems of ethics?

Popular piety assumes that the Ten Commandments are the superhuman source of all the virtues; and that the ancient Hebrews possessed in their precepts a divine revelation of the whole duty of man. Their annalists, however, record individual and national conceptions of morality which never rose above the measure of their progress in civilisation; and a comprehensive study of universal history tells us that modern ideals of morality are the product of the ages, reaching us rather through Aryan than Semitic channels.

The first three commandments, in which Jehovah admits their existence through his jealousy of other gods, are addressed, not to mankind, but to the chosen race of a tribal Deity. The fourth involves no principle of morality, and is simply an arbitrary decree of the Mosaic dispensation based on the fiction of six days' creation. We moderns all feel grateful to Moses if he, indeed, was the original inventor of a weekly holiday; but if this welcome rest now involved loss of all individual freedom of action for four-and-twenty hours under penalty of capital punishment, we would

assuredly prefer working seven days in the week to incurring the risk of being stoned to death by our friends and neighbours.

It is recorded that the children of Israel found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, and brought him to Moses, who consulted Jehovah, and received the inexorable command to have the poor wretch stoned to death.¹ Was there no plea of extenuating circumstances? Was the unhappy culprit young and foolish, erring without a thought of consequences? Was he in the full vigour of manhood, boldly testing his right to individual opinion on the observance of the Sabbath? Was he feeble and decrepit, wearily gathering fuel to warm the withered hands of age? Had he father or mother, brother or sister, wife or children? From the vast multitude, did no compassionate voice utter a plea for mercy? Vain and irrelevant questions! What matters it who or what the man is, he gathered sticks on the Sabbath day—away with him to summary execution!

But have these amateur executioners never tampered, in the privacy of their tents, with the fourth commandment? Are they all so innocent of Sabbath-breaking that each may hasten with savage piety to cast the first stone? No time is given for inconvenient reflection; the homicidal instinct is awakened; the tragedy hastens to its conclusion; and on the blood-stained sands rests a ghastly form once human, now crushed out of the semblance of humanity. Was there no Seer in Israel who, lifting his eyes from this Mosaic tragedy, could see with prophetic vision the form of the Son of Man

¹ Numb. xv. 32-36.

moving through the cornfields, and recording his solemn protest against the judicial murder of the wilderness, through free interpretation of the fourth commandment?

Are Sabbath-breakers liable to summary execution in this nineteenth century? Some zealous preachers of righteousness reply in the affirmative, by assuring us that the Tay Bridge disaster inflicted divine vengeance on Sunday travellers.

The fifth commandment promises longevity to those who honour their parents; but how was this precept understood among the Israelites? 'If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother; and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of the city, and unto the gates of his place. And they shall say unto the elders of his city—This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of the city shall stone him with stones that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear.'¹

Has human nature so completely changed since the Deuteronomist wrote, that a reign of terror in Hebrew homes was the most effectual means of improving the morals of the nation? Did the abiding fear of impending execution foster filial reverence towards those, who now may speak and act as parents, but anon assume the stern aspect of public prosecutors, demanding the

¹ Deut. xxi. 18-21.

blood of their children? Were young and old divinely instructed in righteousness through the ghastly spectacle of ferocious piety inflicting death on naughty children by divine command, in a form which we reserve for some noxious reptile? We might answer that Deuteronomy is a legislative fiction of the reign of Josiah, and these impossible parents merely homicidal phantoms conjured by the anonymous author to frighten little boys into obedience; for is it possible to trace the hand of a veritable legislator, in the untenable assumption that all disobedient sons are gluttons and drunkards? But, whilst Orthodoxy presents us with Deuteronomy as the Word of God, we must still identify its teaching with Mosaic ethics, and thus inquire, whether Semitic views of parental and filial relationship surpass in excellence the uninspired conceptions of our Aryan kinsmen, whose illustrious Master, Sâkya-Muni, anticipated the moral precepts of Jesus of Nazareth, but one century later than the alleged discovery of the Book of Deuteronomy in the Temple?

The last five commandments of the Decalogue, in affirming the rules indispensable to social existence, at once disclose their merely human origin. It is obvious that, in the absence of laws protecting the rights of property, defining the relationship of sex, and prohibiting deeds of fraud and violence, association for tribal or national purposes would have been impossible, and man, driven by lawlessness into savage isolation, would have cultivated in sullen solitude the habits of ferocious brutes.

But apart from the conclusions of theoretic sociology, we learn from papyric and monumental evidence that

the ancient Egyptians had attained a civilisation impossible to men who had not yet learned the moral code of honest and peaceable citizenship. If it be, however, true that a Divine Code, inconceivable to merely human intelligence, was once miraculously revealed to a Chosen Race, may we not reasonably expect, in that highly favoured people, a far more noble conception of social duty than attainable by the less fortunate races deprived of divine enlightenment? And are these anticipations fulfilled in Hebrew versions of the social obligations involved in the last five commandments?

‘Thou shalt do no murder.’ In what sense are these words understood in Hebrew Scripture? As a startling instance of wholesale murder, committed in cold blood on captive men, women, and children, by the command of Moses in the name of Jehovah, we refer our readers to the Semitic atrocities disclosed in the narrative of the sacred massacre of the Midianites;¹ and proceed to illustrate Hebrew views of the sixth commandment through the legalised murder of slaves, and prophetic eulogy of assassination.

‘And if a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished; notwithstanding if he continue a day or two he shall not be punished, for he is his money!’² This is the language of Jehovah, and by this divine decree slaveowners might beat even female slaves to death with impunity, provided their victims lingered in agony till the second or third day, instead of being mercifully dispatched on the first. An opulent slaveowner with a natural or acquired taste for homicide, skilful in cal-

¹ Numb. xxxi.

² Exod. xxi. 20, 21.

culating the probable duration of life under given conditions of physical torture, could therefore gratify the worst instincts of a savage and vindictive nature by witnessing the sufferings of human beings, unprotected by any motive to mercy but the divine suggestion that they represented so much capital!

In Judges iv. we read the story of the assassination of Sisera. The Israelites having suffered twenty years' oppression under Jaban, King of Canaan, Deborah and Barak undertook their deliverance. A great battle was fought with the hosts of Jaban, under the command of Sisera, resulting in the defeat of the Canaanites, and the flight of their general, who, alighting from his chariot, fled swiftly from the field of battle towards the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, a friend and ally of King Jaban.

Jael invited him into her tent, satisfied his thirst with milk, covered him with a mantle, and promised to faithfully conceal him from his enemies. The unhappy fugitive, betrayed by her smiles, placed his life with trustful confidence in her hands, and sank into the deep sleep of exhaustion. Thus unconscious, he saw not the shadow of Jael, or the nail and hammer uplifted over his head. The treacherous woman and perjured hostess became the ruthless assassin of her sleeping guest, and the story of his murder stands forth prominently in Hebrew annals as one of the foulest crimes recorded in their blood-stained pages.

This felonious violation of the laws of hospitality, held sacred in the East from time immemorial, might be assigned to the religious fanaticism or personal cruelty of Jael, but that an eminent prophetess compromises

revelation by an inspired eulogium extolling the crime and the assassin.

These homicidal episodes in Hebrew Scripture obviously indicate that the sixth commandment, as interpreted among the Israelites, was not incompatible with deeds to which modern civilisation gives the names of murder and assassination.

The seventh commandment—accepted by modern piety as a divine revelation of the sacred obligations of marriage, which formed, however, the rule of domestic life among the ancient Egyptians, before the world had heard of Moses and the Prophets—was obviously interpreted among the Israelites in harmony with polygamy, concubinage, and a facility of divorce which gave to nuptial vows a purely nominal character.

We need not dwell upon the oft-told tale of Hebrew licentiousness, but illustrate how lightly they regarded matrimonial ties, by an episode in the early career of the pious David.

Once upon a time, according to 1 Samuel xxv., when Saul was yet king, and David a fugitive in the wilderness of Paran, there was a man in Maon named Nabal, possessed of numerous flocks of sheep and goats, and a beautiful wife—Abigail, of good understanding, which meant, in her case, considerable aptitude for looking after her own interests. Nabal, the husband of this charming and accomplished woman, is depicted as a churlish fellow guilty of a fault common in modern life, namely, unwillingness to part with his own to strangers, without clearly understanding why.

David sent Nabal a polite message, soliciting his friendship and any more substantial gifts he might feel

disposed to grant, on the grounds that he (David) had never injured or robbed him. Nabal, interrupted in the midst of festive preparations, replied in the churlishly interrogative style, declining to share with mere strangers the good things prepared for himself and his servants. The proper punishment for this incivility, in the opinion of David, was the immediate slaughter of Nabal and all his male followers, a sanguinary purpose which he forthwith prepared to put into speedy execution by arming four hundred of his followers. But the ready-witted Abigail, informed of all these things by one of her husband's servants, hastened to meet David with a liberal supply of wine and provisions, and won the heart of the amorous warrior by her charming countenance, and clever abuse of her churlish husband. David, with characteristic piety, saw in her the messenger of Jehovah, and sent her away with the assurance that her advice and person were equally agreeable to him.

On the return of Abigail to Nabal, she found that unlucky churl in no fit condition for matrimonial confidence. But the next morning she 'told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone,' in other words the unhappy husband became paralysed, on learning that his wife had been intriguing with a stranger.

Our interest in this narrative, however, centres in the closing scene: 'It came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.' For this tragical result David praises the Lord, forthwith marries Abigail, and takes another wife in the following verse! Let us compare this narrative with the famous

scene in which Nathan the Prophet denounces David for his adultery with Bathsheba, in the memorable words—‘Thou art the man.’¹ Might not the king have advisedly answered, ‘Hast thou forgotten, O Nathan, most mistaken of the Prophets! how the Lord slew Nabal that I might marry his charming widow? Has not, therefore, Uriah fallen by the will of Jehovah, that the beautiful Bathsheba might become the lawful possession of his faithful servant, David?’

Deuteronomy xxiv. records a law legalising divorce at the caprice of husbands. The wife had no voice in the question of expulsion from her home, but enjoyed the privilege of remarrying some one more appreciative of her charms, as often as she might be divorced, with the sole exception that she could not renew conjugal relationship with one of her former husbands. Attractive women, whilst yet young, may have found life tolerable under these conditions, but what became of them when old—a misfortune which overtakes women at a very early age in the East? Who provided for the victims of Mosaic legislation who failed to secure more than one husband during a lifetime? And what became of the children born of such marriages?

This statute, in fact, swept away the seventh commandment, and legally sanctioned an economical system of polygamy fatal to the domestic and social life of the Hebrews. The rich man might crowd his harem with wives and handmaidens, but his impecunious neighbour, adopting intermittent divorce, avoided the expense of keeping more than one wife, whilst retaining the privilege of changing her at discretion.

¹ 2 Sam. xii.

The last three commandments, condemning covetousness, dishonesty, and falsehood, simply define rules indispensable to even elementary civilisation; and we therefore fail to discover in the Decalogue any trace of a moral revelation superior to the ethics of uninspired Humanity. On the contrary, we find that, when Mosaic teaching nominally harmonises with the social virtues of the ancient Egyptians, it becomes forthwith marred by supplementary legislation characterised by ignorance, superstition, and barbarism. Can we imagine a more degraded law, enacted in the darkest hour of Nigritian fetishism, than the Mosaic test of female frailty?¹

In the event of a jealous husband suspecting impropriety in his wife, he forthwith brought her to a priest, who gave her a mixture of dust and holy water to drink, as the miraculous test of guilt or innocence. If the case were one of unjust suspicion the accused suffered nothing more than the pangs of injured innocence. But, if she were indeed guilty, the unsavoury dose became a deadly poison, which convicted the culprit by afflicting her with some loathsome disease. This miracle was, therefore, always at the disposal of jealous husbands; and revelation was compromised by a barbarous rite, admitting of the innocent being poisoned through collusion with venal priests.

We wonder if this ordeal is a lost secret to modern Jews; and whether, if substituted in our day for the more tedious and costly procedure of divorce courts, modern justice would also present the bitter cup to the lips of suspected husbands.

If theocratic legislation sanctioned the bondage of

¹ Numb. v.

aliens, did it, at least, secure the rights of freemen for each member of the Chosen Race? On the contrary, it is enacted immediately after the Ten Commandments, that Hebrews might purchase their own countrymen for a term of six years. If, in the interval, the master gave the slave a wife, and children were born of the marriage, the man was free to depart on the expiration of his term of servitude, leaving his family as the property of the slaveowner. But, if love of wife and children induced the husband and father to prefer slavery to desertion of his family, then he was forthwith marked with the brand of perpetual slavery. Natural affection among Hebrew slaves, therefore, condemned them to penal servitude for life, whilst callous heartlessness secured the priceless boon of freedom!

Thus slavery, invested with all the honours of a divine institution, was carried into the nineteenth century in the name of an infallible Bible by communities holding the foremost place in modern civilisation. As the British and American nations have, however, with tardy consciousness of guilt, disavowed Moses in emancipation, is it not full time for them to vindicate their 'deal Deity from the charge of past complicity in human bondage?

Mosaic legislation inflicted yet one more appalling calamity on mankind.

Exod. xxii. 18 : 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.'

Lev. xix. 26 : 'Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.'

Lev. xx. 27 : 'A man also or a woman that hath a

familiar spirit or that is a wizard shall surely be put to death : they shall stone them with stones : their blood shall be upon them.'

Thus, alleged revelation adopts the barbarous superstition of sorcery in terms so vague, that even three thousand years later the British witch-hunter could devise no more rational method of detection than that of thrusting pins into the flesh of suspects to test Satanic insensibility to pain ; and tens of thousands of innocent men and women, convicted by irrational evidence of impossible crime, were consigned to the stake or the gallows by the sentence of learned and conscientious judges, piously accepting judicial guidance from an infallible Bible.

Inspired by Mosaic legislation, the Church of Rome employed, for centuries, all her vast resources in an imaginary conflict with impalpable phantoms, whose supposed mediums were the unhappy victims of the spiritual contest. The chiefs of the Reformation were as ignorant as their theological opponents of the monstrous delusion involved in human intercourse with evil spirits. Luther, a steadfast believer in every form of Satanic agency, was unmerciful in his denunciation of infernal practitioners. Episcopalians and Nonconformists, in England and Scotland, vied with each other in piously hunting down fresh victims for immolation at the altar of the Hebrew God, who had imposed on mankind the religious duty of exterminating witches. And finally the Pilgrim Fathers, carrying with them this most pernicious superstition to a new hemisphere, piously committed the appalling crimes against Humanity, involved in the persecution and judicial murder of the martyrs of Salem.

The reasoning which caused these tragedies was simple and conclusive—an infallible Bible condemns witches to death : they therefore inevitably exist, and it becomes a religious duty to bring the nefarious criminals to justice. This deplorable fallacy received full confirmation in practical results. The miserable victims of popular superstition, tortured into delirious hallucinations, or seeking death as a release from mental and physical agony, confessed their awful crimes. How marvellous the triumph of divine revelation ! Self-convicted sorcerers establishing the infallibility of Scripture by candid admission of fellowship with the Devil ! Could the zeal of faith or the obligations of religion pause at any measure short of consigning the accursed criminals to the gallows or the stake, in conformity with a theocratic administration of justice ?

That the prevalence and lamentable results of this superstition are assignable to faith in an infallible Bible is disclosed in the statement of Sir Matthew Hale, who, when condemning Amy Duny and Rose Cullenden to be burnt as witches in 1664 at Bury, declared that the existence of witchcraft was unquestionably established by the evidence of Scripture.

If, in those days, any presumptuous mortal disclosed impious doubts of man's fellowship with the Devil, he was forthwith denounced by Orthodoxy as an infidel or an atheist.

British laws against witchcraft were repealed A.D. 1736. But as no sacrilegious hand may tamper with sacred Scripture, the superstition survives in Mosaic statutes. Wesley declared that 'giving up witchcraft was giving up the Bible.' To later theologians, accus-

tomed to ingenious adaptation of faith to reason, this language may appear extreme; but in it we find the honest and forcible expression of an inevitable conclusion. If Wesley meant, as no doubt he did mean, that belief in witchcraft and faith in the infallibility of Scripture must stand or fall together, the great evangelist simply stated what every unbiassed thinker must accept as truth. For, if we once admit that past generations committed judicial murder in harmony with Mosaic legislation, the Bible finally loses all claim to the authority of an infallible guide, and we must carefully criticise its teaching in the light of our own age, that future generations may not condemn us for blind acceptance of some sacred superstition, as pernicious then, in their eyes, as belief in witchcraft, now, in ours.

CHAPTER IV.

HEBREW MORALITY—*continued.*

Not only is Mosaic legislation thus identified with the ignorance, superstition, and cruelty of a barbarous age, but furthermore, overlaid with an elaborate ritualism, more conducive to faith in priests than trust in God, and so impossible of observance as to be named by an apostolic Jew, 'A yoke alike intolerable in past and present.'¹ There is, perhaps, no lesson we more clearly learn from Scripture than the moral inefficacy of rites and ceremonies; and the ancient Hebrews would assuredly have been better and happier men if Moses had relied less on ceremonial piety, and more on human virtue.

Apologetic theologians, however, hasten to assure us that the apparently trivial and purposeless rites of the ceremonial law were but material types of the spiritual mysteries to be revealed through Christianity to later generations—a theory which, however, depicts the temporal Ruler of the Hebrews studying rather to supply modern piety with materials for ingenious speculation, than to provide the Chosen Race with the laws most conducive to their intellectual and moral progress.

¹ Acts xv. 10.

The most important religious rite borrowed by Moses from the ceremonial worship of heathen gods, is Sacrifice, a barbarous device for propitiating the gods, reaching us from ages so remote that we fail to trace its origin in even the most ancient traditions; and therefore see in its irrational barbarism the superstitious terrors of primeval man, hastening with tribute from his possessions to appease the wrath and win the favour of the invisible Beings, whose voices were heard in the roar of the tempest, and from whose hands were launched the terrors of the thunderbolt.

This debased form of worship, engrafted on pre-historic religions when mankind had no perception of beneficence in God, attained its fullest development in the adoption of human sacrifice. The first victims were doubtless prisoners captured in battle; but when priests announced that the inexorable gods demanded the sacrifice of man's dearest treasures, even affectionate parents piously responded to divine cruelty by yielding up their children to the knife or the flames.

This sanguinary piety attained its most awful consummation among the Tyrians, Carthaginians, and kindred nations, who, in all great emergencies or national calamities, sacrificed the most valuable lives to appease the anger of the gods. They even periodically selected the children of the noblest families—especially only sons and daughters—to be held in reserve for immolation when the public welfare should require the propitiation of some offended deity.

When children were sacrificed to Kronus, or Molech, they were cast into the arms of an idol glowing with heat, from which they fell into a devouring furnace, and

were promptly consumed in honour of the god of light and fire. When the innocent victims were sacrificed to other gods, the unhappy parents, piously surrendering the claims of natural affection to the obligations of national religion, conducted their sons and daughters to infernal altars, where, embracing them with religious heroism, and soothing them into submission to the appalling will of the gods, they plunged a knife into their bosoms, and besmeared the hideous altars with the life-blood of theological victims.

As we consider the revolting horrors which the institution of sacrifice inflicted on the Egyptians, Phœnicians, Persians, Greeks, Gauls, Germans, Scythians, and Scandinavians, with numerous other tribes and nations, who all piously slew their children in conscientious conviction that they were performing religious duties, shall we not join with that worthy old heathen, Plutarch, in the inquiry, whether it would not have been better for mankind to have had atheists as their lawgivers, and never to have heard of gods or demons, than to have had theological rulers who taught them to secure the prosperity of their country by propitiating invisible Beings with the blood of their children? And may we not reasonably inquire, from modern believers in an infallible Bible, whether they consider it credible that an omnipotent and omniscient Deity ever adopted a religious rite common to all heathen theologies, and inevitably tending towards the abomination of human sacrifice?

In Judges xi. we read that Jephthah, an inspired judge, ‘vowed a vow unto the Lord and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into

my hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.'

Jephthah returned in triumph from the battle, and beheld his daughter—an only child—coming forth from his house to congratulate him on his victory. There was no means of escape from the tragic consequences of this rash and fatal vow. The doomed maiden at once exclaimed, 'My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies.' How deplorable the superstitious barbarism of the Hebrews, under judges declared to be divinely inspired! This daughter of Israel believed that human sacrifices were acceptable to the national God, and that her blood was the contract price of supernatural victory over the enemy. She therefore yielded to inevitable destiny, stipulated only for two months' respite, and was then offered up as a human sacrifice to Jehovah by an inspired judge whose faith is eulogised by the apostolic author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹

Apologetic theologians, scandalised by Hebrew fellowship with the abomination of Ashtoreth and Molech, suggest that a life of imprisoned celibacy was substituted for filiacidal sacrifice: but, if imaginative theories may thus efface the clear and obvious meaning of words, the authority of Scripture is finally lost in the universal right to modify its meaning in harmony with individual fancy. Hebrew writers, seeing the impossi-

¹ Heb. xi. 32.

bility of disputing the literal fulfilment of Jephthah's vow, condemn the act as illegal and displeasing to Jehovah. If therefore the Hebrew judge thus erred, why did not an inspiring dream—a voice from heaven—the angel Gabriel, arrest the sacrilegious hand of Jephthah, and announce Jehovah's abhorrence of Molech's favourite rite? In the next chapter but one, the angel of the Lord appeared twice to the wife of Manoah to prescribe a prudent regimen in pregnancy; and conversed so familiarly with both husband and wife that Manoah invited him to a feast. If, therefore, celestial visitants attended to these trivialities in human affairs, how marvellous that not one of the Heavenly Host appeared to snatch the daughter of Jephthah from the flames, and vindicate the national God from the homicidal tastes of rival deities!

Who therefore can question the pernicious tendency of a ritualism of blood? Tradition depicts the brazen statue of Molech, the national deity of the Ammonites, set up within the last of a suite of seven chapels. The first was thrown open to worshippers of the god for an offering of fine flour; the second for a pair of turtle doves; the third for a lamb; the fourth for a ram; the fifth for a calf; the sixth for an ox; and the seventh for the worshipper's own child. Thus was piety measured by barbarians bowing down before a brazen image; first the fruits of the earth, then a graduated tribute of blood, culminating in human sacrifice as the highest form of human worship. If, therefore, the ancient Hebrews found no divergence in the sacrificial views of Jehovah and Molech until reaching the door of the seventh chapel, were they not liable to assume that the

blood of their children might also be acceptable to their own deity, or that there was no great impropriety in dividing their allegiance with gods who had established so much uniformity in their religion?

We can imagine the perplexity of Solomon when his numerous foreign wives, urgent for permission to worship their national deities, tearfully or scornfully inquired: 'What is the difference between your God and ours, seeing that all delight in the spilling of blood?' If the lurid spectre of human sacrifice ever caused Solomon to repent of liberal concessions to his domestic circle, we wonder that so wise a man did not discourage the abominations of Molech and Ashtoreth by the final abolition of a ritualism of blood.

It was, however, reserved for the lofty genius of Isaiah, or rather the 'Great Unknown' who spoke in his name, to detect and expose the barbarism of Mosaic ritualism; and his eloquent denunciation of propitiatory butchery attains a sublimity which commands the admiration of posterity. 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea,

when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.’¹

Is this the language of a merely human reformer, whose revolutionary eloquence denounces the cherished ritualism of Mosaic theology, or a new revelation superseding Moses by Isaiah? They are obviously no longer prophets of the same religion. Let us determine which shall be our guide; but if we forsake Moses for the ‘Great Unknown,’ we have finally parted with ritualism, sacraments, and liturgies, as objects of withering scorn to Isaiah’s God, and we pass into a theological school whose creed is humanity, and whose religion is virtue.

But believers in an infallible Bible dare not discredit Moses, and yet must sustain Isaiah: they, therefore, tell us that the divine purpose in all this prophetic denunciation is merely to spiritualise the meaning of sacrifice, as if the spilling of blood could ever mean anything but butchery, or the useless destruction of life exercise any but a debasing influence on gods or men.

Christianity, however, discovers in sacrificial ritualism a series of types foreshadowing the tragedy of Calvary; and apologetic theologians suggest that the mysterious origin of sacrifice is concealed in primeval revelation, through which the Deity influenced mankind to adopt a religious ceremony foreshadowing the

¹ Isa. i. 11-17.

final sacrifice of the Hebrew Messiah ; but the dogma of the Atonement, which appeases divine wrath by the judicial murder of an innocent man, remains for investigation at a more advanced stage of our inquiries.

CHAPTER V.

HEBREW MORALITY—*continued.*

IF it were possible for Christians of all denominations to consider, in absolute freedom from religious prepossession, the foregoing proofs of debasement in Hebrew morality and theology, a unanimous voice, giving expression to a candid and impartial judgment, would inevitably affirm that the ignorance, cruelty, and barbarism disclosed in the pages of the Pentateuch, finally destroy Mosaic pretensions to a supernatural revelation of the will and purpose of the Deity worshipped by modern Christians.

But Orthodoxy withstands this reasonable conclusion with a vast literature of apologetic accommodation, filled with ingenious suggestions subversive of reason and common sense, when found irreconcilable with the dogma of an infallible Bible. What theory constitutes the very essence of this fanciful reconciliation between the barbarism of the Hebrew Jehovah and the beneficence of the Christian's God? That the policy of the Deity in revelation has been a policy of expediency and compromise, fashioning truth, justice, and mercy in harmony with the debased morality of a barbarous age!

We are assured by pious men, honestly believing

in their own personal knowledge of the unrecorded thoughts entertained by the Deity some thousands of years ago, that when He made polygamy and slavery the objects of divine legislation, He did not approve, but diplomatically modified institutions radically immoral, but entering so deeply into existing habits and customs as to render it expedient to postpone their final suppression to a future age.

Orthodoxy, therefore, depicts the Almighty conducting the personal government of the Israelites on a system of political trimming, destructive of definite principles in morality; for if institutions condemned by the moral consciousness of our generation were divinely legalised in past centuries, the virtues of the present may become the crimes of futurity; and thus moral oscillation confounds good and evil in disastrous chaos.

But are not these the deceptive theories of mistaken piety, sustaining the infallibility of Scripture through the mutability of God? If Paganism had survived the fall of the Roman Empire, and carried Olympian theosophy into the nineteenth century, might not its priesthood, trained in modern ethics, borrow the same line of argument by depicting the formerly corrupt cultus of Jove as simply divine adaptation to the habits and customs of a licentious age, and claim our adoration for the gods and goddesses of Hellas, now posing in the garb of modern respectability?

And may not Roman Pontiffs, adorned by modern virtues, claim infallibility, notwithstanding the apparent errors, and even crimes, of some of their predecessors, by sustaining the theory of transitional revelation? For if we accept the divine inspiration of Hebrew

priests and prophets, who consecrated treachery, cruelty, and murder in the name of Jehovah, may not mediæval Popes, who burnt heretics for the honour and glory of God, have been the automatic mediums of the divine policy of their age?

But if we are not dealing with some theological nightmare—and it is indeed true that the Deity once modified truth and justice in harmony with human barbarism and superstition—why do not modern missionaries follow the divine example of ethical compromise by approaching the heathen with composite systems of morality, combining the virtues of Christianity with the vices of barbarism, and thus diplomatically coquetting with the polygamy of Turkey, the infanticide of China, and the sacrificial massacres of Dahomey, in harmony with the principle of progressive revelation? Or why should we not, in trying to reclaim our criminal classes, adapt a sliding scale of graduated ethics to varying shades of moral delinquency, so as not to deter rogues and ruffians from partial reformation by unconditional condemnation of fraud and violence? Why? because the moral consciousness of our age forbids our tampering with truth and righteousness; and thus we claim a higher wisdom in the present than we assign to the Deity in the past by sustaining alleged revelation through the degradation of Divinity.

But have the apologists of a debased revelation reviewed their theories in the light of mental science, and considered that existence under conditions which foster sensuality and cruelty, produce a cerebral inferiority which perpetuates, through hereditary develop-

ment, the intellectual and moral degradation of the race? And thus, if the great First Cause of Nature's laws sanctioned, as the temporal ruler of the Hebrews, a legislative compromise with evil, He condemned the Chosen Race, through the universal laws controlling all mankind, to cumulative abasement.

Say that we accept the theory of divinely debased legislation in Judaism, when and how were objectionable statutes repealed? Jesus left slavery where He found it; Paul recommended men to rest content as bondservants or freemen; and Anglican Protestantism obviously accepted slavery as a divine institution when instructing infant slaves, through the Church Catechism, to be content with that station of life to which it had pleased God to call them. Has theocratic legislation been therefore repealed by the voice of Humanity, and has modern civilisation pronounced a tardy vote of censure on Divinity by restoring freedom to races condemned to slavery by the divinely ratified curse of Noah?

In sustaining Scripture through the theory of temporising legislation, apologetic theologians obviously assume that this form of divine policy was beneficial to the Chosen Race. But, as debased revelation involves debased Divinity, we still await their version of the advantages conferred on mankind in any stage of human progress, though an inspired ideal of the Deity, false to the infinite attributes assigned to Him in modern theosophy.

Thus far, we have shown that the pretensions of Hebrew morality to a divine origin are unattested by any superiority to merely human systems. This adverse

criticism is, however, conceived in no unfriendly spirit towards Judaism. Its manifest imperfections are irreconcilable with revelation ; but we do not, therefore, deny the presence of human wisdom in some of its ordinances. Thus we read, 'Thou shalt take no gift, for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.'¹ How admirable a precept for this age of fraudulent commissions, and universal *back-sheesh* ! Again, if the Mosaic law,² which commands the seducer to marry or provide for his victim, were present in the statute books of Christendom, how much more effectual would it prove in social reformation than the sermons of bishops or the prayers of saints !

¹ Exod. xxiii. 8.

² Exod. xxii. 16, 17.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHOSEN RACE.

III. IF it is historically true that a Chosen Race once lived under the rule of the Deity as their temporal legislator and king, may we not reasonably expect, in that highly favoured people, a wisdom, virtue, happiness, and prosperity unattainable by ordinary mortals denied the boon of theocratic government? And if these conditions are unfulfilled in Judaism, shall we discard the illusion of a Chosen Race, or attribute legislative failure to Divinity?

The pages of Genesis record the covenant with Jehovah, through which the land of Canaan was secured to the descendants of Abraham as an everlasting possession.¹ This divine charter was ratified by the rite of circumcision: any male child found uncircumcised after eight days was to be put to death, 'because he had broken the covenant.' A savage inauguration of divine government, which Christian piety accepts as theocratic legislation because it is in the Holy Bible, and only concerns Hebrew babes such a long time ago: but, if the truth were brought home to modern maternity through the capital punishment of Christian babes negligent of baptism, feminine instincts would detect

¹ Gen. xvii. 8.

the Satanic tendency of this legislative cruelty, and vindicate the Deity by denying His complicity in sacerdotal infanticide, Sacred Scripture notwithstanding.

From a merely mortal point of view, we might reasonably expect that, in selecting the father of the Hebrew race, Jehovah would have chosen a man as pre-eminent in courage and virtue as the most illustrious chief of Gentile antiquity; but immediately after his election, Abraham discloses a despicable cowardice unreprieved by Jehovah, who, instead of punishing his baseness, inflicts the penalty on the innocent.

It is recorded that, in consequence of a famine in the land, Abraham set out for Egypt in company with Sarah, his beautiful and affectionate wife.¹ As they drew near to their destination, the true character of the Patriarch became apparent. He entreated Sarah to save *him* from any personal danger by concealing that she was his wife. In consequence of this deception, Sarah became an inmate of Pharaoh's house; and Abraham was freely supplied, for her sake, with sheep and oxen, asses and camels, men-servants and maid-servants, which, for anything he knew to the contrary, were the price of his wife's dishonour. Jehovah forthwith afflicted 'Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. And Pharaoh called Abraham, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him, and they sent him away and his wife, and all that he had.' Thus the Egyptian king, who erred in ignorance, was severely

¹ Gen. xii. 10-20.

punished with all his innocent household, whilst the Hebrew impostor escaped with impunity, carrying with him the spoil acquired by false pretences.

Was Sarah when wooed by her royal lover quite true to her caitiff husband? The king, as a man of honour, sustained her innocence; and if she was, indeed, faithful to the man who thought more of possible danger to himself than of almost certain dishonour to his wife, modern Hebrews may well feel proud of their ancestress, whilst humiliated by the disreputable conduct of the father of the race, who subsequently played the same trick on Abimelech, King of Gerar. This monarch, fascinated by the charming Sarah, also committed the indiscretion of introducing her into his house; but, warned by Jehovah in a dream, he forthwith sent her away, and bestowed a number of valuable presents on her husband, who thus travelled about reaping a rich harvest from the good looks of his wife.

The Hebrew historian, Josephus, tells us that, in the compilation of genealogies, women who had been in captivity were carefully excluded, in consequence of the suspicion attaching to their intercourse with foreigners. As Isaac was, therefore, born subsequent to the residence of Sarah with Abimelech, is it not questionable, according to this theory, whether modern Jews are the veritable descendants of Abraham?

From the age of Abraham to the departure of Jacob for the land of Egypt, the Hebrews enjoyed one of those intervals of peaceful prosperity which rarely relieved the calamities of their subsequent career. But having settled in Egypt as colonists, and become as numerous as the native population, they proved so bereft of every

manly virtue as to submit to abject slavery without a struggle. Even the females of the brute creation attain the courage of despair when their offspring are assailed by the fiercest animals; but the men of Israel had become slaves, so vile and abject, that they preferred ignoble safety in making bricks to heroic, if even hopeless resistance to the murder of their children. Do modern Jews accept as veritable history a narrative which depicts their race as the most despicable cravens of antiquity?

The ingenuity of a Hebrew mother devised the plot which rescued Moses from the Nile, to become the *protégé* of a royal princess, educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Let us consider the relative merits of Hebrew and Egyptian training. Moses, surrounded by all the pleasures and allurements of a royal court, might well have forgotten the very existence of his servile kinsmen; but, when he beheld one of them ill-used by an Egyptian, he permitted neither self-interest nor personal danger to withhold his hand from slaying the oppressor, whereas, so ignobly servile had his brethren become, that they treated with sneering insolence the intervention of the man who, in showing his will and ability to protect them from their enemies, had also presumed to teach them justice towards each other.

Moses having fled out of Egypt in disgust with his countrymen, they remained in bondage until the sighs and groans of forty years, at length, recalled his covenant with Abraham to the memory of Jehovah who, accordingly, 'came down to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians.' In later generations inspired

prophets proclaimed great calamities as manifestations of divine wrath for national desertion of the God of Israel; but now, it is Jehovah Himself who, without any alleged provocation, had abandoned the Chosen Race to the debasing influence of slavery. Can we wonder if the Hebrews, thus trained to see in Jehovah a capricious God, turned towards the shrines of other divinities in emergencies possibly overlooked by their national deity?

Moses, having brooded over the misfortunes of his race during an exile of forty years in the land of Midian, at length formed the design of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It was useless to appeal to the higher instincts of Humanity in addressing a people lost in servile abasement to the ennobling virtues of freemen. Moses, advancing no more imposing claims to the authority of a national leader than may be found in personal patriotism, would have been received with the scorn and derision of his degenerate countrymen. He could, therefore, only hope to win their obedience as the accredited representative of a God who had undertaken the duties of their national Deity, and instructed him to communicate the divine will and purpose.

The alleged covenant of Jehovah with Abraham was doubtless a legend of the Hebrews, dwelling on which, in an age of universal belief in the supernatural, the future prophet inevitably dreamt a dream or saw a vision which summoned him, in the name of Jehovah, to the rescue of his unhappy countrymen. What more simple in an age of extravagant credulity than for an enthusiastic prophet to accept his own impassioned thoughts as a divine revelation, and hasten to give them

practical effect as the will of the Being whom he worships? Or, if he be possessed of the genius of a Moses or a Mahommed, he will discover a new god, or so successfully modify an old one as to become the founder of a new religion. The opponents of the *parvenu* theology may condemn the Prophet as an impostor, but to the candid and impartial student of religious phenomena he is a man of genius who, in brooding over some great purpose in solitude and asceticism, at length yields to the hallucinations of cerebral exhaustion. Moses, however, through his Egyptian training in divination, which, in Judaism, assumed the form of Urim and Thummim, could at all times feel assured of his personal intercourse with the Deity.

The enterprise of Moses resulted in the Exodus, the records of which confirm the servile degradation of the Israelites. Six hundred thousand men marched out of Egypt, and yet, when pursued by Pharaoh and his army, they denounced Moses for bestowing on them a freedom which involved personal danger. This cowardice is fostered by Jehovah, who deprives them of all motive for heroic resistance by undertaking the supernatural destruction of their enemies. Pharaoh, virtually irresponsible for his actions through inspired obduracy, and his subjects obeying the commands of their lawful sovereign, are all overwhelmed in the waters of the Red Sea, to establish the comparative superiority of Jehovah over other gods, as indicated in the song of Moses: ¹ ‘Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, in doing wonders?’ As the prophetess Miriam takes a

¹ Exod. xv. 11.

timbrel in her hand, and invites the daughters of Israel to celebrate the occasion with music and dancing, we can imagine some Hebrew mother interrupting this jubilant festivity with the inquiry, 'If even the waves of the sea obey the voice of Jehovah, why did the waters of the Nile close over the babes of Israel?'

Moses having thus entered upon his career as the leader of the Hebrews, let us glance at the conditions under which he assumed his important duties. Those who rely on Hebrew records for their knowledge of ancient Egypt necessarily form very erroneous impressions of the religious, social, and political organisation of a people whose history may be traced to about 4000 B.C., and whose science, philosophy, and religion have been extensively borrowed by nations attaining civilisation within the historic period.

Professor Lepsius, of Berlin, who has exhaustively studied the evidence of pyramids, tombs, and papyri, fixes the date at which Menes, the founder of Memphis, ascended the throne as 3893 B.C., at which remote period the Ancient Egyptians possessed a highly organised civilisation and most elaborate theology, which could only have been evolved through the progressive development of ages unknown to orthodox chronology.

The Ancient Egyptians anticipated Christianity in a divine Trinity, and an incarnate Deity, redeeming mankind by his death, and an eternity of happiness or misery beyond the grave. Osiris, the Saviour of Humanity, was the supreme Judge of the Dead, by whose decree they were to enter abodes of bliss or eternal fire. Those who, in their lifetime, had given food to the hungry,

water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, lived in truth, and loved God, were to enjoy eternal life in his presence, and pluck the sweetest fruit in heaven; but the wicked were to be excluded from the presence of the Lord of Heaven, and tortured by varying forms of human suffering. If, therefore, an Egyptian mummy, now reclining within the precincts of the British Museum, were suddenly restored to life, and miraculously gifted with modern tongues, might he not reasonably infer, on entering a Christian temple and hearing an evangelical discourse, that Egyptian theology had survived the vicissitudes of six thousand years?

The high tone of morality prevailing among the Ancient Egyptians is disclosed by the monuments. In the valley of Thebes is an inscription said to refer to Rameses II. : ‘I have lived in truth and fed on justice. What I have done for Humanity was salvation. And how I have loved God, God only and my heart know. I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clad the naked, and sheltered the homeless.’ The same witnesses tell us of the high social position of women in a community where the wife was ‘the lady of the house’; and the sanctity of marriage was universally respected, before it had ever been heard of as a Christian sacrament.

The Egyptian religion, however, as all other ancient systems of theology, had eventually become corrupted by the growth of superstition, and the multiplication of gods. Moses, who, according to the historian Manetho, had been a priest of Osiris, was obviously familiar with the cultus of many gods, but, as the founder of a nation, recognised the importance of undivided allegiance to

one deity as the national divinity, piously accepted as supreme in power over all other gods. But how shall we explain his exclusion from Hebrew faith of the doctrine of immortality, the judgment-seat of Osiris, and eternal retribution beyond the grave? As the priest Osarseph of Heliopolis, Moses would have been familiar, not only with the public teaching, but with the esoteric theosophy of the priesthood avowed in the privacy of sacerdotal circles, discussing divine philosophy in the sacred groves of Heliopolis. Opinions doubtless varied, as among theologians of every age and every clime: some confident, some agnostic, some sceptical of immortality. Moses was doubtless one of the unbelievers, and therefore limited the hopes of his followers to temporal rewards and punishments, to the exclusion of a life hereafter, blessed by paradise or cursed by perdition.

Notwithstanding this marked divergence between Egyptian and Hebrew creeds, Moses borrowed freely from Egyptian sources.

Circumcision, whether first adopted by Abraham or Moses, was practised by the Egyptians before the existence of either.

The Tabernacle, with its Holy of Holies, was simply an Egyptian temple. The Ark was the sacred Coffin of Osiris, and the Cherubim were modified Sphinxes.

The priestly caste of the Levites, with their special laws and customs, are of undoubted Egyptian origin.

In Egypt, seven lamps were placed before the Holy of Holies. In the Hebrew tabernacle, a candlestick with seven branches occupied the same position.

The chief priests of both nations were robed in the same manner, and the Hebrew pontiff wore the breast-

plate of an Egyptian judge ornamented with twelve precious stones.

The laws of purification, and the distinction between clean and unclean animals, are adopted from the Egyptians.

The Decalogue is an adaptation of the Egyptian moral code.

Moses not only borrowed rites and ceremonies, but even his ideal of Divinity, from the Egyptians. According to Plutarch (*de Iside*), the front of the temple of Isis at Sais was inscribed with the words, 'I am all that hath been, and that is, and that shall be,' and Moses proclaimed the Hebrew Deity as the great I AM. The same writer also informs us that the Thebans worshipped a god 'whose form comes not under the senses, and cannot be represented,' and Moses prohibited the adoption of any graven image of the national god.

The most important gift of Egyptian theosophy to Moses was, however, the art of divination, through which he attained communion with Jehovah. So familiar were the Hebrews, through their Egyptian experience, with Urim and Thummim, that the investiture of Aaron with these oracular Talismans was tacitly accepted as a matter of course.

Various fanciful hypotheses have been advanced in solution of the Mosaic form of divination. That the jewels on the breastplate of the Pontiff, engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, supplied a marvellous alphabet, through which the divine response could be read from letters miraculously raised and illuminated; that the name of Jehovah was engraved upon a jewel or plate of gold in the centre of the ephod,

gazing on which, and uttering an incantation, the chief priest heard the voice of the oracle issuing from the precincts of the sanctuary; that Urim and Thummim were little golden images shut up in the breastplate, which answered with an articulate voice the questions addressed to them by the Pontiff. But whatever may have been the mode of invoking the oracle, the evidence of monuments and mummies discloses the Egyptian origin of Urim and Thummim.

The sacerdotal judges of Egypt wore on a golden chain an image of Truth (*Aletheia*), formed of some precious stone, and symbolising the purity which should characterise their office; and the Septuagint, the literary product of Egypt, translates Thummim with the word *Aletheia* (*Ἀλήθεια*). In the centre of the *pectorale*, on the breasts of priestly mummies as they recline in modern museums, is the mystic *scarabæus*, adopted from its brilliant wing-cases as the symbol of the sun, light, and vitality; and in the word Urim Hebrew scholars read light or fire, confirmed by the Greek versions of Aquila and Theodotion, who render Urim by *φωτισμός*—illumination.

Orthodox theologians, at first alarmed by this unseemly borrowing of heathen *pontificalia* for the service of the sanctuary, are now reconciled to monumental evidence, and suggest, as the *modus operandi* of Mosaic oracles, that the high priest, looking on the sacred symbols of truth and light, became mesmerised by fixity of gaze, and, losing self-consciousness in profound abstraction, passed into that mysterious condition of mental suicide supposed to invite divine inspiration. How marvellous the vitality of ancestral superstition,

which thus persuades intelligent and educated men of the nineteenth century that the Supreme Deity, whom they worship, once utilised the phenomena of cataleptic hypnotism as media of divine revelation !

Whatever may have been the method of divination through oracular gems, the fact remains that Moses, claiming to be in direct communication with Jehovah, taught the Hebrews to seek supernatural knowledge through pre-existent arts of divination, and we thence infer that his 'Thus saith the Lord' meant nothing more than his own thoughts and words, sanctioned by the illusory oracles of Urim and Thummim.

As we possess no authentic Life of Moses, our sources of information respecting the fabulous wanderings of forty years are limited to the compilations of Ezra. Our ideal of Moses trained in the midst of Egyptian civilisation is much higher than warranted by Scripture, but we must deal with the unsatisfactory materials at our disposal. Thus we see the Hebrew prophet ascending Mount Sinai to receive the Law under conditions more characteristic of human jugglery than divine revelation. The congregation of Israel are commanded not to approach the Mount, under penalty of death, until summoned by the trumpet ; when Jehovah would 'come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai.'¹ But instead of this public attestation of Theocracy, we hear of nothing but a thunderstorm, and of fire and smoke as of a furnace, in which Jehovah is *said* to have descended on the Mount. Then comes a voice summoning Moses to ascend ; and the people are again threatened with the danger of

¹ Exod. xix. 11.

Jehovah rushing forth upon them, should they approach to gaze. Savage races have from time immemorial associated the war of the elements with terror of the gods: is it therefore credible that the Deity proclaimed His presence by evoking the superstitious terrors of primeval barbarism? Or does not rather the entire narrative read as if the Prophet were availing himself of popular ignorance to prevent too close an inspection of the sacred rites of conjuration?

Turning to a different phase of divine intervention, we read of a battle with the Amalekites, during which Moses stood upon a hill, and when he 'held up his hands Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hands Amalek prevailed:' so that, to accomplish victory, it was necessary for Aaron and Hur to hold up the arms of the prophet on either side. How hopelessly demoralised must not Hebrew troops have grown under a theocratic system of warfare, in which courage and strategy did not count, and success depended on the miraculous, controlled by the endurance of prophetic muscles! In thus associating military success or disaster with the supernatural, the Hebrews were already doomed to subjugation by nations holding that practical view of human warfare which places Providence on the side of 'big battalions.'

We refer to one more episode in the drama of the wilderness. When Moses had fled as an exile from Egypt, he was most hospitably received by Jethro, priest of Midian, who bestowed on him Zipporah, one of his seven daughters, with whom the prophet seems to have lived happily for forty years. After the Exodus, Jethro came to visit Moses at Rephidim with

Zipporah and her two sons, joined in the worship of Jehovah as the greatest of all the gods, and displayed so much practical sagacity that the inspired Moses adopted his suggestions for the improvement of judicial procedure among the Hebrews ;¹ and yet it is upon the Midianites that the appalling atrocities were committed, as recorded in Numbers xxxi.

The enticing fascinations of the Midianitish women was the pious pretence for wholesale murder: but when fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives had been slain, Moses issued the command: ‘Kill all the males among the little ones, but keep all the virgins alive for yourselves!’ By a pious fiction, thirty-two of these young girls were assigned to Jehovah as His share of the spoil, and appropriated by Eleazar the priest, ‘As the Lord commanded Moses.’

It is superfluous to dwell upon the miseries of the desert. We see the men, who had lived as slaves in Egypt, going forth to die as savages in the wilderness, to be succeeded by a new generation, trained in the fierce barbarism of the desert for the career of rapine and murder awaiting them in the land of Canaan. We see them decimated by plagues, bitten by serpents, consumed by fire, swallowed by the earth—as manifestations of divine vengeance for complaining of the pangs of hunger and thirst, or seeking the alleviation of their misery through the favour of other gods. Even modern Piety might grumble if divinely fed on manna, and impiously test its nutritive qualities by chemical analysis. The ancient Hebrews were sorely afflicted with cutaneous diseases, for which modern derma-

¹ Exod. xviii.

tologists would prescribe a change of diet. And what were the alleged judgments of God for idolatry but the interpretation of natural events through the same spirit of religious intolerance which, from time immemorial, has attributed national calamities to theological error? In the days of Moses, mankind believed in many gods; in modern times they trust in divergent creeds. But as we no longer burn men for conscientious heresy, is it not full time to acquit the Deity of ruthless persecution of the Hebrews, for participation in the universal faith of multiform divinity, inherited from ages unconscious of the existence of the Mosaic Jehovah?

The Chosen Race had departed from Egypt in reliance on the unconditional promise of their Deity, that they should obtain possession of a land flowing with milk and honey: and yet, with two exceptions, they all found graves in the wilderness. They were not a self-denying people, and would not have chosen misery and death for the prospective benefit of their descendants. As therefore each of the old brickmakers of Egypt found his end approaching, he doubtless reviled Moses in his heart as a political adventurer, who had deceived the multitude by the false pretence of an earthly home, whilst withdrawing the Egyptian hope of another and better world, in which he might yet find consolation for the intolerable misery of his life on earth. Can we wonder if surviving relatives, thus witnessing despairing death, broke forth into the captious or clamorous complaints so sternly punished by the national God?

A new generation entered the promised land, and disclosed the savage training of the desert in ruthless

massacres, assigned by Scripture to the vengeance of God. But what was the guilt of Canaan, and could nations born to the worship of other deities fulfil the commands of Jehovah? The men with whom Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in friendly intercourse, before the departure for Egypt, were intellectually and morally superior to the followers of Joshua. The children of Heth were courteous, and even generous in their treatment of Abraham when desirous of purchasing a family burying-ground;¹ Abimelech disclosed, on his restoration of Sarah, a sense of honour unknown to the Hebrew patriarchs;² and Melchisedec, king of Salem and priest of Eliun, the most High, commanded the respectful reverence of Abraham.³ Had the memory and example of these men so utterly perished throughout the land that no redeeming virtue might save the doomed inhabitants from destruction? We answer—the Canaanites had no historian, and are therefore condemned unheard through the records of the enemies who coveted their possessions; and their miraculous destruction is quite as improbable as a divine massacre of Chinese and Indians of the same generation, for nonconformity to the laws, customs, and religion of Moses.

The war of extermination was, however, waged in the name of Jehovah, whose thirst for blood interrupted the routine of the solar system, to facilitate the slaughter of the Amorites.⁴ The fabulous origin of this and other miracles is, however, disclosed in such passages as this: ‘And Jehovah was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of

¹ Gen. xxiii. ² Gen. xx. ³ Gen. xiv. 18–24. ⁴ Josh. x. 12, 13.

iron'¹—as if any addition to the military resources of the enemy could baulk the purpose of Him who suspended the law of gravitation that the sun and moon might 'stand still in the valley of Ajalon.'

The military genius of Joshua accomplished victories which Scripture attributes to faith in the gospel of blood, and a successful career of rapine and murder placed the Israelites, at his death, in possession of important positions in the land of Canaan. But the next generation, having disclosed symptoms of humanity by making tributaries of, instead of murdering the Canaanites, the angel of Jehovah appeared to denounce this merciful view of sacred warfare, and declare that He would not drive out the remaining inhabitants, but leave them as thorns in their sides, and their gods as a snare to the children of Israel.² Is not this the pious fiction of the author of Judges, accounting for failure in the promises of Jehovah through the imaginary sins of the people?

We read, 'And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites, and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.'³ In other words, the Israelites discovered the wisdom of consolidating their conquests through friendly alliances, resulting in a fusion of races and consequent community of gods.

In studying the map of Canaan, or overlooking the valley of the Jordan from the central heights of Palestine, and recalling the numerous warlike tribes which occupied the land before the Hebrews, we need not

¹ Judg. i. 19.

² Judg. ii. 1-3.

³ Judg. iii. 5, 6.

the eye of a Moltke to detect the impossibility of its complete subjugation by a barbarous tribe issuing from the desert with no greater resources than possessed by the Israelites. The only hope of permanently retaining partial conquests, therefore, lay in political alliances; and if the Hebrews had adopted and persevered in this course, instead of again trusting to the supernatural, they might have escaped the appalling future of a Peculiar People, doomed to calamity from the age of the Philistines to the Russian atrocities.

But Hebrew fellowship with native tribes vanishes, when named, from the pages of the sacred annalist, and the Israelites stand alone throughout the appalling vicissitudes of more than three centuries, alternating intervals of independence with periods of subjection to hostile chiefs and tribes, or of precarious existence, hiding, as hunted animals, in the dens and caves of the mountains.

Intermittent faith in the supernatural was sustained by Shofetim or Judges who, believing themselves inspired, were guilty of treachery, assassination, and even human sacrifice, in the name of Jehovah.

The story of Samson, the Semitic Hercules, reads as a page from mythology or a chapter from the Arabian Nights.¹ An angel with a terrible countenance predicted his birth, and consecrated him a Nazarite with unshaven head. On attaining to inspired manhood, he fell in love with a pretty Philistine of Timnath, to whom his pious parents objected as a designing stranger, but they did not know *that it was of the Lord*. Samson, however, induced them to accompany him to the vine-

¹ Judg. xiii.-xvi.

yards of Timnath. On the journey he met a lion, but the 'spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him, and he rent him, without any weapon, as he would a kid.' Samson's suit prospered, and after a time, returning by the same rocky pass to claim his bride, he saw the carcase of the lion, 'and, behold, it contained a swarm of bees and honey.'

This remarkable incident suggested a conundrum: 'Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweetness,' which he proposed for solution to his thirty companions at the wedding festival, within the appointed days of the feast, subject to a forfeit, on either side, of 'thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments.' The wedding guests were puzzled, and, being genuine Philistines, threatened the unhappy bride with untimely death unless she enticed her husband to disclose the answer to this exasperating riddle. The foolish woman, instead of trusting to her natural protector, wept for seven days, which proved so trying to Samson that he was, at length, beguiled of his secret, and the truculent thirty accordingly solved the enigma 'on the seventh day before the sun went down.' 'And the spirit of Jehovah came upon Samson,' who forthwith murdered and robbed thirty men of Ashkelon to provide the stipulated forfeit for the expounders of the riddle; thus establishing by scriptural precedent, that debts of honour are more binding than the sixth and eighth commandments.

Enraged with his Philistine connections, Samson now abandoned his wife and returned to his father's house at Zorah. But his heart was still in the vineyards of Timnath, where we find him, at the wheat-

harvest, bringing a kid as a present for his wife, who had, however, been meanwhile given by her father to one of his thirty companions, under the impression that she had been finally deserted by her Hebrew husband. Exasperated by his disappointment, Samson caught three hundred foxes, tied them tail to tail with lighted firebrands, and drove them, with disastrous results, into the cornfields, olive-yards, and vineyards. In revenge for their lost produce, the Philistines burnt Samson's wife, but 'he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter, and went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.'

Then came the Philistines to the men of Judah—who were apparently living in contentment under their rule, demanded the surrender of Samson, and received him from three thousand of his countrymen bound with two new cords, which he forthwith burst as burnt flax, picked up the jaw-bone of an ass, 'and slew a thousand men therewith.' Famished with thirst, Samson prayed to Jehovah for water, and forthwith a miraculous stream gushed forth from the divinely cloven jaw, or from a hollow place in Lehi, it matters not which to those who, in accepting miracles, believe all equally possible to the Deity.

We next hear of Samson visiting one of the harlots of Gaza, and escaping from the Philistines by carrying off the gates of the city. To no purpose, however, for he forthwith becomes the lover of mercenary Delilah, who, after three unsuccessful attempts, at length learned the secret of his great strength, cut off his miraculous locks, and sold him to the lords of the Philistines for 5,500 shekels of silver. With the loss of

his hair both his strength and Jehovah departed from him, and deprived of sight and liberty, he worked in brazen fetters for his captors.

The Philistines naturally attributed this triumph over Samson and Jehovah to the superior power of their national god, and hastened to offer rich sacrifices to Dagon for their deliverance from the enemy. By which we perceive a remarkable resemblance between Hebrew and Philistine theosophy, varying only in distinctive objects of similar worship.

A day of festive thanksgiving was appointed. The lords of the Philistines assembled with the people in a temple, the very roof of which was crowded with men and women, spectators of the exciting scene, as the once terrible Hebrew was led forth by a boy amidst the exultation of his enemies. Samson, whose hair had partially grown, begged for permission to rest against the pillars of the temple, prayed to Jehovah for help, 'took hold of the two middle pillars on which the temple stood,' and overwhelmed all in crashing ruins.

It needs no depth of criticism to detect in all this a Semitic version of the Herculean myth, accepted as Scripture by the credulous editors of the Restoration, and consecrated by the anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who catalogues Samson with Samuel, David, and all the prophets. Eminent commentators, entangled in the meshes of scriptural infallibility, therefore accept Semitic mythology as revelation, and tell us that the story of Samson, which stakes the fortunes of the Chosen Race on the shorn locks which fall from the lap of Delilah, is veritable history flowing from the pen of inspiration. But his career is some-

thing very different from that of other famous Shofetim of Israel. If Ehud was an assassin, Deborah a eulogist of the same crime, and Jephthah guilty of human sacrifice, they at least worked according to their lights for the deliverance of Israel and the glory of Jehovah. But Samson 'judged Israel twenty years,' and yet we hear of nothing but his amours, and miracles evoked, not for national but for personal vengeance.

If modern Orthodoxy deems this criticism impious, we can only repeat that the impiety lies with those who degrade Divinity through cosmopolitan legends, and fail to recognise an Olympian hero in the Semitic Hercules. As we see tortured foxes carrying devastation, with blazing torches, through the products of human industry, and hear the appalling crash of falling columns, crushing men and women, conscientiously praising their ancestral god for deliverance from a man in whom they necessarily saw a sanguinary monster, we marvel at the superstition of an enlightened age which identifies the God of Samson with Jesus of Nazareth.

The sufferings of the Israelites from foreign aggression, under the *régime* of the Judges, were still further aggravated by the horrors of civil war. When Jephthah, by a series of brilliant victories, had delivered his countrymen from the Ammonites, the Ephraimites complained that they had not been invited to join in the war with the common enemy.¹ This merely sentimental grievance caused a fratricidal contest, in which the men of Ephraim were defeated, and all fugitives from the battlefield massacred, so that the slain reached the number of forty-two thousand.

¹ Judg. xii.

The last three chapters of Judges record, with doubtful date, the revolting details of a crime committed in Gibeah, a city of the Benjamites. The atrocity of the offence aroused the indignation of the other tribes, who demanded the surrender and punishment of the criminals. This request was rejected; and the children of Israel, therefore, arose 'and went up to the house of God, and asked council of God, and said, which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first'—an obvious response through the oracle of Urim and Thummim. The Israelites, therefore, went forth to battle in a just cause approved by Jehovah, suffered a disastrous defeat, again consulted the oracle, were divinely instructed to renew the fight, and again repulsed with a total loss of forty thousand men.

The children of Israel accordingly wept, fasted, and sacrificed to Jehovah, who, interrogated by Phinehas, promised victory; and on a renewal of the fatal contest, the Benjamites were utterly routed, their cities destroyed by fire, and the entire tribe ruthlessly exterminated, with the exception of six hundred warriors, who escaped into the wilderness, 'and abode in the rock of Rimmon four months.'

In the interval, the Israelites had time to reflect on the national calamity involved in the destruction of an entire tribe, and, repenting of the extreme measures adopted towards the unhappy Benjamites, became anxious that the six hundred fugitives, intrenched at Rimmon, should be supplied with wives to prevent the final extinction of the tribe. The children of Israel could not supply them because they had sworn

at Mizpah : ‘ There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin for wife.’ The difficulty was, however, met by another oath sworn at Mizpah, to the effect that any of the tribes not attending the meeting there should be put to death. The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, a city on the east of the Jordan, were convicted of this offence, and forthwith murdered, with all the married women and children, by twelve thousand most valiant men! Four hundred virgins were, however, secured as wives for the Benjamites, and the necessary number completed by forcible abduction of two hundred daughters of Shiloh. This narrative concludes with the remark : ‘ In those days there was no king in Israel : every man did that which was right in his own eyes.’ And yet Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was in communication with Jehovah as the temporal Ruler of the nation.

From these sanguinary episodes in the annals of Judah we infer that many of the calamities of the nation resulted from superstitious reliance on the oracles of Urim and Thummim ; and that the cruelty of the Hebrews towards alien nations indicates, not divine vengeance, but native barbarism, as ruthless in conflict with Benjamites as with Philistines.

Passing over the idyl of ‘ Ruth,’ with its unwonted picture of rural tranquillity among the Hebrews, and unusual recognition of virtue in a daughter of Moab, we next hear of the pontificate of Eli,¹ a venerable priest and judge, whose character stands out prominently in admirable contrast with his sanguinary predecessors, as he is accused of nothing worse than

¹ 1 Sam. i.-iv.

being a too indulgent parent. Even in modern times the offspring of eminent bishops are not always exempt from the ancestral vices developed through heredity, as was the case with Hophni and Phinehas, the dissolute sons of Eli, who, as members of the priesthood, were not content to dine on the prescribed shoulder of peace-offerings, but insisted on more appetising food and varied cookery. They were also guilty of other improprieties, for which Eli rebuked them sternly: 'but they hearkened not to the voice of their father, because Jehovah would slay them:' and Eli adopted no more vigorous measures—practically impossible to nonagenarian senility.

An anonymous man of God, accordingly, appears upon the scene, and insults the venerable prelate with insolent denunciation—heard with a patience superior to that of Job, for he utters no word of remonstrance, and, even when cursed through the lips of a child, he thus anticipates the gospel: 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.' In fact, Eli was sufficiently in advance of his age to have been a Galilean Apostle.

The children of Israel were obviously irresponsible for the actions of theocratic priests, in whose appointment they had no voice; and yet, for the sins of Eli's sons, the Philistines slew thirty-four thousand of them, and even captured the sacred coffer of Jehovah, which, passing from place to place as an iconoclastic and plague-producing talisman, was at length restored by the enemy to the men of Beth-Shemesh, fifty thousand of whom were slain by Jehovah for examining its contents. Meantime the venerable Eli, having heard of the

rout of the Israelites, the death of his two sons, and the capture of the ark, fell down and broke his neck ; for, as the sacred annalist tells us, ‘ he was an old man, and heavy, and he had judged Israel forty years.’ These appalling events are apparently traceable to the refusal of Hophni and Phinehas to conform to Mosaic restrictions on diet, so that individual neglect of ceremonial observances, under a Theocracy, may result in great national calamities.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPHETS.

A Theocracy administered by priests and judges, in the name of Jehovah, having thus resulted in calamitous failure, the occasion had arisen for the intervention of the prophets. And henceforth, professors of the superstition which controls human reason by alleged revelation, assumed the divine right of interference with the functions of government, and, by discrediting the judgment and paralysing the action of the responsible rulers of the nation, inaugurated conditions of social and political anarchy which doomed the Hebrew race to eventual subjugation by nations more amenable to the practical sagacity of their rulers than to the fanciful divination of their prophets.

The records of antiquity depict mankind practising various arts of divination, through which they hoped to read futurity and interpret the purpose of the gods. This popular illusion created a demand for augurs, soothsayers, astrologists, and prophets, who credulously or fraudulently ministered to the superstition of their age by arts of divination, ranging from the humblest efforts of sorcery to the most ambitious flights of astrological forecast.

We might trace in the pages of Herodotus and Plutarch the calamitous results of individual and

national action inspired by soothsayers or controlled by oracles, but may more promptly detect the evils of tampering with futurity by ideally introducing the augurs, diviners, and prophets of antiquity into the practical life of modern times, and depicting the chaos into which our civilisation would be resolved, if our designs were fashioned by omens, and our actions determined by oracles—conditions of perplexity and confusion which we should, however, probably end by emulating the moral courage of the Roman commander who set divination at defiance by throwing the sacred chickens overboard.

The ancient Hebrews followed the example of other nations. Joseph had learned in Egypt to divine with a cup; and Moses established the oracle of Urim and Thummim, the secret or virtues of which seem to have been finally lost about the time of David. But Samuel had previously introduced musical conjuration into Judaism by which the divine afflatus was evoked, as in the mysteries of Isis and the revels of the Corybantes.

We have not far to seek the source from which Samuel borrowed the institution of the prophets. The legend of Balaam depicts a professional vendor of benedictions and anathemas, who, although an alien soothsayer, was in communication with the Hebrew Deity.¹ To him came elders of Moab and Midian with 'the rewards of divination, to purchase curses against the children of Israel,' impossible to Balaam, divinely instructed to bless. It is almost incredible that modern Piety accepts the prophetic affinity of Balaam with Jehovah, for how could he then have won his reputa-

¹ Numbers xxii.

tion among heathen clients as a successful dispenser of mercenary blessings and curses? The legend, however, inclusive of the ass which, as an eminent commentator tells us, 'had more spiritual penetration than his master,' still holds its place in sacred Scripture, dated more than three centuries before the age of Samuel. And as prophetic divination was therefore familiar to the Canaanites long before the Hebrew school of prophets, its adaptation to Judaism from heathen sources stands confessed.

According to 1 Samuel ix., the prophetic calling was originally held in very poor estimation by the Hebrews. We read of Saul and his servant travelling about the country in search of his father's stray donkeys. The weary Saul proposed to return home, but the servant said: 'Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man, all that he saith cometh surely to pass. Now let us go thither, peradventure he can show us our way that we should go. Then said Saul to his servant: But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God. What have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said: Behold I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver; that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way. Then said Saul to his servant: Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.' Now, as the seer in question was no less eminent a prophet than Samuel, it is obvious that Hebrew views of prophetic divination, even among the class from which the king of Israel was chosen, had not then risen above the superstition of a modern

peasant who crosses a gipsy's hand with silver to learn the whereabouts of stolen goods.

All this was, however, changed by the genius of Samuel, who formed much more ambitious views of the prophetic office, and established the political influence of his sacred Caste on a permanent basis by founding schools of prophets at Ramah, Bethel, and other localities for the education of poetic minstrels, trained to evoke the Spirit by artistic harmony, and enrolled among the candidates for active service as impassioned Nâbis, commissioned to thunder at the gates of kings with messages from Jehovah.

An episode in the life of Saul illustrates the imaginary affinity between music and revelation.¹ On the occasion of his sending messengers to arrest David at Naioth, 'When they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. Then went he also to Ramah . . . and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say—Is Saul also among the prophets?' In this grotesque parody of divine inspiration, we necessarily detect an epidemic fanaticism, analogous to the illusions of crazy flagellants and dancing maniacs, prevalent during those centuries

¹ 1 Sam. xix. 20-24.

of mediæval darkness when Christianity and barbarism had become convertible terms.

A remarkable instance of musical conjuration occurred on the occasion of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, kings of Israel and Judah, consulting Elisha in his prophetic capacity,¹ when that eminent Nâbi exclaimed: 'Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.' Is it possible to attain clearer evidence of the affinity between Hebrew and heathen conjuration?

The artistic minstrelsy which invited Jehovah discomfited Satan.² Thus, we read of David driving away an evil spirit from Saul by a skilful performance on the harp, which cannot, of course, mean anything more than the soothing influence of music on mental excitement or depression.

Apart from the anonymous band of choral aspirants, the most distinguished prophets were, obviously, men of genius, in whom the poetic fire had kindled an enthusiasm which they accepted, in harmony with the superstition of their age, as divine inspiration. Thus Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, when pouring forth, with glowing eloquence, the imaginative creations of exuberant fancy, assumed, in their own and popular estimation, the imposing aspect of inspired prophets, authoritatively interpreting the will and purpose of the Deity, with reference to impending events susceptible of forecast through merely human foresight.

The prophetic career of Jeremiah indicates the obvious design of controlling the immediate future of the nation in harmony with the supposed will of Jehovah;

¹ 2 Kings iii.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 23.

and when predicting the Babylonian invasion and conquest of Palestine, he simply forecasts probabilities, already foreshadowed by the growing power and menacing ambition of the Chaldean empire. The practice of fancifully adapting the language of prophets to events remote from the era of authorship was the work of later generations, seeking to authenticate the foregone conclusions of current theology by an arbitrary interpretation of the prophets, thus posthumously glorified by a predictive eminence surpassing their own prophetic pretensions.

There is no demand for prophets in modern communities; but, if we stood in need of prescient bards, the predictive sagacity of our age would prove sufficiently fruitful in prospective forecast to establish the reputation of a thousand prophets. Modern journalists occasionally forecast events with an accuracy which subsequently gives to merely conjectural essays the aspect of virtual history. One of the most remarkable prophecies of modern times was uttered by that distinguished but unfortunate Frenchman, Prévost-Paradol, who, when accredited as ambassador to the United States by Napoleon III., committed suicide, in the prescient consciousness of genius that he had accepted service under the Ruler whose policy would tarnish the glory and diminish the greatness of his beloved France.

These are his words, uttered two years before the tragic drama of Sedan: 'Yes, France will have to expiate, one way or the other—with the blood of her children if she succeeds, with the loss of her greatness, perhaps of her very existence, if she fails—the series of

faults committed in her name by her Government since the day when the dismemberment of Denmark was commenced under her eyes—since the day when France favoured that great disorder in the vain hope of profiting by it.' If this remarkable prediction, subsequently fulfilled in the lamentable results of the Franco-German war, had been uttered in an age of faith in prophecy, would not its author have been placed in the foremost rank of divinely inspired prophets?

No marvellous foresight is required to forecast the consequences of great political errors; but, if retrieved, the prophecy does not come off. Thus when we first heard of our faithful Egyptian ally, and even our own countrymen, apparently abandoned to the brutality of Arab bandits under the guns of a British fleet, we might have exclaimed, 'England shall yet expiate with blood, with treasure, and even with territory, the tarnished prestige of centuries.' But, when the thunder of her avenging guns was heard on the shores of the Mediterranean, Cassandra was put to silence, and Englishmen again placed greater faith in admirals than in prophets.

The illusion of prophetic control over the ordinary course of natural events is disclosed in the narrative recording the alliance of the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, for the purpose of quelling the rebellious revolt of the tributary King of Moab.¹ The allied sovereigns, having found their armies and cattle in danger of perishing through scarcity of water in the wilderness of Edom, decided on consulting a prophet of Jehovah, who was, accordingly, found in the person of Elisha,

¹ 2 Kings iii.

and requested by the allies to communicate with the Deity on the subject of their dire extremity. Elisha forthwith called for a minstrel—‘And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Jehovah came upon him, and he said, Thus saith Jehovah, make this valley full of ditches.’

To dig and obtain water is so natural an event that its explanation by the miraculous is obviously due to the superstition of a people, whose ignorance of causation furnished unlimited scope for fanciful conceptions of divine intervention in human affairs.

Let us, however, test the true nature of prophecy among the Hebrews by consulting the prophets themselves. Turning to Ezekiel xiii. we read: ‘And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, and say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Thus saith the Lord God, Woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying the Lord saith, and the Lord hath not sent them. And they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say the Lord saith it, albeit I have not spoken?’

Jeremiah xiv. 14–16: ‘Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them. They prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of naught and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord, concerning the prophets that

prophesy in my name and I sent them not, yet they say sword and famine shall not be in the land. By sword and famine shall these prophets be consumed; and the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword, and they shall have none to bury them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters, for I will pour their wickedness upon them.'

Two eminent Hebrew bards thus affirm the existence of false prophets, whose successful deception of the nation involves the most appalling calamities; and yet these inspired representatives of Jehovah suggest no means of determining the divine authenticity of prophetic pretensions. How therefore could the general community discriminate between the deception of fraudulent impostors, the illusions of honest fanaticism, and the revelations of inspired prophets? For scriptural enlightenment on this vital question we turn to Deuteronomy xviii. 20-22: 'The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.'

There is, perhaps, no passage in Deuteronomy more clearly proving its post-Mosaic authorship than this

reference to prophetic complications, unknown in the days of Moses, when revelation was attainable through Urim and Thummim.

The Deuteronomist or his interpolator, whether Jeremiah or some other prophet, is strangely ignorant of the purport of the language he attributes to divine wisdom. True prophecy is attested by its fulfilment. All false prophets shall surely die. No prediction is, therefore, applicable to events extending beyond the lifetime of an inspired prophet, because if he died pending the fulfilment of his prophecies he would necessarily be pronounced an impostor by his contemporaries. Could Omniscience, therefore, devise no more reliable means of attesting revelation than the unsatisfactory course of waiting an undefined period for the dubious results of prophetic prediction, or the premature death of deceptive prophets? Was life endurable under conditions of expectancy, involving joy or sorrow, prosperity or ruin, life or death, as prophets might prove true or false exponents of destiny? Was not the very existence of the nation imperilled by the inevitable vacillation of its rulers, perplexed by the divergent predictions of rival prophets, advocating conflicting views of home and foreign policy, in the name of Jehovah?

A remarkable instance of this form of prophetic strife is furnished by the contest between Hananiah and Jeremiah, in which the former advocated resistance to Babylon through an Egyptian alliance, and the latter counselled submission to Nebuchadnezzar as the will of Jehovah.¹ We regret the absence of Hananiah's version of this great political question, involving the national

¹ Jer. xxviii.

existence of the Hebrews; but, as the story reaches us through his rival, we are assured that he died prematurely as a false prophet—a result so analogous to the prophetic test of the Deuteronomist,¹ that the passage obviously belongs to the age of Jeremiah.

If prophecy is inseparable from these embarrassing conditions, could Jehovah have introduced fresh elements of confusion? In Deuteronomy xiii. we find the following remarkable passage, also assignable to the age of Jeremiah: ‘If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign and the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God proveth you to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. And that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.’

Again, in Ezekiel xiv. we read: ‘And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet; and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.’

We thus have true prophets dependent for attestation of their divine mission on the, possibly, tardy fulfilment of their predictions; impostors gifted with the power of working miracles that the Chosen Race

¹ Deut. xviii.

may be lured to apostasy ; and false prophets deceived by Jehovah Himself, and ruthlessly punished for irresponsible complicity in divine deception !

The contents of 1 Kings xxii. removes all doubt as to the practical meaning of these passages of Scripture. We there read of the alliance of Ahab, King of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, with the view of recovering Ramoth-Gilead from the King of Syria. At the suggestion of Jehoshaphat, Ahab consulted four hundred prophets respecting the prospects of the expedition, and received unanimous assurance of the destruction of the Syrians. Jehoshaphat, however, inquired whether there was no other prophet of Jehovah available for consultation. Ahab replied that there yet remained Micaiah, the son of Imlah, whom he hated for his unsatisfactory predictions. This prophet was, however, summoned to the presence of the kings, and contradicted his inspired brethren by forecasting the death of Ahab and the defeat of his army. This startling divergence of prophetic opinion he explained in the following manner : ‘ Hear thou, therefore, the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the Host of heaven standing by him on the right hand and on the left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead ? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith ? And he said I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also ; go forth, and do so. Now, therefore, the

Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.'

If this dramatic record of divine complicity in fraud and falsehood be true, Orthodoxy can no longer identify the tribal god of the Hebrews with the Supreme Being whom modern Christians worship; if it be false, so monstrous a calumny against the Deity finally discredits the claims of the Hebrew Scriptures to divine inspiration; but whether true or false, the scandal of these divergent prophecies destroys all confidence in Hebrew predictions, and warns us against accepting their imaginary fulfilment as confirmation of their divine origin.

Thus far the relationship of the ancient Hebrews to prophetic divination is clearly defined.

- (i) They had true and false prophets.
- (ii) True prophets falsely inspired by Jehovah.
- (iii) The only means of testing the credibility of prophecy was to wait its fulfilment or the death of the prophet.

Is it not obvious that the nation, whose domestic and foreign policy was controlled by so disastrous a superstition, was doomed to destruction as a foregone conclusion?

There remains a yet more important aspect from which to view the prophetic superstition. It is obvious that, if supernatural prediction has any basis in fact, the miracle lies in foreknowledge of future events which would occur in their natural sequence whether predicted or not; and not in the miraculous fulfilment of those events in consequence of their prediction. The actors, also, in the scenes forecast by prophets, must be

unconscious of any design to accommodate their conduct to the prediction, or otherwise the prophecy simply produces its own fulfilment, and loses all claim to the miraculous. But the Hebrew Scriptures clearly show that prophets circumstantially announced impending events, inculcated their fulfilment as a religious duty, and thus evoked that pernicious superstition which prompted the zeal of fanaticism to co-operate with the Deity in blindly executing the decrees of His prophets. How vast and overwhelming an influence this superstition has exercised in the evolution of Christianity will appear at a later stage of our inquiries.

Thus armed with power to influence human thought, shall we blame the prophets if they sometimes adopted pious frauds to accomplish national purposes? The most remarkable instance of fictitious prophecy is, perhaps, furnished by that passage of Scripture in which Cyrus is named, more than a century before his existence, not by Isaiah, but by the 'Great Unknown' of the Captivity, who obviously personated a remote predecessor with the patriotic design of influencing Cyrus to restore the Hebrews to Palestine.¹

'In the first year of the reign of Cyrus,' says Josephus,² 'God commiserated the captivity and calamity of the Israelites, as he had foretold by Jeremiah the prophet, that, after they had undergone a servitude of seventy years, he would restore them to the land of their fathers, and they should build their temple and enjoy their ancient prosperity. And these things did God grant them, for he stirred up the mind of Cyrus, and made him write this through all Asia: Thus

¹ Isa. xlv. 28.

² *Antiq.* xi. 1.

saith Cyrus the King—Since God Almighty hath appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is that God which the Israelites worship: for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judea. This was known to Cyrus *by his reading the book* which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies; for this prophet said that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision: My will is that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back my people to their own land, and build my temple. Accordingly, *when Cyrus read this*, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him *to fulfil what was so written*; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem and the temple of God.’

We have attributed the very flattering language addressed to Cyrus by Jehovah to the pen of the ‘Great Unknown,’ but his work was not improbably interpolated by the pious conspirators who designed and accomplished the return from captivity. If, however, we even accept the prediction as the veritable forecast of Isaiah, it follows that, in the opinion of the Hebrews, prophecy was miraculously fulfilled when a man deliberately performed actions which he was assured had been divinely decreed, and for which he had been rewarded in anticipation by the gift of empire.

This view of Hebrew prophecy receives further confirmation from Josephus¹ in the narrative which

¹ *Antiq.* xiii. 3.

depicts the High Priest Onias, when living in exile at Alexandria, obtaining permission from Ptolemy Philometer to build a Hebrew temple at Heliopolis, on the grounds that Isaiah had prophesied that 'there should be an altar in Egypt to Jehovah.'

CHAPTER VIII.

SAUL.

SAMUEL having succeeded Eli as the last of the Judges of Israel, when conscious of the growing infirmities of age, appointed his two sons, Joel and Abia, as assistant judges, with the unhappy result of their detection by the Elders in the act of accepting bribes for the perversion of justice.¹

The addition of judicial corruption to the numerous other calamities endured for centuries under a theocratic government at length exhausted the patience of the long-suffering Israelites; who therefore determined on following the example of their more fortunate neighbours by adopting the monarchical form of government. It was a wise conclusion; and if they had elected a king invested with the royal prerogative to rule in absolute independence of Samuel and all the prophets, the Hebrews might have succeeded in reforming social abuses, developing internal resources, and so organising national capabilities for resisting foreign aggression as to have founded a permanent dynasty, ruling a united and prosperous people with much happier results than are now found in the blood-stained annals of Israel and Judah.

The moral courage of the people did not, however,

¹ 1 Sam. viii.

rise to the occasion. The prophetic superstition was too powerful for the development of independent public opinion ; and the Elders sealed the doom of the nation by requesting Samuel to appoint a king. The venerable prophet, personally hostile to political innovation, and feeling as confident as a modern Pope that the representative of God is necessarily the wisest temporal ruler, communicated the popular views to Jehovah, who, apparently unconscious of or unwilling to admit the disastrous failure of theocratic government, replied with the wounded *amour-propre* of an earthly sovereign deposed by rebellious and ungrateful subjects, and instructed Samuel to comply, under protest, with the wishes of the nation, at the same time warning them of the tyranny and oppression of an earthly king, demanding tithes of all their possessions, and making lackeys and confectioners of their sons and daughters—conditions of life which, if coincident with individual and national security, must have appeared to the harassed victims of theocratic anarchy far preferable to a precarious existence under inspired judges and prophets, who embittered the sufferings of private misfortune or national calamity by denouncing their victims as miserable sinners.

In Deuteronomy xvii. 14–20 we read a circumstantial prediction of the future adoption of the monarchical form of government by the Hebrews, after obtaining possession of the promised land. The king was to be chosen by Jehovah, and, when sitting on his throne, was to write out a copy of Deuteronomy, and study it all the days of his life.

Is this Mosaic forecast, or fictitious divination uttered after the event ?

In deprecating the election of a king, had Jehovah forgotten the prediction of Moses? Was the general community aware of the existence of the prophecy? Did Saul fulfil the prediction by copying the Book of Deuteronomy, and why did not the contents enable him to confront Samuel with the divine sanction of monarchy through the greatest of the prophets?

These are embarrassing questions for orthodox believers in the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy; but find their obvious solution in the fact, that neither Samuel nor his contemporaries had ever heard of a book unknown till more than four centuries later, in the reign of Josiah king of Judah.

It is important to observe, with reference to the fictitious dates of Hebrew Scripture, that not only was Deuteronomy unknown to Samuel, but the annals bearing his name were unknown to Josiah, who would have otherwise detected the pious conspiracy to assign Deuteronomy to the age of Moses, in Samuel's obvious ignorance of the inspired prediction forecasting a future kingdom of Israel.

The popular demand for a king having resulted in the abdication of Jehovah, we might reasonably expect divine permission for the Hebrews to elect their own king, and thus test, in his administration, the comparative merits of theocratic and human government. But, on the contrary, we read: 'Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear, a day before Saul came, saying, to-morrow, about this time, I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be Captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hands of the Philistines, for I have

looked upon my people, because their cry is come up unto me.’¹

But that we reject the prediction of the Deuteronomist as apocryphal, this sudden change in divine opinion would indicate that Jehovah had been searching the register of ancient prophecy, or consulting Moses on the necessity of fulfilment—a hypothesis involving no irreverence towards a Deity whose defective memory and vacillating judgment are so candidly admitted by His own annalists.

Notwithstanding the imperfection of human judgment, history furnishes some happy instances of personal rulers so judiciously chosen by their subjects as to combine, in their administration, internal peace and prosperity with successful resistance to foreign aggression. But what shall we say of the good fortune of a nation whose sovereign has been elected by divine wisdom! What foresight in counsel! What justice in judgment! What courage in action! What devotion to duty must characterise the Elect of Jehovah! If these expectations are falsified in the career of Saul, shall we attribute imprudent choice to the Deity, or assume that a theocratic *régime* had destroyed, in the entire nation, the public virtues which flourished among the heathen of antiquity?

But had the divine selection of a king any existence except in the imagination of the prophet? We read of the Phrygian peasant Gordius raised to the throne in response to an oracle which recommended the people to select for their king the first man going to the temple of Jupiter seated on a waggon. Samuel, excited by musical conjuration, was his own oracle; and if it had flashed upon him, in a moment of supposed inspiration, to

¹ 1 Sam. ix. 15, 16.

anoint as king the first man he should meet of exceptional stature, or the first client tendering *backsheesh* for the recovery of stray cattle, he would have proclaimed the stranger as the Lord's anointed with an honesty of conviction analogous to the faith of Roman cardinals when they elect a Pope by acclamation.

But if Saul were even possessed of the qualities of a great king, did not the persistent interference of Samuel annul the abdication of Jehovah, perpetuate the evils of Theocracy, prevent Saul from fairly testing the results of merely human government, and mock the Hebrews with a phantom king controlled or cursed by prophets?

In the beginning of his reign Saul obtained a great victory over the Ammonites ; and this auspicious event might have won the confidence and established the courage of his subjects, but that, at a great assembly of the people convoked by Samuel, the prophet renewed his denunciations of national iniquity in desiring a king : ' Now therefore,' said Samuel, ' stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to-day ? I will call upon the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain ; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord sent thunder and rain that day : and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not : for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.'¹

Thus far we have a king predicted by Moses, chosen by Jehovah, and nominated by Samuel, ruling over a

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 16-19.

people miraculously punished for desiring a form of government approved by Jehovah as the most effectual means of saving them from the Philistines!

If the purpose of Samuel had been to discredit and paralyse the administration of Saul, could he have more effectually accomplished his design than by thus depicting monarchical government not only as a folly but as a crime? The result was a foregone conclusion; and, when Saul was subsequently at war with the Philistines, he beheld his subjects following him with fear and trembling, or hiding themselves 'in caves and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.' What misery and wretchedness do not these words involve!¹

In 1 Sam. xiii. we read of Saul offering a sacrifice to Jehovah in the absence of Samuel. For this venial offence the prophet announced the deposition of the king in favour of a 'man after God's own heart,' and yet David assumed ecclesiastical robes, offered sacrifices, and bestowed the priestly benediction with impunity.²

In chap. xv. we have the command of Jehovah to 'smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.' Saul piously executed this atrocious edict, with the exception of sparing Agag, and a choice selection of sheep and oxen.

This error of judgment, redressed by Samuel's murder of Agag, was pronounced an unpardonable offence; Jehovah repented of His choice; Samuel departed to anoint David; the Spirit of the Lord was transferred from Saul to the future king; and Satan

¹ 1 Sam. xiii, 6.

² 2 Sam. vi.

took possession of the deposed monarch. Omniscience might err and repent; but Saul's contrition could not avert the extreme penalty inflicted for the defective obedience of an untutored rustic, on whom the responsibilities of government had been suddenly thrust.

Thus, Jehovah and Samuel abandoned the Chosen Race to the personal government of a man, worried into insanity or divinely afflicted as a demoniac, whose intermittent frenzy was to be further intensified by the irritating consciousness that a divinely appointed rival awaited his deposition or death to occupy the throne of Judah.

Saul and his subjects had never ceased to reverence Jehovah; they are not accused of worshipping alien gods; and yet, for merely trivial errors, the career of the king was closed by suicide or assassination; and his unhappy subjects slain or driven forth as fugitives before the victorious Philistines. What clearer refutation can we hold of the theory, sustained by all the prophets, that the calamities of Israel were manifestations of divine wrath against idolatry? Shall we not rather say that the Hebrews were driven to worship at other shrines by the violated promises of their prophets?

In the story of Saul we detect the popular error which classes royalty among the divine institutions of Scripture—a fallacy refuted by Samuel when he called down fire from heaven to attest divine condemnation of monarchy. The prophets spoke of 'the Lord's anointed' when they had usurped the right to nominate Hebrew kings; but monarchy originated, not in divine, but in human wisdom, seeking social order and political stability through the personal rule of the strongest and the

wisest, who thus became the founders of permanent dynasties, born to the heritage of governing nations. In modern times, constitutional monarchy commands the allegiance of all, who wisely recognise the wisdom of loyalty to the hereditary chief of the commonwealth, claiming our homage, not as the representative of a sacred superstition, but as the executor of the wisdom of the ages. Unanointed kings, therefore, receive their meed of reverence from nations who identify their greatness with a governing race; and, when Royalty claims our homage in the person of a lovely and charming woman, born in the purple as the descendant of kings, loyalty needs no prophetic fiction to evoke its highest form of chivalrous devotion. Alexandra of Wales may seem to inspire, amid scenes of peaceful prosperity, no greater depth of national feeling than respectful interest in a lady of exalted rank; but, if she were overshadowed by the misfortunes of a Marie Stuart, or a Marie Antoinette, men would stake life and fortune in her cause, and, losing on the cast, walk proudly to the scaffold with a smile on their lips.

The disastrous degeneracy of parliamentary government in our time gives us the greater occasion for rejoicing that we still possess a Royal Dynasty to which we may, some day, appeal, to save society from anarchy and confiscation, and rule us in the good old fashion of beneficent despotism.

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID.

THE accession of David to power effected important changes in the social and political condition of the Hebrews. The new monarch was not only a pious man, at all times ready to sing the praises of Jehovah, but also a practical statesman, who detected in political success many other elements besides the miraculous. Whilst, therefore, conciliating priests and prophets with diplomatic tact, he conducted his administration in harmony with the ordinary rules of political expediency, and directed special attention to the arts of military organisation, which have exercised a more important influence on the rise and fall of empires than the prayers of priests or the curses of prophets—but with what results for the Hebrew people?

More than a thousand years had elapsed since Canaan had been promised to the descendants of Abraham, and about four centuries since Joshua had partially conquered and divided the land among the tribes of Israel; and yet the work of blood was now to be renewed to establish, by right of conquest, a merely mushroom empire, doomed by prophets to disruption within the third generation. We read of David smiting the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, and Ammonites, and rivalling

Joshua in the ferocious cruelties inflicted on men and animals ; but what of the tens of thousands of dead and dying Israelites lying on these numerous battle-fields ? It was very well for David to tune his harp and burst into ecstatic praise of Jehovah for placing on his head the golden crown of Ammon ; but the sweetest strains of artistic or inspired minstrelsy could not drown the despairing cry of the widows and orphans of Israel, deprived of their natural protectors, and ignorant how soon the Philistines or Ammonites might return, and imitate David by placing *them* under iron harrows.¹

Not only were the Hebrews under David subject to the calamities involved in ambitious wars of conquest, but so great a favourite of Jehovah or His prophets was this most fortunate king, that the penalties for his errors or crimes were inflicted, not on him, but on his irresponsible subjects.

We need not repeat the well-known episode in the life of David which connects his name with the seduction of Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, as our present interest lies in the form attributed to divine retribution. David, having been convicted by Nathan the prophet, repented in sackcloth and ashes, and was forgiven, but the weight of punishment was inflicted on the nation in the form of civil war with the king's son Absalom, through which twenty thousand Israelites perished in the wood of Ephraim—a heavy tribute of innocent blood exacted through some incomprehensible principle of supernatural justice.

In 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, we have the abrupt announcement : ‘ And again the anger of the Lord was kindled

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 31.

against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.' Again in 1 Chron. xxi. we read: 'And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.'

It is futile to comment on this grotesque parody of providential intervention in human affairs. If the author of Samuel is correct, Jehovah acted as if he were indeed a spirit of evil; but if the compiler of Chronicles is more worthy of credit, Satan had entered upon the scene to enhance the miseries of a nation whose government seems to have been the pastime of capricious gods and men.

The census of Israel and Judah, whether effected under Divine, Satanic, or human auspices, was condemned as a crime by Jehovah, with optional penalties of famine, military disaster, or pestilence. David accepted the latter, and seventy thousand men of Israel accordingly perished, before Jehovah repented of His cruelty, and stayed the hand of the destroying angel.

When we consider the amount of social misery and domestic anguish involved in the unmerited and yet appalling calamity thus inflicted on the plague-stricken victims of divine wrath, we abandon all hope of verifying in the annals of David the existence of a race divinely chosen for the special favour of the same Deity who, nearly one thousand years later, descended on earth to interpret the providential policy of His Father in heaven, not through the pestilential breath of the destroying angel, but by compassionate alleviation of the sufferings of disease.

David is not only a central figure in the historic drama of Israel, but has also exercised an important

influence on the opinions and practice of modern Christianity.

The story of a man so pre-eminently pious and wicked as David necessarily absorbs the attention of men desirous of reconciling the claims of religion with the attractions of Mammon. They see the Hebrew monarch guilty of errors which shock the proprieties of modern respectability, and yet they are assured on inspired authority that the royal sinner was a man after God's own heart. What therefore is the secret of divine favour? The question is easy of solution. David composed and sung more psalms to the honour and glory of God than all the prophets, saints, and martyrs known to sacred history. If therefore, tempted by Satan, we should unhappily fall into any of the sins of our age by adulterating human food, building with unbaked bricks and untempered mortar, betraying our trust for a commission, or issuing a legally unassailable but morally fraudulent prospectus, let us hasten to the nearest Temple of psalmody, and seek divine favour by singing the praise of the Lord in the most laudatory stanzas of the royal bard of Judah.

As this aspect of the question practically depicts David as the ancient father of modern Cant, it is due to his memory to inquire whether any episodes in his career identify his character with the vice of hypocrisy.

We read in 2 Sam. xx., 'There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered, It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.' This monstrous oracle, whether obtained by the divination of Urim or the fanaticism of

prophets, resulting in the cruel murder of seven members of the family of Saul, obviously cloaked the design of exterminating possible pretenders to the throne, in harmony with the immemorial practice of Eastern despots.

In chapter xvi. we find Shimei, a member of the house of Saul, cursing David as the murderer of his family. The king heard this abusive language with a mild humility, worthy of a modern apostle of peace : ‘ Let him alone and let him curse,’ said David, ‘ for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.’ Shimei subsequently made an abject apology, and was forgiven by the apparently magnanimous king. But, when David was on his death-bed, confiding his last wishes to Solomon, he said : ‘ And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei, the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim : but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death by the sword. Now therefore, hold him not guiltless ; for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him ; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.’¹ Solomon, accordingly, on the death of the king, took the first favourable opportunity of murdering Shimei ; and the entire narrative thus convicts David of systematic hypocrisy. The dying monarch still further withdrew the veil from his true character by suggesting to Solomon the murder of his old companion in arms, Joab, and the veteran

¹ 1 Kings ii. 8, 9.

was accordingly sacrilegiously slain within the sanctuary of the tabernacle.

David has left a pernicious legacy to mankind in the superstition of the 'allotted period,' which cuts short the melancholy days of pious septuagenarians depressed by a sacred death-warrant. The Council of Trent, however, in canonising the Apocrypha, transformed the 'allotted period' into one hundred years; and they who accept the Wisdom of the son of Sirach as Scripture are all, therefore, possible centenarians.¹

In comparing the annals of Saul and David, we find Hebrew history controlled by the same laws of causation which determine the fortunes of all human communities. Saul, a man of deep religious convictions, was so hopelessly crushed by superstitious terror of prophetic denunciation that his subjects were not only deprived of the social and political advantages, unattainable except through human experience and sagacity intelligently dealing with the ordinary course of natural events, but they were even plunged into misery and calamity for which the Thaumaturgist, who had blighted the career of their leader, supplied no remedy in his sullen abandonment of king and country.

David was also a religious enthusiast, but he possessed a practical wisdom which excluded priests and prophets from a preponderating influence in the state; and thus his subjects were partially protected from the extremes of fanaticism rampant during the reign of his rash and excitable predecessor.

Modern statesmanship inevitably recognises that David was right and the prophets wrong, on the ques-

¹ Ecclus. xviii. 9.

tion of a national census, as indispensable to responsible rulers three thousand years ago as now, for correctly estimating the available resources of the country. David did not, therefore, consult Nathan or Gad on an affair of state which would have merely aroused their fanaticism; but he first numbered the people, and, when this great public duty had been accomplished, he charmed his confessors with penitential psalms, in sack-cloth and ashes.

The successful career of David as warrior and statesman probably inspired the Hebrew nation with hope that Jehovah had at length tardily fulfilled His covenant with Abraham, and bestowed on them the promised land as an everlasting possession. But superstition is stronger than princes, and more enduring than the life of a nation. Their warrior king had cherished and controlled an institution on which he fondly hoped his dynasty might rest throughout the unbroken succession of centuries: could he have foreseen that the prophets of futurity would destroy the national results of his sagacity and prowess, David would, most assuredly, have received an oracle, or seen a vision, instructing him to proscribe and exterminate the entire school of the prophets, which he would have accomplished, in the name of the Lord, with a purpose as inflexible as the spirit of Mehemet Ali, when he planned and accomplished the destruction of the Mamelukes.

CHAPTER X

SOLOMON.

THE wisdom of Solomon has not only been celebrated in the annals of Judah, but invested with all the marvels of Wonderland, in the traditions and legends of both Jews and Gentiles. We learn from the last words of David that his illustrious son had acquired a reputation for natural sagacity before his wisdom had assumed the imaginative form of a divine gift. Possessed, therefore, of a penetrating and far-reaching intelligence, Solomon had, doubtless, learned from the tragedy of Saul and the experience of David, that the social and political problem waiting successful solution was the administration of public affairs, in absolute independence of the disorganising intervention of prophets.

Even the wisdom and courage of Solomon would have inevitably failed in an unequal contest with the prophetic superstition of his age, if he had not supplemented the commanding influence of his genius by adopting some element of the supernatural. Socrates had his familiar spirit (*δαιμόνιον*), and Numa his Egeria, to disarm the malice of envy by attributing personal wisdom to inspiration; and the sagacious monarch of Israel dreamt that, in an interview with Jehovah, he had been divinely chosen as the wisest man of all time.

There was not, of course, any eye-witness of the

vision ; but it was an age of miracles ; and a king, ever invested with the divine halo of supernatural wisdom, was so obvious an improvement on the spasmodic frenzy of ecstatic prophets, that their national influence was overshadowed by the majestic presence of Solomon ; and the disturbing element of their fanaticism ceased to trouble Israel for a generation ; to be however revived, with disastrous results, when the sceptre of Solomon should have passed to a monarch as deficient in natural as in miraculous wisdom.

The personal prestige of Solomon having thus changed the position of the prophets, Gad the seer (Chozeh), and Nathan the prophet (Nâbi), became national annalists ; the sons of the latter accepted government appointments ;¹ and Solomon appeared at the dedication of the temple as a supreme Pontiff, invested with the dazzling splendour of a gorgeous ritualism, and speaking with the authority of priest and prophet, in the name of Jehovah.²

The introduction of reason and common sense into the affairs of the nation produced most satisfactory results. Solomon having secured immunity from foreign aggression, by constructing fortified positions, organising powerful armies, and concluding important alliances, furthermore developed the internal resources of the kingdom by patronising art, fostering commerce, and encouraging maritime enterprise by the construction of fleets which, freighted with the produce of Palestine, exchanged their cargoes, in numerous ports, for the merchandise of many climes, as materials for the workmanship of skilled artisans hastening to scenes of

¹ 1 Kings iv. 5.

² 1 Kings viii. 22.

peaceful industry, where life and property were guaranteed by a wise and stable government.

The triumph of reason over fanaticism is clearly shown in the adoption of cavalry as an important element of strength in the armies of Solomon.

In Joshua xi. we read: 'And the Lord said unto Joshua, thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. And Joshua did unto them as the Lord bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.'

2 Sam. viii. 4: 'And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for a hundred chariots.'

There was no Society for the prevention of cruelty to animals under a Theocracy, for its members would have been denounced as impious opponents of the divine will. Shall we, therefore, in this age of sympathy for all animal suffering, believe that the Deity once sanctioned wanton cruelty towards the noble animal which both modern Jews and Gentiles delight to honour as the faithful friend of man?

The superstitious prejudice of the ancient Hebrews against the use of cavalry explains their frequent defeats by nations who prudently supplemented their reliance on the gods with all the natural resources available for defensive or aggressive warfare.

All this was changed by the genius of Solomon, who 'had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely every man under his vine and under his

fig-tree from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.' Human intelligence had, therefore, accomplished all which prophets had vainly hoped to achieve through the miraculous; and the Hebrews enjoyed a period of peaceful prosperity, never to be again experienced except as the subjects of alien monarchs, as sagacious as Solomon in placing the skilful tactics of experienced generals above the enthusiastic piety of inspired prophets.

In Isa. xxxi. we read: 'Woe to them who go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are many; and in horsemen because they are strong; but they look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord.'

Thus, in later generations the prophets, who opposed an Egyptian alliance, renewed the exploded superstition against horses, and to them we assign the cognate passage in Deut. xvii. 16 expressing the same views. To these eminent Nâbis it was of much greater importance to give effect to the supposed will of Jehovah than to save their countrymen from being cut down or carried off by the cavalry of the enemy.

To all these social and political benefits, conferred by Solomon on the nation, he added the priceless boon of religious toleration. Anglican Christians periodically solicit divine mercy for the ignorant, supercilious, and hard-hearted people who, under the various denominations of Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics, presume to differ from them in opinion.¹ But Solomon, in his eloquent address to Jehovah, at the dedication of the Temple, solicited a favourable response from the

¹ Third Collect, Good Friday.

Hebrew Deity to the prayers of foreign worshippers of alien gods, occasionally attracted towards the Temple at Jerusalem by the reputation of Jehovah: 'Moreover concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake, when he shall come and pray towards this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for.' Thus Solomon, three thousand years ago, spoke in advance of the sectarianism of the nineteenth century; for what Christian church or sect could believe in divine acceptance of prayer from the graceless lips of unbaptised Humanity?

Unhappily for the Hebrew nation, both David and Solomon encouraged the social evil of polygamy by their example. It seems almost incredible that the poet who was capable of feeling and expressing the refined passion poured forth in the Song of Songs, could have fallen into the abyss of sensuality attributed to him by his annalists; but his premature death, weary of all things as utter vanity, indicates a cerebral exhaustion suggestive of excess; and his declining years doubtless furnished sufficient evidence of premature decay to renew the hopes of the prophets, whose intervention now assumed the criminal form of treason against king and country.

In 1 Kings xi. 26 we read of Solomon noticing the energetic qualities of Jeroboam, the son of his servant Nebat, and advancing him to be 'ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.' This recipient of royal favour was so ungrateful that 'he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted

up his hand against the king; it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem that the prophet Ahijah, the Shilonite, found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment, and they two were alone in the field; and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces; and he said to Jeroboam, Take these ten pieces, for thus saith the Lord the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel.'

Let us choose whether the obscure prophet, who thus proposed to destroy the happiness of a people, and overthrow the power of an empire, was an envoy of Jehovah, a secret conspirator, or an irresponsible fanatic.

If Ahijah was, indeed, the messenger of an angry God, jealous of a divided worship, did Omniscience select as a religious reformer a traitor to king and country, that he might perpetuate national apostasy by proclaiming the golden calves of Dan and Bethel as the gods of Israel; and finally hear the appalling denunciations of the same prophet, predicting that his children should be devoured by ravenous dogs and vultures, and the nation rejected 'because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and made Israel to sin?'¹

How incomprehensible are the views of ancient Hebrew annalists respecting the character of the national Deity, whom they thus depict as violating all his promises to the Chosen Race by refusing to Rehoboam, the grandson of David, a single chance of establishing a

¹ 1 Kings xiv.

permanent dynasty over the empire of Solomon, in the disruption of which the national hopes of Israel were finally doomed to perish !

If we are, indeed, reading history, to us Ahijah is a dangerous fanatic, Jeroboam a willing traitor, and the occasion—when tempter and tempted stood thus alone in the field—the momentous hour which was finally to determine the fortunes of the Hebrew race for all time.

If Jeroboam had been an honest man and promptly denounced, in the presence of the king, the pernicious fanaticism which menaced dynasty and empire, Solomon might yet have impeached the prophets, destroyed their political influence, and thus changed the future course of ancient and modern history.

Several generations later, when the prophet Amos publicly predicted that Jeroboam II., king of Israel, should die by the sword, ‘Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel.’¹ This was, obviously, the rational view of prophetic denunciation ; but prophecy seems then to have been disarmed of its superstitious terrors. The king received the communication with contemptuous silence, and stultified the prophet by a prosperous reign and peaceful death. As Amos, however, was an irregular practitioner, holding no diploma from the schools of the prophets, perhaps the sacred annalists did not consider it necessary that his predictions should be accurately fulfilled.

Solomon was also warned of the conspiracy against his empire, but too late to prevent the escape of

¹ Amos vii.

Jeroboam into Egypt; whence he returned on the death of his royal benefactor, to usurp the throne of Israel, in fulfilment of the supposed will of the Deity.

The sacred annalists apparently intimate that the defection of the ten tribes was caused by the ungracious refusal of Rehoboam to lighten the national burden of taxation; but in 1 Kings xii. 15 we read: 'Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.' It mattered not, therefore, whether the son of Solomon was wise or foolish. He, as well as Jeroboam, was a mere cipher in the hands of prophetic destiny. Ahijah the Shilonite had spoken, the cause of the prediction was the idolatry of Solomon, the usurper would establish the worship of golden calves, but let Israel and even her religion perish rather than question the irrevocable decrees of the prophets!

Rehoboam would have willingly fought to preserve the union, 'but the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord; ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing is from me.'¹ We wonder what President Lincoln would have said to the prophet who told him it was from the Lord that he should let the Confederates go!

¹ 1 Kings xii. 22-24.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

JEHOVAH having thus abandoned the ten tribes of Israel, we might reasonably expect that the social and political result would have been left to the ordinary course of natural events. The new nation had received a divinely chosen king whose religious policy was, necessarily, foreseen by Jehovah; they were cut off from the head-quarters of their religion, and therefore accepted the golden calves of Dan and Bethel as authentic symbols of the national deity, set up by the Lord's anointed. But respite from prophetic denunciation was of brief duration. The representatives of Jehovah reappeared in the reign of Jeroboam, and renewed social and political anarchy by dooming dynasty after dynasty to purposeless destruction, at the hands of regicides, incited to assassination by predictions which promised them the throne of their victims.

The ostensible purpose of this reign of terror was to punish idolatry; but no change of dynasty relieved successive monarchs from the necessity of holding their own against Judah through independent forms of worship.

We read of Baasha exterminating the house of Jeroboam; Zimri slaying the heirs of Baasha, and terminating his own brief reign of seven days by suicide,

to be replaced by Omri, who plunged the nation into civil war to contest the crown with Tibni.¹

Omri succeeded in establishing his dynasty, but he 'wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him.' He was succeeded by his son Ahab, who married the much-abused Jezebel, a princess of the Zidonians, who introduced the worship of Baal into Samaria. How marvellous that Jehovah should have dismembered the empire and destroyed the family of Jeroboam, with no more satisfactory results than the disestablishment of the Mosaic priesthood in favour of the ministers of an alien god!

The famous prophets, Elijah and Elisha, are central figures in the tragic drama of the kingdom of Israel; but, although gifted with supernatural control of the elements, and even masters of life and death, their disastrous intervention in Hebrew affairs simply multiplied the blood-stained pages of the national annals.

If we associate David with modern hypocrisy, Elijah becomes the great prototype of that religious intolerance which inspired mediæval inquisitors, evoked the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and has universally incited hostile theologians to revile, persecute, torture, and murder each other for the honour and glory of God. The priests or prophets of Baal were Phœnicians, attracted to Samaria by the marriage of their countrywoman, and therefore conscientious votaries of the ancestral faith, in which they had been necessarily educated; or Hebrew converts who, with the instincts of courtiers, adopted the fashionable religion, as Pagans became Christians at the bidding of a Constantine, and

¹ 1 Kings xv., xvi.

Catholics embraced Protestantism in sympathy with a Henry or an Elizabeth. But Elijah admitted no plea of extenuating circumstances for theological error. All who differed from him in his conceptions of the divine had committed an unpardonable offence, meriting a violent death; he therefore became the public executioner of the prophets of Baal, and, having accomplished this work of blood, fled in terror from the vengeance of the queen, who was thus incited to emulation in the pious duty of slaying the prophets of Israel.

We next find the great Nâbi at Mount Carmel, where, with imagination tinged with blood, he heard 'a still small voice,' which whispered words involving murder and assassination!—'Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest anoint Hazael to be king of Syria; and Jehu son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel'—in other words, Go, name the servants of kings as their successors, that they may slay their royal masters.

The first oracle of the 'still small voice' was obeyed, not by Elijah, but by Elisha. In 2 Kings viii. we read of Benhadad, king of Syria, sending Hazael to Elisha to inquire whether he would recover from the disease which then afflicted him. Elisha told the messenger to inform the king that he might recover, but would surely die. The prophet then burst into tears, which—as he said—flowed for the appalling cruelties which his auditor would inflict on the children of Israel. Hazael naturally expressed profound astonishment at so improbable an event, and was then informed by Elisha that he should be king of Syria by divine decree.

The murder of Benhadad was, therefore, a foregone

conclusion. Hazael hastened to the king, soothed him with hopes of recovery, and, next morning, fulfilled prophecy by usurping the throne of Syria as the treacherous assassin of his royal master. Thus the equivocating oracle of Elisha proved suggestive of murder to the predestined assassin, who was raised to the throne of Syria that he might ruthlessly massacre the helpless women and children of Israel!

The curtain rises on the second tragedy of the 'still small voice,' as Elijah rushes into the highway to arrest the chariot of Ahab and pour forth appalling denunciations dooming the royal family to destruction, with all the ghastly horrors of the unsepulchred dead.¹

On that ill-omened day, when Ahab cowered beneath the wild fanaticism of the fierce old Nâbi, seated behind him in the chariot were two youthful attendants, one of whom, Jehu, was unconsciously predestined to become the future instrument of divine or prophetic vengeance. Time passed away. Ahab was dead, Joram was king, Jehu, now a powerful captain, sat in the midst of his officers at Ramoth-gilead; a young prophet from Elisha approached, demanded an audience, anointed Jehu king of Israel, and forthwith fled. The gift of royalty was, however, conditional on the massacre of all the royal family.²

Jehu was a zealous executor of prophecy. He slew Joram, and cast his body into the field of Naboth; he incited their guardians to murder the royal children, and placed their heads at the gates of Jezreel; he had Queen Jezebel thrown from a window, and drove his chariot over her body, which, abandoned in the high-

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 17-24.

² 2 Kings ix. 1-10.

way, was devoured by dogs—and this is called the fulfilment of prophecy! An eminent Nâbi predicts contemporary events, selects a suitable instrument, and promises him a throne as the reward of actions which, in fulfilling alleged prophecy, consecrate the crimes of fanaticism and ambition in the name of the Deity!

Students of Scripture thoughtlessly condemn unheard the victims of the prophets as meriting their appalling punishments; but their annalists are the partisans of their accusers, judges, and executioners. Modern critics have found that the monsters of history were not always so black as depicted by their political opponents. There are two sides to the story of even a Borgia or Richard III., and, if we could search the private records of the dynasty of Omri, we might find that, although Jezebel imitated Elijah, and anticipated Christianity in piously slaying her theological opponents, she possessed redeeming virtues, as wife, mother, and queen, which might have claimed the simple boon of human sepulture.

The zeal of Jehu exceeded the tribute of blood demanded by the prophets. He slew all the friends, relatives, and priests of Joram; he arrested and murdered forty-two members of the royal family of Judah, travelling in fancied security to visit the friends in Samaria whose heads were already in heaps at the gates of Jezreel; and, finally, he exterminated all the worshippers of Baal, with the satisfactory result of receiving the following message from Jehovah: ‘And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab all that was in mine heart,

thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.'¹

Did this saturnalia of blood, therefore, supply Jehovah with a king after his own heart? Not according to the compiler of 2 Kings, who informs us that 'Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin. In these days the Lord began to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel.' Smiting, according to the tearful Elisha, meant dashing out the brains of young children, and ripping open defenceless women.

Thus the tragic oracle of the 'still small voice' is fulfilled. Jehu was anointed to exterminate the family of Ahab, and Hazael was chosen to massacre the children of Israel, because their divinely elected king had disappointed the expectations of Jehovah. The author of Ecclesiasticus shows a just appreciation of the position when he assures us that Elijah 'anointed kings to take revenge.'²

But what shall we say of the climax to this strange medley of prophecy and Providence recorded in the prophet Hosea: 'And the Lord said unto him, call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.'³ Had Jehovah, therefore, repented of the massacre of the family of Ahab; and were the descendants of Jehu to be punished for the crimes of an ancestor, divinely approved and rewarded as righteousness, more than a century before they were born?

¹ 2 Kings x.

² Ecclesiasticus xlvi. 8.

³ Hosea i. 4.

The tragedy of Israel now hastens to a conclusion. The dynasty of Jehu produced one great king, Jeroboam II., who reconquered the lost territory, and restored the prosperity of his country, notwithstanding the imprecations of Amos, and the character for impiety received from the prophets.

It was a question of life and death for the Hebrews to secure a stable government through a permanent dynasty ; but the prophets had decreed that the house of Jehu should not reign after the fourth generation, therefore the son of Jeroboam was slain by a usurper, who also fell by the hands of his successor, within a month after his elevation to the throne. The new king, Menahem, became a tributary of Assyria, and transmitted the kingdom to his son, who was murdered by a fresh usurper, slain in his turn by Hoshea, the last monarch of the kingdom of Israel, in whose reign Samaria was besieged and destroyed by the Assyrians, who carried the ten tribes captive into Medea beyond the Euphrates. Thus the fanaticism of prophets had finally blighted the hopes of Israel, and falsified the solemn covenant of Jehovah with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the national extinction of ten out of twelve tribes of the Chosen Race.

When the Hebrew exiles had experienced the social and political advantages of life under a strong and stable government uncontrolled by prophets, they doubtless detected a natural sequence in human affairs, unbroken by the disturbing influence of the miraculous ; rejoiced at their escape from the pernicious fanaticism which had given them a national history of misery, anarchy, and bloodshed ; and forestalled the wisdom of modern

Jews by becoming the industrious, contented, and loyal subjects of alien governments sufficiently enlightened to treat them with justice.

There was no Stock Exchange at Nineveh, with exciting lists of Egyptian bonds and Babylonian scrip, to develop that genius for finance latent in the Hebrew race; but they doubtless devised ingenious methods of spoiling the Assyrians, and thus promptly attained conditions of prosperity and affluence which rendered them quite as unwilling to return to Palestine as modern Hebrews, who obviously prefer the Gentile attractions of Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and London, to even the milk and honey of the Holy Land.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

THE fall of the kingdom of Israel having secured for the survivors a happy escape, as Assyrian colonists, from Hebrew anarchy, the less fortunate kingdom of Judah had to endure, for a longer period, the calamities inseparable from fanatical reliance on the supernatural, and in her fall to transmit to a doomed remnant of the Hebrew race the fatal superstition which has set them apart for centuries as defenceless minorities among alien communities, whose inconsistent theologians have adopted a Jew as their Deity, whilst persecuting or ostracising the Hebrew race.

Although the dynasty of David retained dominion in Judah, the rule of even the most virtuous kings did not exempt the Jews from the denunciation of prophets or the judgments of God. Hezekiah excelled all the other kings of Judah in piety, and yet, during his reign, the kingdom twice suffered the devastations of foreign invasion, and he himself was divinely condemned to premature death, when only forty years old. The desire of the prophets and the will of the Deity had been fulfilled in the reign of a great religious reformer, who extirpated idolatry and restored the national worship, and yet Judah was to be plunged into social and political anarchy by cutting off the dynasty of David, through the premature death of a childless king.

Hezekiah, who had no hope beyond the grave, succeeded, however, in changing the divine purpose through prayer, and thus obtained a respite from death of fifteen years, during which period an heir to the throne was born. The Gospel according to Matthew traces the descent of Jesus through this son of Hezekiah. If, therefore, the divine decree had not been annulled, Jesus would never have been born, and modern communities would now be found worshipping some other Deity.

The predestined death of Hezekiah occurred when he was only fifty-six: he was, therefore, succeeded by a boy of twelve, who, deprived of paternal guardianship, grew up to restore idolatry, sacrifice human victims, and massacre his subjects. Thus revelation depicts the special dispensations of Providence among the Chosen Race.

The Hebrew annalist assures us that, in consequence of the extreme wickedness of Manasseh, the nation was condemned to final destruction,¹ but the judgment had been already pronounced by Isaiah in the previous reign, because Hezekiah had shown the national treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon.² For this simple act of courtesy Jehovah decreed the Babylonian captivity. Apologists tell us that Hezekiah was guilty of vanity; but what would become of individuals and nations if divinely punished because their rulers are merely human?

As the condemnation of a people for the venial offence of a ruler is irreconcilable with our conceptions of the Hebrew bard, whose sublimity commands the admiration of posterity, let us compare the alleged facts

¹ 2 Kings xxi.

² 2 Kings xx. 12-19.

of the sacred annalist with the inspired utterance of the prophet.

According to 2 Chron. xxix., Jehovah was wroth with Judah and Jerusalem because they had 'not burnt incense, and offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel.' Hezekiah, who 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord,' rivalled Solomon in sacrificial ritualism, pouring forth the blood of bullocks, and of lambs, and of goats as burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord.' These, according to the sacred annalist, were works of piety wrought during the lifetime of Isaiah in harmony with the will of Jehovah. But what says the prophet? 'Hear the word of the Lord, give ear unto the law of our God. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.'¹

If sacred annalists and inspired prophets thus differ in defining Hebrew piety, who shall disclose to us the will of the Hebrew God?

Hezekiah having been succeeded by two wicked kings, we again have a pious monarch in Josiah, zealous in the extirpation of idolatry and the restoration of

¹ Isa. i. 10-14.

Judaism. During the execution of repairs in the temple, Hilkiah the priest said unto Shaphan the scribe : 'I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord.'¹ The king, terrified by the imprecations contained in this mysterious volume, consulted Huldah, an inspired prophetess, and learned with dismay that the most appalling curses ever uttered by human lips² were to be inevitably inflicted on the people for not obeying the words of a book the contents of which were unknown to them. What further interest could the doomed nation, therefore, feel in the worship of a Deity whose inspired prophetess had thus annulled his promises, and rendered the future ministration of prophets a mere mockery of men who had finally lost all the hopes of religion ?

The theory of divine intervention in Hebrew politics becomes even more confused when we read of Josiah, a monarch surpassing even David in piety, prematurely slain in battle in violation of the inspired prediction of Huldah, that he should be borne to his grave in peace.

The tragedy of Judah now hastens to a close, under the auspices of Jeremiah, the most fanatical of all the Hebrew prophets, who discloses, in his varying moods, all the symptoms of insanity. He tells us that the Lord put forth His hand, touched his mouth, and gave him supreme control over the prosperity or destruction of kingdoms and nations.³ Anon, he suffers inevitable reaction from this mental exaltation, curses the day of his birth,⁴ and anathematises all who differ from him in

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 8.

² Deut. xxviii.

³ Jer. i. 9, 10.

⁴ Jer. xx. 14.

opinion;¹ and yet some eminent commentators see in this poor victim of cerebral disease the veritable type of Jesus of Nazareth!

Earlier prophets had encouraged national repentance, and sustained national hope, by depicting Jehovah as the divine partisan of their race, ever prepared to miraculously resist foreign invaders in fulfilment of his solemn covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but, marvellous to relate, Jeremiah suddenly announces: 'Thus saith the Lord, I have made the earth, and given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now I have given all this land into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant. The nations and kingdoms which will not put their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them with his hand.'² Is not this the language of insanity? Could foreign nations know or accept the decrees of the Hebrew God, of whom they could only have heard as the spiritual enemy of their race? Could the heirs of Abraham believe that Jehovah had doomed them to appalling calamity for reliance on the divine promises? Jeremiah might proclaim Nebuchadnezzar as the chosen servant of God, but rival prophets uttered conflicting oracles, the inspiration of which could only be tested by waiting for their fulfilment or the premature death of the prophets: meanwhile, the responsible rulers of the country might passively await impending destruction.

Can we wonder if the men, whose common sense approved the Egyptian alliance as the only means of

¹ Jer. xviii. 18-23.

² Jer. xxvii.

escape from Babylon, denounced Jeremiah as a traitor whose advocacy of non-resistance to foreign aggression was demoralising the warriors of Judah? The prophet was, however, no suborned traitor, but an honest fanatic, who, mistaking the merely human forecast of Babylonian conquest for divine revelation, attributed impending events to the decree of Jehovah; and thus finally disposed of the theory of a Chosen Race by depicting the national God as the author of national ruin.

The inhabitants of Judah were at length carried captive into Babylon, where under a stable government they developed those habits of enterprise and industry so conspicuous in their modern descendants, and attained a material prosperity which rendered them quite as unwilling to return to the Holy Land as their brethren of Israel, who had been already absorbed within the national life of Gentile civilisation. When, therefore, the prophets of the Captivity proclaimed a new exodus, the opulent Hebrews remained with their possessions, and witnessed the departure of their poorer brethren devoted to the hopeless task of, some day, restoring the empire of Solomon through supernatural assistance.

The entire body of Hebrew emigrants consisted of about forty-two thousand. At a remote period of their history, at least two millions of the children of Israel set out from Egypt with the same design of obtaining possession of the Promised Land; and now, after the lapse of nearly a thousand years, the national roll-call of a people, who were to have counted as the sands of the sea-shore, could only assemble numbers equivalent to the population of a modern country town.

If the prophecy of Jeremiah respecting the return

from Babylon within seventy years be not a *vaticinium ex eventu*, then the prediction produced its own fulfilment. Daniel declares that he learned the predestined period of the Captivity from the writings of Jeremiah.¹ In due time, therefore, the Jews who were desirous of restoring Jerusalem brought before Cyrus the alleged prophecies of Isaiah, in which the Hebrew Deity addresses that monarch by name nearly two hundred years before his birth: 'I am the Lord, that saith of Cyrus he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.' And again: 'Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, I will go before thee, and give thee hidden treasures, that thou mayest know that I the Lord which call thee by thy name am the God of Israel.' The obvious inconsistency of this predictive accuracy with the customary vagueness of Hebrew oracles, discloses the presence of pious fraud, interpolating Isaiah to win the co-operation of Cyrus in the patriotic design of rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem.

On this subject we hold the independent testimony of Josephus, already cited in Chapter VII. of this work, according to which the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy meant the study of ancient bards and the deliberate accomplishment of their supposed predictions. How marvellous that the candid admissions of the Hebrew historian have not, long since, revealed to Christian theologians the vanity of prophetic pretensions to the miraculous!

¹ Dan. ix. 2.

Under what divine covenant did the Jews return to the Holy Land? 'Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For lo, the days come that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon Mount Ephraim and Gilead. In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.'¹ Again: 'For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel. Neither shall the priests of the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to sacrifice continually. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.'² Does the subsequent history of the Jews authenticate the inspiration of the prophet, by recording the fulfilment of the promises of Jehovah?

For two centuries after the return from Babylon the Jews remained subject to Persia. On the conquest of that empire by the Macedonians, and the death of Alexander the Great, rival generals fought for the possession of Judæa, which eventually became the prize of Ptolemy Lagus, who entered Jerusalem on the sabbath

¹ Jer. l. 19, 20.

² Jer. xxxiii. 17, 18, 22.

without resistance, because Hebrew piety had now attained a perfection which placed the observance of Mosaic law above the duties of patriotism.

Another century witnessed the dominion of the Ptolemies in Judæa, followed by the invasion of Antiochus the Great, who defeated the Egyptian general and annexed the Holy Land, under the name of Palestine, to the kingdom of Syria.

The Jews enjoyed an interval of prosperity under their new master and his immediate successor, but Antiochus Epiphanes sold and resold the office of High Priest to rival candidates of Grecian culture, whose tumultuous conflicts summoned the Syrian monarch to Jerusalem, where he massacred forty thousand of the inhabitants, plundered the temple, defiled the sanctuary, and departed with a multitude of captives, leaving the survivors at the mercy of a Phrygian governor surpassing his master in cruelty.

Two years later Antiochus sent Apollonius to Jerusalem to revive the tragedy of rapine, slavery, and massacre, with the appalling results of thousands slain, whilst piously obeying the fourth commandment, the city plundered and burnt, its walls demolished, and hostile fortifications constructed on Mount Zion, within which the Syrian garrison retired with the captive wives and daughters of the dishonoured dead.

Still greater horrors awaited the unhappy Jews. An edict of the Syrian tyrant proclaimed catholicity of worship throughout his dominions; Mosaic rites and ceremonies were abolished; altars erected to Syrian gods; the temple reconsecrated to Olympian Jove; and the worship of Jehovah suppressed with a savage

cruelty, which terrified some into apostasy, and bestowed on others the crown of martyrdom.

Thus, in the fourth century from the Restoration, we find the unhappy descendants of the Hebrews, who had been lured from Babylon by the fatal mirage of prophecy, suffering the disastrous consequences of superstitious reliance on the supernatural. According to prophetic oracles, they were to multiply as the sands of the sea, and yet their country is depopulated by recurrent massacre. They were to live as freemen under the dynasty of David, and yet are the defenceless slaves of an alien despot. Their reconstructed city was to endure for ever,¹ and yet its houses are destroyed, and its walls demolished. The priesthood was to offer unfailing sacrifices, and yet Mosaic ritualism is abolished, and its ministers slain or forced to witness the appalling sacrilege of Jehovah's altar defiled by the impious abominations of heathen worship.

There can be no pretence that these calamities are inflicted in punishment of Hebrew transgressions. The sins of their forefathers had been blotted out; and, from the Restoration to the massacres of Antiochus, the Hebrews had renounced idolatry, fulfilled the law, and worshipped Jehovah with all the piety demanded by the most zealous of the Prophets; and, if some tendency to Grecian apostasy existed among them, general loyalty to Jehovah sustained the national claim to the favour and protection of the national God. When, therefore, we find Jehovah as unmindful of his promises, and as callous to Hebrew suffering, as fourteen centuries previously, when the daughters of Israel wept

¹ Jer. xxxi. 33-40.

for their murdered children on the banks of the Nile, can we escape the inevitable conclusion that Hebrew and Delphian oracles were equally illusory?

The results of theocratic superstition having culminated in these Syrian atrocities, the time had come for trusting more in man and less in Providence. Horrified by the unmerited sufferings of his unhappy countrymen, the aged Mattathias, appealing to the courage of despair, raised the standard of revolt against Syrian despotism; and entered upon the patriotic struggle which, continued with varying fortunes by his heroic sons, achieved results giving to the Jews a brief interval of national life under the Asmonæan princes.

The outlines of this great Hebrew drama are traced in the pages of 1 Maccabees—a work which approaches nearer to the form of history than any other of the Hebrew annals; and, unlike the more mythical version of 2 Maccabees, depicts Hebrew vicissitudes in harmony with the natural sequence of events, unbroken by one vestige of the supernatural.

So exemplary was the piety of the nation at this disastrous epoch of their history that one of the first events of the war was the massacre of a thousand Hebrews, who preferred death to resisting the enemy on the sabbath. The common sense of Mattathias overruled this suicidal piety; and henceforth, the law of self-preservation controlled the observance of the fourth commandment. The sagacious sons of the Hebrew Tribune further sustained the claims of human reason by trusting more to skilful strategy and astute diplomacy than to the predictions of prophets and the promises of Jehovah.

In the fourth generation of the Asmonæan family independence was won, and Aristobulus I. assumed the title of king. The nation remained faithful to the law of Moses and the worship of Jehovah : but we fail to trace, in their domestic annals or foreign relationship, the faintest vestige of miraculous favour towards a chosen race. The later generations of the Asmonæan princes, corrupted by power, disclose their degeneracy in domestic crimes ; rival candidates claim the throne of David, and contending factions invite the arbitration of Roman generals to establish legitimacy or sanction usurpation. And when Pompey, Antony, or Cæsar become the arbiters of Hebrew destiny, the time is at hand when prophetic dreams of a chosen race and a partisan God must perish in the presence of a practical Providence which then, as now, bestowed its favours on the most skilful generals and the most powerful armies.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSIONS.

WHAT, therefore, are our conclusions? As we hold no authentic records of Hebrew antiquity, we necessarily assign to patriarchal supernaturalism a place among the myths of ancient Greece and Rome. Assuming that Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew race, and honestly accepted dreams and visions as divine revelation, his conceptions of Divinity fall infinitely short of the higher ideal of Aryan races, as defined in the Sacred Scriptures of India; and we doubt the monotheism of a man whose Deity partakes of a feast so much less worthy of Divinity¹ than the ambrosial banquets of Olympian gods. It is true that Abraham's mysterious Guest claims jurisdiction over the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah; but when he exclaims, 'I will go down now and see whether they have done according to the cry of it which is come unto me, and if not I will know,' we miss the characteristic attributes of the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

We do not question that the children of Israel once lived in Egypt, and went forth under the leadership of Moses in search of other settlements; but the sensational miracles of the Exodus and the desert are the obvious creations of imaginative Piety, traditionally glorifying

¹ Gen. xviii.

the national God, in generations remote from the alleged marvels of Egypt and Sinai.

A national Deity being indispensable to the success of his enterprise, Moses selected an Egyptian god for Hebrew worship, depicted as the imageless Theban Deity, and introduced to his expectant votaries as the great I AM—a title borrowed from the inscription in front of the temple of the Egyptian Isis: ‘I am all that hath been, and that is, and that shall be.’ We must not, however, assume that the Jehovah of the prophets came out of Egypt as depicted in their pages. Contact with the inhabitants of Palestine had considerably modified Hebrew ideals of Divinity by the time of Samuel and David; and could Moses have then risen from the dead, he would scarcely have recognised his Egyptian Deity in a God conjured by music instead of Urim and Thummim.

The theological studies of Moses in the divinity school of Heliopolis had obviously resulted in scepticism as to the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. He therefore excluded these Egyptian doctrines from Hebrew creeds, and substituted Jehovah’s promise of worldly prosperity as the sole reward of piety—a scepticism which we find reproduced in the language of David,¹ Solomon,² and Hezekiah,³ but abandoned after the Restoration by all but those faithful disciples of Moses, the unbelieving Sadducees.

In the legendary compilations of Ezra, Moses is depicted in direct personal communication with Jehovah; but as the prophet followed the example of the heathen by establishing a system of divination, the scriptural

¹ Psalms vi. 5.

² Eccl s. ix. 10.

³ Isaiah xxxviii. 18.

formula, 'Thus saith the Lord,' was obviously nothing more than the oracular response of Urim and Thummim, and the theory of theocratic government an *ignis fatuus* which lured the nation to destruction.

As the policy of Moses involved religious intolerance, the character of the Hebrew Deity harmonised with the design of the prophet. The compilers of Genesis tell us that Elohim created man in His own image; but the Hebrew prophet depicts the Hebrew God in the image of Man, capricious, vainglorious, jealous, wrathful, cruel, revengeful, favouring the Chosen Race under ceremonial conditions, and persecuting all without the pale of Judaism, with a sanguinary ferocity characteristic of the savage barbarism of primitive Humanity.

A Deity of this type could have no pretensions to the supreme government of the universe, for the order of nature demands providential immutability; and divine partisanship is the negation of divine justice. Jehovah was, therefore, the tribal Deity of the Hebrews, admitting the existence of other gods through jealousy of their pretensions. Hebrew annals, from Exodus to the Captivity, record the prevalence of intermittent idolatry among the children of Israel, which meant, not disbelief in Jehovah, but desire to participate in the favours of alien gods, apparently lavished with generous profusion on *their* peculiar people.

When the children of Israel feared, in the absence of Moses, that Jehovah had abandoned them in the wilderness, they did not disavow His existence, but appealed to an old Egyptian friend, Apis, symbolised by a golden calf. When Solomon, in deference to his foreign wives, erected altars to alien gods, his divided allegiance

simply shows universal belief in polytheism. When the king of Assyria colonised Samaria with strangers from Babylon and Cutha, their neglect of Jehovah, the local Deity, evoked devouring lions, which disappeared on their combining Hebrew with heathen worship.¹ The theory of divine partisanship and a chosen race could, in fact, only have originated in an age of universal belief in local and tribal deities, and proved the very mainstay of constructive polytheism ; for is it not more rational to assume a plurality of gods, severally devoted to the interests of various communities, than to limit Divinity to one God, negligent of all the world's inhabitants but the favoured members of a Semitic tribe ?

Do we therefore revive the Gnostic theory of primitive Christian sects who accepted Jehovah as an inferior God ? On the contrary, we see in him as imaginative a creation as the Egyptian Osiris or the Grecian Jove, and read the fabulous records of his Theocracy as we study the poetic imagery of Homer, depicting the action of the Olympian gods.

How, therefore, if the ancient Hebrews were polytheists, did they become the confirmed monotheists of later generations ? After centuries of polytheistic worship, shared with Jehovah, Apis, Baal, Ashtoreth, Molech, and any other god or goddess through whose favour they hoped to attain prosperity or escape disaster, the Hebrews entered Babylon, and, on its conquest by the Persians, came in contact with an Aryan race of monotheists, worshippers of Aura-mazda (Ormazd), ' the great Giver of Life,' who created the heavens, the earth, and its inhabitants, placed the Persian kings upon their

¹ 2 Kings xvii.

thrones, and sustained their victorious empire. The Hebrews embraced the great principle of monotheism; Cyrus identified Ormazd with Jehovah, and thus Aryan and Semitic piety united in sympathetic worship of one supreme Creator and Controller of the universe, who still remains the God of modern Jews and Gentiles.

The Aryan Ormazd was a Deity of infinite beneficence: the Persians, therefore, attributed evil to Ahriman, 'the Death-dealing Spirit,' the source of frost, poverty, disease, crime, death, and all the other evils which afflict humanity. The Jews also introduced this dual principle into their theology, as dramatised in the Book of Job; and the Persian Ahriman, surrounded by malevolent spirits, became the Hebrew Satan and his fallen angels, whose malign influence evokes calamity; whilst the sanguinary Jehovah of more remote antiquity, deprived of the authorship of evil,¹ was gradually transformed into the heavenly Father of the age of Jesus.

Thus, on the friendly contact of Aryan and Semitic races, stood the Deistical problem. The Persians worship one God. The Hebrews worship one God. Therefore Ormazd and Jehovah are one.

Let us test the inference by introducing another ancient race of monotheists on the scene. Herodotus informs us that the Getes believed in the immortality of the soul, and worshipped Zamolxis as the only true God. Ormazd, Jehovah, and Zamolxis are therefore one. But how shall we establish their unity? Ormazd, a beneficent Deity; Jehovah, a ferocious God; Zamolxis, appeased by human sacrifice! Are not these uncongenial Divinities but ideal phantoms fashioned in har-

¹ Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6.

mony with the relative civilisation of human communities, and are we not thus deprived of all historic evidence of the true nature of Divinity? Yet modern theologians introduce the same fallacy into Christian creeds, and exhaust the resources of apologetic piety in the vain effort to identify the barbarous Jehovah of the ancient Hebrews with the heavenly Father of Jesus of Nazareth.

When the Jews of the Restoration undertook the compilation of a national literature, the recent adoption of monotheism sanctioned recourse to the traditions and records of other nations, in search of Elohim's dealings with primeval Man, before His revelation as the Hebrew Jehovah. The editors of Genesis, therefore, borrowed, from Chaldean and other foreign sources, the legends of Creation, Paradise, the Fall of Man, semi-human giants, a universal Flood, and the post-diluvian confusion of tongues—all of which they amalgamated with the traditions of their race in the imaginative pages of constructive history; and thus compromised revelation by a fabulous cosmogony and mythical annals, which assume the form of fiction in the light of modern research.

From the legend of a decalogue, lithographed by the finger of God, we learn that Moses introduced the moral precepts of the Egyptians to his countrymen as a divine revelation: but, even centuries after possession of the Ten Commandments, Semitic ethics fall immeasurably short of the moral culture of Egyptian citizens and Achaian Greeks, as disclosed on comparison of monumental evidence and Homeric song with the licentious and sanguinary annals of the children of Israel.

When the Hebrew oracle of Urim and Thummim became, from some unknown cause, a lost secret to the Levitical Priesthood, self-appointed prophets adopted the vain illusion of revelation evoked by artistic minstrelsy, and thus Imposture, Fanaticism, or Insanity might utter oracles as the voice of God, until this superstition also perished with the lapse of time, and Hebrew Prophets became as voiceless as Urim and Thummim.

The prophetic gaze of Hebrew Nâbis did not vainly scan the invisible horizon of remote futurity, but watched the shadows of impending events susceptible of human forecast; and the fanciful adaptation of their vague predictions to the historical events of later centuries is the pious work of imaginative theologians, sustaining dogmas by predictive miracles, and even carrying Hebrew prophets into the nineteenth century, to condemn a world to premature dissolution which science tells us will still roll onwards, freighted with the organised evolutions of remote futurity, thousands of centuries after the prophetic craze shall have been classed by coming savans among the theological fossils of dead religions.

The theocratic policy which fostered international hostility, and deprived the Hebrews of all friendly allies, had foredoomed them to that destruction which inevitably falls on nations controlled by the absorbing egotism which ignores the natural rights of alien races. The secular struggle of the heroic Maccabees came too late in Hebrew history to establish a kingdom or found an empire; and, when all hope of victory through natural means had perished, the old inheritance of Fanaticism revived in Messianic dreams of national restoration.

In Babylonian exile the Jews had heard of Persian expectation of a coming Saviour and Regenerator of Mankind; and, with characteristic egotism, had assumed that the Messiah of Aryan dreams was the Hebrew Prince predestined by Semitic prophets to restore the throne of David and renew the glories of Solomon. As all reasonable expectation of national independence vanished, the fatal fascination of a phantom empire transformed Messianic enthusiasm into the fierce fanaticism which rashly challenged the invincible power of Rome, and invited the final catastrophe which made Jerusalem the funeral pyre of an expiring nation.

How vain to seek for miracles in these most natural events! Josephus, who had visited Rome in the reign of Nero, warned his countrymen against the insanity of defying imperial power, and tells us they were lured to destruction by the ambiguous oracle of Sacred Scripture predicting that, about that time, a Hebrew ruler 'should become the governor of the habitable earth.' In the hopeless conflict with invincible legions produced by the prophetic superstition, the Hebrews were, therefore, simply vanquished, as Carthage, Gaul, or Britain, by the irresistible power of a great military empire, and in the hour of victory, Vespasian's son finally destroyed the fiction of a Chosen Race miraculously preserved by supernatural power.

Controlled by the common sense of Josephus, the Jews might have remained the prosperous citizens of a Roman province, and escaped the future miseries of a 'Peculiar People' through gradual amalgamation with surrounding nations. They might even have fulfilled the oracle, through some great Hebrew soldier of

fortune, proclaimed as emperor by the Roman legions he had led to victory. But, controlled by prophetic fanaticism, they staked national existence on the desperate venture of war with Rome, and, losing all for which they had struggled for sixteen centuries, the flower of their race, snatched from massacre as profitable merchandise, was bought and sold in every slave market of the empire.

Christian theologians affirm that the descendants of the vanquished Jews have remained a PECULIAR PEOPLE for nearly two thousand years in fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy; but has not alleged prediction in this, as in countless other instances, produced its own fulfilment? The first generations of exiled Jews naturally clung to the traditions of their race, and fostered gradually expiring hope with the promises of the prophets: but, before the time had come for social interaction to absorb them, as in the case of the lost ten tribes, within the family circles of surrounding nations, Christianity assumed the threatening form of religious intolerance, and forced the Hebrew race into a tribal isolation, which their theological enemies have been pleased to call the miraculous fulfilment of prophecy. Can any candid and impartial inquirer, whether Jew or Gentile, question that, if primitive and mediæval Christianity had respected the social and political rights of the Hebrew race, in the same spirit of natural justice which now enrols them as the enfranchised, loyal, and prosperous citizens of the most enlightened modern States, they would have long since disappeared from history as a Peculiar People, and become an important element in the fusion of races forming the most civilised nations of modern times?

And if, in that case, some charming Esther or fascinating Rebecca had won the love and shared the throne of a Plantagenet or a Tudor, imaginative theologians, detecting a scion of Hebrew royalty in this queenly daughter of Judah, might re-adjust the orthodox interpretation of prophecy, and tell us that the throne of David had been restored in the modern glories of the British Empire.

The darkest pages in the history of Christianity are those which record the persecution of the Jews; and the pretensions of modern communities to civilisation are measurable by the meed of justice awarded to Hebrew citizens. Can we imagine a more amazing spectacle than Christianity appropriating the sacred literature of a Semitic tribe, adapting it to a new religion, and then persecuting and massacring its owners for proving faithful to their ancestral creed! We might as reasonably claim the Vedas as our own, reconstruct Brahminical theosophy, and insist on Hindoo acceptance of our interpretation under penalty of death.

All this is now, however, changed in the most enlightened communities, where the Jews enjoy a tardy recognition of their just claims as loyal citizens. In Germany, where we might reasonably hope for better things, a mild phase of Judæophobia has been aroused by apparent envy of Hebrew prosperity—in other words, Teutonic Aryans admit the intellectual superiority of their Semitic rivals. But neither Germans, Celts, nor Anglo-Saxons need wonder at being beaten in the race with Jews, whose intellectual heritage extends so many centuries beyond their own. When the founders of noble families in Europe were marauding barons, familiar with every form of violence, the Hebrews were

cultivating the arts of peace as merchants, bankers, usurers—if you will—storing up reserves of intelligence in the race which, under the social and political conditions of modern civilisation, are bringing them to the front in every field of intellectual labour, to reap a tardy compensation for the injustice of centuries.

The literary and political achievements of the late Lord Beaconsfield attest our theory. His brain was the storehouse of the intellectual growth of ages. If an Anglo-Saxon, his career would have been a marvellous feat of genius; but weighted in the race with all the disadvantages of Hebrew birth, his success overshadows even the greatest of his European contemporaries. The crowning glory of his life was this, that he, a Jew, born of a race on which Englishmen have looked coldly as mercenary aliens, understood more clearly than any other British statesman of his generation that the existence of the British Empire depends on the resolute maintenance of her imperial power, imperilled in modern times by the fallacious theories of Radical doctrinaires.

Let us hope that the anti-Jewish agitation, in so highly civilised a country as Germany, is nothing more than the temporary craze of an insignificant minority, guilty of nothing worse than calumniating their Semitic neighbours. But it is a grave question for the consideration of German statesmen, whether Teutonic denunciation of the Jews, passing beyond the frontier, is not an exciting cause of Russian atrocities among a less civilised race, interpreting the verbal animosity of Germans through the lawless violence of Tartars.¹

¹ The thanks of the civilised world are due to M. Tisza for his prompt suppression of anti-Semitism in Hungary.

The recent persecution of the Jews in Russia reveals the depths of Christian hypocrisy; for the enthusiastic avengers of Ottoman barbarism are now the fanatical murderers of inoffensive Hebrews; and British admirers of Holy Russia, fierce in denunciation of Islamite cruelty, now venture on nothing more than respectful remonstrance with Russian atrocity.

The Government of the Czar assure us that they have done their best to protect Semitic subjects from outrage. Thus also spoke the Ottoman executive, when Christians suffered from Moslem violence. Are therefore diplomatic excuses for preventible crime more valid from Christian than Turkish lips? If, on the first warning note of popular reversion to mediæval Christianity, Russian statesmen could not take the necessary precautions for disarming superstitious fanaticism, shall we infer that the Imperial Government has lost the power of maintaining law and order throughout the empire, and is therefore doomed to succumb to the first popular movement directed against its authority? Or shall we not rather assume that an executive, which brands a section of the population with social and political disabilities, has condoned in anticipation the injustice inflicted on them by their compatriots, acting in loyal sympathy with the religious intolerance of their rulers?

According to our experience of modern Jews, they are quite content as the loyal subjects of Governments which grant them the same privileges as their Gentile neighbours; and they are even found clinging to homes, under civil disabilities, until driven forth as fugitives by lawless violence. It is said that the Jews now flying

from the scene of Russian intolerance, experience a Messianic impulse towards the Holy Land—a not improbable tendency in men seeking the alleviation of calamity in dreams; but before accepting the impulse as national, we reasonably inquire whether the Jews of England, France, Austria, and America are willing to surrender assured prosperity in the countries of their adoption for a policy of adventure under Ottoman rule. If, indeed, the Sidonias of Israel are willing to contribute hundreds of millions towards the pious design of fulfilling prophecy, through the colonisation of Palestine, with the numerous sons and daughters of Judah, now scattered over the face of the habitable earth, this age of sympathy with national aspirations will surely cooperate in the purchase of the Holy Land, more especially as we are assured, on rabbinical authority, that the Hebrews no longer indulge in selfish dreams of a tribal Messiah, but await a cosmopolitan Prince, whose dominions shall alike embrace Aryan, Semitic, Turanian, and kindred races.

If, however, the modern magnates of Israel and Judah prefer to reign as monetary princes in London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, to fulfilling prophecy by feeding countless flocks, as illustrious sheikhs of Palestine, should not all persecuted children of Israel hasten to those true lands of promise—Canada, America, Australia—where they may yet fulfil the visions of Abraham and the dreams of Jacob, in absolute immunity from the forebodings of seers and the anathemas of prophets, whilst tribal expectation of a Messianic Claimant for the throne of David and the dominions of Solomon gradually fade from the Semitic horizon,

and the appalling vicissitudes of three thousand years are forgotten, in the midst of a civilisation created by Aryan Races, once classed, by Hebrew intolerance, among the enemies of God ?

In modern times we hear of 'reformed,' as distinguished from 'orthodox,' Judaism. But we have omitted all reference to Semitic Protestantism, as we consider that, if the Mosaic dispensation be a personal communication from the Hebrew Deity, it admits of no modification except through a new revelation ; and that modern Jews who sanction the appeal to Reason against Mosaic teaching, have practically surrendered Semitic pretensions to the possession of a supernatural religion.

Having thus briefly reviewed and rejected the supernatural claims of Judaism on their own merits, we can imagine orthodox theologians exclaiming, 'How profound the spiritual darkness which thus rashly judges Moses and the prophets, apart from that Christian dispensation through which alone we can interpret the divine mysteries imperfectly revealed in Hebrew Scripture!' Let us, therefore, no longer dwell on Judaism, but seek revelation in the School of Galilee.

BOOK II.—JESUS OF NAZARETH.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

NEARLY nineteen centuries have elapsed since Jesus of Nazareth was born to the destiny of Divinity, as the future Deity of the western branch of that great Aryan race whose illustrious teacher, Sakya-Muni, anticipated the Kingdom of Heaven by the Kingdom of Righteousness, five hundred years before the Christian era; and now commands the reverence of one-third of the world's inhabitants, through varying forms of modern Buddhism.

Filled with admiration of the moral genius of the great Jew who has exercised so vast an influence on the fortunes of Humanity, we feel an absorbing curiosity to learn all that is possible respecting the career of Jesus on earth; but as he omitted to transmit to posterity any autographic or authenticated record of his life, our scanty sources of knowledge respecting his character and teaching are limited to the anonymous Gospels reaching us through the Christian Church.

Evangelical theologians formerly assigned to the versions of these books in our possession an authenticity as indisputable as if our modern editions were printed

in heaven and Jesus himself revised the proof sheets. But the Gospels have not reached us as divine editions. Jesus never wrote nor edited them, nor did he instruct apostles or disciples to compose sacred books the contents of which should be binding on the reason and conscience of posterity. On the contrary, so unsuggestive of dogma and mysticism was the simple theology of Jesus, that the necessity for written records seems never to have occurred to him. Had he foreseen the future growth of a Christian literature, of authorship so doubtful and interpretation so conflicting as to originate the antagonistic creeds of hostile churches, fruitful in anathemas involving eternal perdition, Jesus would have placed on record, in a few brief words, as intelligible to the multitude as his formula of prayer, the simple articles of faith which, in his opinion, qualify members for the kingdom of heaven.

The sacred books of the Hebrews were the only Scriptures of primitive Christianity. Whilst the religion of Jesus was yet innocent of creeds and dogmas, and its votaries were expecting the early re-appearance of the Messiah, they felt no need of written documents, and were content to hold their simple theology through oral traditions recording with verbal freedom and varying version the acts and teaching of Jesus and his apostles.

The Apostolic Fathers freely quote the Hebrew Scriptures, but traces of reference to evangelical language in their works are too faint to indicate knowledge of extant written Gospels.

In the second century, Papias, although acquainted with early versions of Matthew and Mark, discloses his ignorance of a present or future New Testament of in-

fallible authority, by assigning a higher place to oral traditions than to written records.

The first reliable traces of the existence of Evangelists are found in the writings of the Fathers succeeding the Apostolic Age; who, however, adopt a freedom of expression irreconcilable with the theory of an infallible New Testament.

Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) was acquainted with versions of the first and third Gospels. He was ignorant of, or rejected Pauline literature, spoke of Revelations as the work of a 'man among us named John,' and assigned to books, which we now call apocryphal, the same authority as to works now deemed infallible.

Polycarp (A.D. 150–166), in his epistle to the Philipians, cites the first three Gospels, 1 Peter, and several Pauline epistles, but gives no indication of having ever heard of an infallible New Testament.

The second epistle of Peter, written in the name of that apostle about a century after his death, refers to the Pauline epistles as Scripture; but the author of this pious fiction probably wrote with the laudable design of reconciling the conflicting claims of Pauline and Petrine theology, by depicting Peter canonising in his lifetime the literary productions of his great rival.

The age of oral traditions was followed by a period prolific in Gospels, Acts, and Revelations, ostensibly written by Apostles or men of the Apostolic age, but varying in version with the divergent views of antagonistic sects, mutually suspected of corrupting the text of Christian records. If, therefore, Christianity was ever to assume the form of a definite theology, it became necessary to select and authenticate specific versions as

orthodox materials for the construction of a Catholic religion. But on what authority, human or divine, was this great work accomplished?

In those early days, no supreme Pontiff or infallible Council held the pretensions, or claimed the right to select and authenticate Sacred Scripture. The task was, therefore, unconsciously undertaken by a small group of zealous but credulous men, known to us as the early Fathers of the Christian Church. Irenæus, Clement, and Tertullian, who flourished at the close of the second and beginning of the third century, stand out prominently in ecclesiastical history as the canon-makers of the New Testament. And as his successors closely followed in the footsteps of Irenæus, the work was practically accomplished by a man so hopelessly obtuse and credulous that he declares there should be neither more nor less than four Gospels, because there are four universal winds, and four quarters of the globe.¹ If, therefore, Irenæus had counted the winds by the points of the modern compass, he would have selected thirty-two from the numerous Gospels competing for canonisation, and Christianity would have been afflicted with the additional weight of doctrines, dogmas, and mysteries, found in their pages, and accepted by posterity as divine revelation.

Irenæus, writing in the last quarter of the second century, adopted the four Gospels, thirteen epistles of Paul, 1 John, and Revelations; and assigned a secondary place to 2 John, 1 Peter, and the Shepherd of Hermas. He knew nothing of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jude, James, or second and third Peter.

¹ *Heresies*, iii. 9.

Clement added to this collection the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jude, the Revelations of Peter, the Epistles of Clement of Rome and Barnabas, both of whom he accepts as apostles; and the Shepherd of Hermas, viewed by modern Orthodoxy as a pious fiction, he declares to be divine.

Turning to the epistle of Clement of Rome, we find the following fable adduced as an argument in favour of the truth of the Resurrection.¹

‘Let us think of that marvellous sign which occurs in the East, that is to say, in Arabia and the surrounding countries. There is a bird called a Phœnix—the only one of its kind—which lives five hundred years, and, when the time of its death is at hand, makes a nest of frankincense, myrrh, and other spices, into which, when the time is completed, it enters and dies. As the flesh decays, a worm is produced which, fed by the remains of the dead bird, creates feathers. Then, when strong enough, it takes the nest containing the bones of the parent, and passes with them from Arabia to Heliopolis, a city of Egypt, and, flying in the daytime in the sight of all men, it places them on the altar of the sun, and returns to its former home. The priests then refer to the registry of dates, and find that it has returned in exactly five hundred years. Do ye, therefore, think it a great and marvellous thing for the Creator of the universe to raise up again those that have piously served him, in the assurance of faith, when He manifests to us through a bird the greatness of His power to fulfil His promise?’

If one of the compilers of New Testament Scripture canonises an author sufficiently credulous to adopt this

¹ Clem. Rom. xxv.

heathen legend (known to Herodotus) as a practical proof of the truth of man's resurrection from the dead, what confidence can we place in his capacity to determine what should be the contents of an infallible Bible?

Tertullian adopts a nearly similar canon ; but, if we accept him as a competent and trustworthy compiler of infallible Scripture, we must also receive at his hands the Book of Enoch as the inspired autogram of that patriarch, or the miraculously restored version of Noah.¹

Of all the ante-Nicene Fathers, Origen (254 A.D.) applied the greatest ability and industry to the study of Christian literature in a spirit of rational criticism ; and his evidence establishes general corruption in the text of the Evangelists. 'It is obvious,' he states, 'that the difference between the copies is considerable, partly from the conclusions of individual scribes, partly from the impious audacity of some in correcting what is written, partly also from those who add or remove what seems good to them in the work of correction.'² This language obviously fails to assure Christianity of the possession of an infallible New Testament.

Origen honestly endeavoured to classify Christian literature in the order of merit, a form of criticism unsuggestive of faith in divine inspiration ; and as he wavered in opinion respecting the authenticity of books some of which are accepted and others rejected by modern Christianity, it was evidently an open question in the third century as to what really constituted the contents of the New Testament.

So far the Christian Fathers had not published any specific list of the books meeting their approval ; and

¹ *On Female Dress*, iii.

² Orig. *In Matt.* xv. 14.

their canonical conclusions are only to be inferred from their works. But when the Emperor Constantine (about 330 A.D.) recognised the importance of identifying a definite selection of Christian literature with the Catholic Church, he applied to the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, for a complete collection of authentic works.

Eusebius, in his ecclesiastical history, assigns the first place to the four Gospels, fourteen epistles of Paul, 1 John, and 1 Peter. These he calls *ὁμολογούμενα*—generally received; but adds, ‘there are some who include the Gospel to the Hebrews, with which converted Jews are particularly pleased. It also should not be concealed that some have rejected the epistle to the Hebrews as not the work of Paul.’ Among disputed books—*ἀντιλεγόμενα*—‘although well known and approved by many’—he places the epistles of James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John; and classes among spurious works (*νόθα*) the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Revelations of Peter, and the Revelation of John—the latter qualified with the remark, ‘if it should appear right, as some reject, whilst others consider it genuine.’¹

Thus, when Christianity was taken in hand by the temporal power, in the fourth century, with the view of establishing a Catholic Church, its primitive literature was dependent for attestation on a Roman philosopher who had never heard of the Gospel of John or the epistles of Paul—an Alexandrian presbyter who believed in the Phoenix, a Gallican bishop who discovered the fourth Gospel in the last quarter of the second century, and a Punic presbyter who accepted the Book of Enoch as antediluvian, and

¹ *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 25.

eventually drifted into the ascetic mysticism of Montanus, who believed himself to be the Paraclete. Where, therefore, was the infallible evidence of the Apostolic Succession supposed to have existed at Rome from Peter to the latest of the Popes? We answer—waiting evolution through the imaginative piety of later generations. And as we see Eusebius seeking in doubt and perplexity for apostolic records which had no existence, and accepting doubtful versions through hazy traditions and contemporary credulity, we can understand the ecclesiastical phenomena of Nicæa, where antagonistic bishops assembled at the bidding of a Roman Emperor, not to discuss the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, but to affirm, through a victorious majority, the foregone conclusions of doctrinal mysticism unknown to the primitive School of Galilee.

In the next century we find Augustine and Jerome still perplexed with the problem of Bible-making, and disclosing the absence of any higher authority for the canon of Scripture than arbitrary traditions and ecclesiastical usage, which virtually meant nothing more than that time had granted prescriptive rights to the credulous conclusions of the ante-Nicene Fathers.

The Evangelists accordingly emerged from the impenetrable shadow of the first century with doubtful dates, conjectural authorship, and varying versions. We hold no record of the fluctuations of Christian opinion during the long interval of oral traditions; and when narrative and discourses assume the form of manuscript, not one of which has reached us with an earlier date than the fourth century, we possess no guarantee against the revisions and interpolations of successive scribes,

more easily influenced by legendary traditions than by the rational conclusions of impartial criticism.

The fluctuations of early Christian opinion may be forcibly illustrated through the orthodox dates of Matthew and John (about A.D. 60 and 90). If, in the brief interval of thirty years, the unassuming Son of Man had been transformed into the mysterious Logos of heathen philosophy,¹ and the simplicity of the Sermon on the Mount into the obscure mysticism of the dialogue with Nicodemus,² how may not the fluctuations of oral tradition, from the Crucifixion to the publication of Matthew, have changed the contents of that Gospel from what they would have been if written immediately after the death of Jesus?

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught a simple morality directly appealing to the natural faculties of his auditors, and a beneficent religion throwing wide open the gates of the kingdom of heaven, to all desirous of entering in absolute freedom from dogmatic tests. But in the unsatisfactory discourses of John, mystical problems supersede moral obligations; and we can imagine Nicodemus returning from his visit to Jesus, perplexed by the discouraging dogma of predestination, and the bewildering theory of a second birth, muttering as he goes—‘I have come in the hope of seeing a great prophet prepared to illuminate all which Moses has left in darkness; but, alas! the darkness is now even more profound. He condemns those who do not come to the light: I have come, and am scornfully dismissed without one luminous ray. He tells me I must be born again; and when I humbly ask how this strange thing can be, he reproaches

¹ John i. 1-5.

² John iii.

me for ignorance of mysteries unheard by me before. It is not in Moses, nor in the Prophets, nor in the traditions of Israel: how therefore could I know these strange doctrines?' Thus Nicodemus departs. He might have been Saul of Tarsus, and, if thus disdainfully dismissed, the future Apostle would have been lost to Christianity.

Eusebius, alluding to the difference in the contents of John and the first three Gospels, accounts for the discrepancy by representing that the fourth Gospel records events in the life of Jesus antecedent to the narrative of the other Evangelists.¹ This theory is based on the statement of John that the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee was the first miracle, and occurred whilst John was baptising in Ænon, whereas the other Evangelists begin their narrative after the Baptist had been cast into prison—a view favoured by orthodox chronology as registered in the margins of our Bibles, according to which the dialogue with Nicodemus preceded the Sermon on the Mount by twelve months. If, therefore, that eminent Pharisee had been present at the later discourse, he would have learned, with as great amazement as we ourselves, how marvellous a change had occurred in the views of the Master, after John had been cast into prison.

We again read of Jesus preaching the same mysticism to the multitude as to Nicodemus, with the result of losing many disciples.² Are we, therefore, to infer that failure warned him to make the complete change of programme indicated in the Sermon on the Mount? Whatever theory of dates may, however, be accepted by

¹ *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 24.

² John vi.

Modern Orthodoxy, the dilemma still remains that Jesus either cancelled the mysticism of the fourth through the simplicity of the first Gospel, or shut up the kingdom of heaven proclaimed in Matthew, by the later revelations of Johannine theosophy. But is not the true solution of this difficulty found in the candid admission that pseudo-John is a pious fiction of the second century, composed by some unknown Gnostic so deeply imbued with the doctrinal novelties of his own generation, that he borrowed the name of an apostle to authenticate his own imaginative ideal of Jesus of Nazareth? This pious fraud may have been even conscientiously committed through faith in the miraculous reproduction of the language of Jesus by the intervention of the Paraclete¹—an illusion through which the author would have considered his own thoughts worthy of confirmation in the name of an apostle, as the veritable teaching of the Hebrew Messiah.

At a more advanced stage of our inquiries, we shall consider the important influence exercised by pseudo-John in the evolution of Christianity; meanwhile, we place this work absolutely external to the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. In thus rejecting the fourth Gospel as an authentic record, we would reluctantly part with that great scene in the Messianic drama which depicts the merciful compassion of Jesus towards the woman hypocritically accused by the Scribes and Pharisees,² but that, if we could even sustain the authenticity of the fourth Evangelist, this interesting episode, absent from the most ancient manu-

¹ John xiv. 26.

² John viii. 2-11.

scripts, is rejected as an interpolation by modern criticism.

St. Augustine sustains the apostolic origin of the narrative, and suggests that it was excluded from written Gospels, through apprehension that its teaching might be accepted by women as a licence for immorality! We must excuse so great a saint for thus libelling woman. It was customary with primitive piety to give her a name for evil second only to Satan himself; but when so great an authority suggests that evangelical records were tampered with, to prevent the compassionate consideration of Jesus towards female frailty from encouraging immorality, what becomes of the theory of an infallible New Testament; and who shall disclose the omissions and interpolations of centuries veiled in darkness, when one stroke of the pen created dogmas or blotted out revelation?

CHAPTER II.

THE SYNOPTICAL GOSPELS.

ORTHODOXY dates the first three or Synoptical Gospels A.D. 60–63, but, as we have seen, their historical existence only begins in the second century. Conflicting commentators vainly seek to determine priority of date ; but, whichever was first written, the later Evangelists obviously utilised its contents, or all compiled their Gospels from an older version, abridged or interpolated in harmony with the current traditions and legends of their locality and generation.

Internal evidence proves the interpolation of Luke. The preface promises to Theophilus a simple record of events known from the beginning to eye-witnesses, and cannot, therefore, contemplate the miraculous intercourse of Zachariah and Mary with angels, for there was no one present to confirm the wondrous tale ; and if the narrative had therefore reached the hands of Theophilus in its present form, he would have been fully justified in rejecting all unattested prodigies. A fresh surprise would have, however, awaited him in a pedigree tracing the descent of Jesus from Adam to his putative father Joseph ; for would it not necessarily have occurred to Theophilus to inquire, ‘ If supposed to be the son of Joseph, what eye-witness can prove to the contrary ? ’ It is, however, only necessary to com-

pare Luke iii. 26 with the first verse of the ensuing chapter, to at once detect that the genealogy has been awkwardly inserted between consecutive verses, and therefore absent from the original manuscript—a discovery which acquits the author of the exordium of claiming the faith of his friend for a mythical pedigree of the Messiah. Is it not, also, obvious that the genealogy was originally inserted by men believing that Jesus was the veritable son of Joseph, and afterwards interpolated with the words ‘as was supposed,’ when the fiction of a supernatural birth had corrupted the primitive faith of Galilee?

The Gospel of Mark is so comparatively free from the supernatural, that, if no other Evangelist had reached posterity, Unitarianism would have been the inevitable creed of the Reformation. For even the title, ‘Son of God,’ not necessarily implying divinity, assigned to Jesus in the opening verse, is from the pen of an interpolator. And when the last twelve spurious verses of the closing chapter are struck out,¹ Mark, said to have been the companion of Peter, knew nothing more of the Resurrection than that three women had seen a young man in a white robe, who told them that Jesus was risen from the dead.²

The earliest version of the Gospel of Matthew was written in Aramaic, the vernacular language of Judea. Papias, writing in the second century, says: ‘Matthew wrote the discourses (*τὰ λόγια*) in the Hebrew dialect; and everyone interpreted them to the best of his ability.’³ This priceless manuscript has perished.

¹ Mark xvi. 9-20.

² Mark xvi. 1-8.

³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 39.

Egyptian papyri, written two thousand years before the Christian era, have reached us through a natural process of preservation; but all the miraculous powers of Christianity could not save for us an apostolic transcript of the Sermon on the Mount. Orthodoxy suggests that apostolic autograms were withdrawn by divine wisdom to prevent their becoming objects of worship; but surely mediæval Christians might as well have adored sacred books as holy relics, and we could then have reverted, at the Reformation, to the original teaching of the school of Galilee.

What has become of primitive Christian manuscripts? The oldest only dates from the fourth century. Were they destroyed to conceal the interpolations of later editions, or hidden away in secret holes and corners, whence some fortunate discoverer may yet bring them forth, to startle the world with the secret history of the evolution of ecclesiastical Christianity?

As Tischendorf found the Sinaitic MS., dating from about A.D. 350, in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, and Bruce brought home the long-lost Book of Enoch from Abyssinia, may we not yet hope to see a MS. Gospel of the second century—a treasure for which united Christendom might well pay millions, if willing to imperil the prescriptive rights of Christian dogmas and mysteries, through the publication of a primitive Evangelist?

What important results may be attained in the detection of ecclesiastical interpolations through the discovery of ancient MSS. is disclosed in the history of the epistles of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, supposed to

have suffered martyrdom as early as A.D. 107 or 116. Of his fifteen extant epistles, eight have been long since condemned as forgeries. The remaining seven reach us in two Greek versions, the second of which is an obviously interpolated version of the first.

Learned theologians have discussed for centuries the rival claims of these two versions; but it remained for Archdeacon Tattam to discover, in 1838-40, in the monastery of St. Mary Deipara, in the Egyptian desert of Nitria, several ancient Syriac MSS., among which were three brief epistles of Ignatius, so much more conformable in style and substance to the apostolic age as to convict the unknown authors of the two Greek versions of literary forgery.

Let us confront primitive simplicity with ecclesiastical innovations. In the Syriac form of the Epistle to the Ephesians we read: 'Seeing that we have received your abundance in the name of God by Onesimus, who is your bishop in love unutterable, whom I pray that ye love in Jesus Christ our Lord, and that all of you imitate his example, for blessed is he who has given you such a bishop, even as ye deserve.'

In the shorter Greek version of the same epistle we read: 'Now, the more anyone sees the bishop showing forbearance, the more ought we to reverence him. For we ought to receive everyone whom the master of the house sends to be over his household as we would receive him that sent him. It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would on the Lord Himself.' This is but one of many kindred passages in the Greek versions sustaining episcopal usurpation; and if the epistles of Ignatius could be thus manipu-

lated for ecclesiastical purposes, what limit can we place to the corruption of evangelical literature, during the long interval which elapsed between the first written Gospel and the date of the earliest manuscript transmitted to posterity?

Modern theologians industriously collate extant MSS. of the New Testament, with the design of attaining a reliable text; but, as none of these ancient documents are of an earlier date than the fourth century, we are absolutely ignorant of the contents of earlier versions, possibly committed to the flames as heretical when Christianity had corrupted the primitive faith of Galilee.

In the Greek original of our English version of Matthew we therefore see a composite work, combining mythical legends and ecclesiastical interpolations with simple records of the life and teaching of Jesus, suggestive of the welcome presence of a Galilean Apostle, speaking as a faithful witness of the daily life of his great Master. As the testimony of Papias in favour of an Aramaic record of the discourses of Jesus inspires us, therefore, with hope that the compilers of the Greek recension reproduced an approximate version of his oral teaching from an apostolic source, we adopt the first Gospel as the most reliable record of the sayings of Jesus, which we shall endeavour to glean from the fabulous and ecclesiastical interpolations now confusing modern perception of the true Son of Man.

The first two chapters of Matthew identify Christianity with the superstition which depicts the Deity manipulating events that prophecy may be fulfilled; and which, accordingly, invites human co-operation with Providence in the accomplishment of Divine Oracles. We have

already learned the disastrous results of this pernicious superstition from the annals of Israel and Judah, and now await its further development in the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Hebrew scribes affirmed that prophecy demanded a Messiah of the lineage of David. The compilers of Matthew, accordingly, provided Jesus with a genealogy irreconcilable with, and therefore as apocryphal as, that of Luke. But, if even confirmed by uniformity, it is nullified by Jesus' repudiation of the theory of Messianic descent from David, and cannot therefore have been inserted in the Gospel by an Apostle who records the disavowal of his Master.¹ As Jesus was obviously ignorant of the fanciful genealogies of future Evangelists, should not modern Christians cease to identify him with fictions long since exposed through attested facts? The exhumed skulls of prehistoric men, who lived and died on earth in ages remote from Mosaic chronology, have finally disposed of legendary patriarchs of nearly a thousand years, and with them necessarily vanish constructive pedigrees, as mythical as the drama of Eden.

In Matthew the prophetic craze even assumes that unnatural events, incapable of attestation, have actually occurred because supposed to have been predicted by the prophets. Thus sprung into existence the legend of the supernatural birth of Jesus, obviously borrowed from the heathen custom of attributing a divine origin to illustrious men, but sustained by the credulous compilers of Matthew through a misinterpreted passage of Isaiah. 'All this was done,' they affirm, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the pro-

¹ Matt. xxii. 41-46.

phet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son.' The language of Isaiah, however, is—'Behold, the maiden or young woman conceives and bears a son'—referring to a contemporary event in the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, implying no miracle of virgin maternity, which never had any existence except in the imagination of men desirous of investing Jesus with the prestige of divinity; and, in fact, Justin Martyr (150 A.D.) refers, in apologetic defence of the legend, to similar instances of miraculous paternity among the heathen gods.¹

Assuming the authenticity of the alleged miracle, how did the principal actors in this marvellous drama sustain their parts? Mary, a betrothed virgin, predestined to the future worship of unborn millions as the illustrious Mother of God, is apparently dishonoured by the expectant maternity of an unmarried woman, and therefore condemned by the law of Moses to summary execution. Although innocent, nothing short of the appearance of the angel Gabriel, proclaiming from the housetops of Nazareth the unsullied purity of the future Queen of heaven, could restore her lost reputation; but, alas! no divine messenger appears to vindicate the apparent victim of female frailty. Her intended husband dreamt that her condition was the result of unconscious intercourse with the spiritual world, and, being a man of marvellous faith, accepted the vision as proof of Mary's innocence. But where were the prying eyes and itching ears of village gossips, seeking the pleasing excitement of social discussion over the latest scandal among the daughters of Israel? Did the kind-hearted Joseph suc-

¹ 1 *Apol.* xxi.

ceed in baffling the curiosity of Hebrew matrons ; or was the unhappy Mary branded as the dishonoured mother of an illegitimate son, saved only from the ruthless grasp of Moses by the infatuated tenderness of an elderly husband, charmed by her beauty to accept the humiliating *rôle* of a putative father ? Or did Joseph, awaking from his dream, publish the miracle of virgin maternity, and satisfy his Nazarene friends and neighbours that the attestation of a naturally impossible event is attainable through a visit to the land of dreams ?

The conflicting contents of interpolated Gospels supply the answer to these questions. According to Luke, when Jesus held a learned discussion with the elders in the Temple, both Joseph and Mary were absolutely ignorant of the supernatural origin of his precocious wisdom.¹ And according to Matthew, when Jesus proposed to instruct the residents of his own immediate neighbourhood, they exclaimed, ‘ Is not this the carpenter’s son ? is not his mother called Mary ? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas ? And his sisters, are they not all with us ? Whence then hath this man all these things ? And they were offended in him.’²

The fabulous nativity having therefore never been heard of in the family or social circle of Jesus, had he himself any knowledge of the alleged miracle ? The reply is obviously negative, for when thus taunted with the humility of his origin, he uttered no word of dissent, but simply claimed the respect of his auditors on the grounds of his prophetic mission. As Jesus did not, therefore, impose the unnatural prodigy on the reason

¹ Luke ii. 41-52.

² Matt. xiii. 55-57.

and conscience of his own generation, why should we identify his birth with the fables of Olympian mythology, on the unattested statements of the anonymous compilers of Matthew and Luke, controlled by a credulity so extreme as to be incapable of detecting the mutually destructive relationship of a human pedigree and a supernatural birth, both overthrown by the evidence of the man in whose name they published their evangelical compilation? In the absence, therefore, of one confirmatory word from Joseph, Mary, or Jesus, let us reject the mythical legend which has robbed Humanity, for centuries, of one of her noblest sons, and degraded divine wisdom by the imputation of tampering with the laws of social propriety through supernatural phenomena, admitting of no rational explanation but the dishonour of the mother of Jesus.

The legend of a supernatural birth necessarily involved the subsequent evolution of Mariolatry. The human mind could not long accept an ordinary mortal, submissive to the vulgar embraces of Joseph the carpenter, in the woman glorified by divine maternity. This homely mother of a numerous family has been, therefore, transformed into an immaculate virgin predestined to the rank of Queen of heaven, where she now enjoys a growing power and influence obviously tending towards her eventual introduction into the Trinity. This marvellous career is the logical sequence of the supernatural birth of Jesus; and it remains for all reasonable men and women to reject the legend, or accept the Goddess, and hasten to adore the majestic Queen of heaven.

The theory of prophetic fatality receives further

development in the efforts of evangelical compilers to show that Messianic prophecy was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, although the home of His parents was at Nazareth. Luke attempts a solution of the difficulty by representing that, although Nazareth was the residence of Joseph and Mary, Jesus was born during a visit to Bethlehem. But the compilers of Matthew change all this by representing Bethlehem as the original residence of Joseph and Mary, where the Messiah was born before their departure for Nazareth.

We read of anonymous sages conducted by an erratic star from the east to Jerusalem, in search of the newly born king of the Jews. The distinguished travellers paid a most inopportune visit of inquiry to Herod, against which they might have been judiciously warned by the angel Gabriel, but that the inexorable prophets demanded the slaughter of the Innocents.

The guiding star moved onwards—happily without introducing chaos into the solar system—until it rested ‘over where the young child was.’ The magi entered, presented gifts, worshipped, and departed like mysterious Melchisedeks for their own country, whence no further news of them has ever reached us, although their testimony would have proved a valuable addition to the evidences of Christianity.

Fortunately for these illustrious sages, no inspired prophet had ever predicted their destruction ; the Deity could therefore provide for their safety by an opportune dream warning them not to return to Herod. But He could do nothing for the poor little babes of Bethlehem, because the unconscious Jeremiah, in depicting Rachel weeping for her children, had uttered the inexorable

decree which doomed them to a cruel death at the hands of Herodian assassins. Joseph was, accordingly, warned by an angel in a dream to carry Jesus and his mother into Egypt, the infant Messiah escaped the threatened danger, and prophecy was vindicated through the blood of the Innocents. How marvellous a consideration for believers in an infallible Bible, that during the occurrence of these providential events the divine babe—as touching his godhead—was an important member of the Trinity, participating in the providential fulfilment of prophecy, and therefore a consenting party to the murder of his innocent compatriots, who, with timely warning, might also have been removed to Egypt, or to some other safe asylum.

In order to reconcile the residence of Jesus and his parents at Nazareth with the alleged birth at Bethlehem, the compilers of Matthew inform us that, on the death of Herod, an angel instructed Joseph in a dream to return to the land of Israel—that is, to Bethlehem. ‘But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither, and, being warned in a dream (χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ’ ὄναρ), he turned aside into the parts of Galilee, and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.’ The angel of the Lord was therefore ignorant or careless of the decree of the Hebrew bards, when he merely instructed Joseph to return to the land of Israel; but fear of Herod’s successor evoked a *second* dream, which vindicated the prophets by securing for Jesus a residential claim to the title of Nazarene. No such prediction can, how-

ever, be found in Hebrew Scripture, unless by ignorantly confounding the Nazarite vow of Samson with the citizenship of Nazareth.'¹

Such are the miserable expedients by which the pious but credulous compilers of Matthew seek to establish the Messiahship on a prophetic basis; but if Jesus had ever heard of these predictive trivialities as artificial props for the kingdom of heaven, He would have cast them aside with a withering scorn finally destructive of their fictitious pretensions.

The third chapter of Matthew contains the interpolated legend of the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the utterance of a heavenly voice. But, if the Deity may be evangelically depicted as a dove, Mosaic condemnation of graven images is annulled, and Egyptian portraiture of divinity, in animal form, condoned. And if a voice from heaven could do nothing more original than quote the Psalmist and Isaiah,² we may well accept its utterance as the dramatic fiction of a later generation.

The fourth chapter corrupts the Gospel with the grotesque legend of Satanic temptation. Was the fast of forty days accomplished through divine or human endurance? If divine, what is its application to frail mortals dependent for daily life on daily bread? If human, did Jesus go forth to preach the Sermon on the Mount as the famine-stricken apostle of fanatical asceticism? Eminent commentators still automatically reproduce the pious illusion that the 'effect of such a fast on any human organism is to quicken all perception of the spiritual world into a new intensity.' No doubt

¹ Judges xiii. 5.

² Ps. ii. 7; Isa. xlii. 1.

the cerebral exhaustion of famine is prolific in spiritual hallucinations; but as modern psychologists identify moral and intellectual excellence with a well-nurtured brain, is it not full time for all who appreciate the true character of Jesus of Nazareth to strike out of his story this interpolated precedent for Lenten asceticism, obviously introduced into the text when Christianity had exchanged the practical wisdom of Galilean apostles for the visionary fancies of fanatical anchorites?

We need not dwell upon the fabulous details of Satanic temptation, but, turning towards Jesus as he utters the first words of the Sermon on the Mount, ask ourselves, as rational beings, do we believe that this calm and practical moralist was quite recently flying through the air in the grasp of Satan, to obtain a panoramic view of the Roman empire, as if human eyes could reach so far, or superhuman vision need an Alpine peak, to extend the horizon of miraculous perception?

In the mythical chapters of Matthew we necessarily detect the credulous superstition of primitive compilers, honestly mingling attested facts with legendary traditions; but their work was also supplemented by the more pernicious practice of tampering with the integrity of MSS. to sustain disputed dogmas, or to establish usurped authority. Thus, in the famous passages to which Rome appeals in attestation of a spiritual despotism claimed as an inheritance from Peter, Jesus is depicted speaking of a church (*ἐκκλησία*) which had no existence during his lifetime, and entrusting Peter with the keys of a kingdom of heaven whose gates had been already thrown wide open for the welcome reception of all willing to enter as the disciples of Jesus.

Nothing, therefore, but unreasoning faith in the dogma of scriptural infallibility prevents Protestant theologians from meeting the claims of Rome—not with controversial interpretations—but a bold denial that Jesus ever uttered the fatal words which consecrated sacerdotal despotism, and held Christendom bound in ecclesiastical fetters for more than a thousand years. It is vain to contend, through Hebrew scholarship, that ‘binding and loosing’ simply means defining right and wrong, and also, the weakest possible casuistry to affirm that Jesus himself—not Peter—was the rock indicated by the speaker; for most assuredly, if the words were spoken by a Being divinely prescient of their momentous influence on the future of Christianity, Peter and, inferentially, his successors enjoy so commanding an influence on earth and in heaven, that prudence suggests our speedy departure for Rome, that we may tender our submission to the Supreme Pontiff controlling the spiritual destinies of mankind.

The second passage in which the word church occurs supplies the warrant for the ecclesiastical excommunication of an erring brother, henceforth classed with publicans, as if this were a term of opprobrium from the lips of a speaker who, in defiance of Pharisaic exclusiveness, had included this class of men among his familiar companions. The presence of a clumsy interpolator is, however, at once disclosed in the irrational assumption that an accuser is always in the right. There is no question of impartial investigation into the merits of the quarrel. The plaintiff, as judge in his own cause, personally condemns the accused, and simply seeks confirmation of his judgment through sympathis-

ing friends or excommunicating priests. This blot on the pages of the gospel is, however, at once removed as we listen to Jesus instructing Peter to forgive his offending brother, not seven, but seventy times seven.¹ Shall we, therefore, sustain the infallibility of Scripture by convicting Jesus of self-contradiction, or vindicate his consistency by expunging obvious interpolations?

Matthew xix. 10-12 is evidently another ecclesiastical interpolation introduced to sanction celibate fanaticism. Apologetic theologians tell us that the language is figurative, and means nothing more than divine approval of voluntary celibacy, as conducive to a life of pious devotion. If this mode of interpretation be admissible for Roman Catholics who prove the depth of their convictions through monastic retirement from the world, how can it be sustained by Protestants who condemn all celibate vows? We solve the question by denying that Jesus ever uttered words literally suggestive of a barbarous superstition, or figuratively commending celibate asceticism. Ecclesiastical manipulators of the Gospels doubtless sought for Scriptural sanction of their interpolations, and in this case found a precedent in the Wisdom of Solomon (iii. 14), pronouncing an eloquent eulogium on the miserable victims of Oriental despotism.

If it should be said how could these important alterations in the text of Christian literature be effected without the knowledge and consent of Christian communities, we answer interrogatively: how did the translators of the authorised version of Scripture retain in the pages of Protestant Bibles, accepted as verbally

¹ Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

infallible by episcopal communities, the following alleged attestation of the Trinitarian dogma, absent from every MS. antecedent to the fifteenth century: 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one?'¹ If millions of confiding students of Scripture have lived and died for centuries, in the full assurance of faith that this is the word of God proclaiming the truth of Trinitarian mysticism, and the passage is now rejected by eminent Greek scholars as an undoubted forgery, what limits can we place to the possibilities of textual corruption during the earliest stages of ecclesiastical evolution?

¹ 1 John v. 7.

CHAPTER III.

JESUS AND THE BAPTIST.

WHEN we turn to the personal history of Jesus of Nazareth, we necessarily experience disappointment in the absence of all information respecting the first thirty years of his life. The legend of precocious wisdom in the Temple contains all the elements of self-destruction. If Jesus was conscious of Messianic duties as a mere child, what means the succeeding blank of nearly twenty years in his life? If his opinions at the age of twelve harmonised with the views of Hebrew sages, had they undergone so great a change by thirty, as to evoke the judicial condemnation of his former admirers? And if he had attained the age of fifty, might not a maturer wisdom have, then, so modified his opinions as to have given to Christianity another history?

The credulous compilers of Luke seem quite unconscious that the legend of the Temple destroys the legend of the Annunciation; for if the angel Gabriel had revealed to Mary the divine origin of Jesus, could his precocious wisdom have caused her any surprise, if even manifested from the moment of his birth?—a phenomenon which the Gospel of pseudo-Matthew records in logical sequence with the supernatural nativity.¹

In utter ignorance, therefore, of the early life of

¹ Pseudo-Matthew xviii.

Jesus, it remains for us to inquire what were the social and intellectual surroundings which fashioned him, as all other men, in harmony with the tendencies of his age and generation ?

The authorised version of Scripture being the source whence popular views of Judaism are drawn, modern Bible-readers are more or less ignorant of the great changes in Hebrew thought effected through contact with Aryan races from the Babylonian captivity to the reign of the Herods. This period of transition from Mosaic barbarism to Persian, Grecian, and Roman civilisation is partially depicted in the pages of the Apocrypha, through neglect of which students of Scripture pass so abruptly from Moses and the Prophets to the school of Galilee, that the natural sequence of events is lost, and Jesus appears upon the scene, not as the lineal descendant of the ages, but as a mysterious stranger introducing the unknown.

To the majority of the exiles returned from Babylon, Hebrew had become a dead language, known only to the learned Scribes (Sopherim), who, as members of the Great Synagogue, said to have been founded by Ezra, collected the Sacred Canon, and became authoritative interpreters of the civil and religious law, adapted to the wants of the age by modifications attributed to Moses through the pious fiction of the Cabbala (tradition), imaginatively traced to the dispensation of Sinai—a fabulous origin of such imposing authority that the ‘ Words of the Scribes ’ became even more binding than the written law, and enlightened Rabbis of liberal views could thus combine Aryan philosophy with Semitic faith, without prejudice to the prescriptive rights of Moses and the Prophets.

As, in consequence of popular ignorance of Hebrew, the unlearned congregation required instruction through the medium of the Aramaic dialect, translations were made into this familiar idiom, with explanatory (Mephorash) commentaries on the most difficult passages. This system of interpretation assumed two forms—Halachah, authoritative teaching based on the Pentateuch and the Cabbala, and Haggadah, or imaginative exposition, dealing fancifully and allegorically with the entire field of Hebrew Scripture, in harmony with the capricious or arbitrary views of individual preachers. The instruction of the multitude thus passed from priests and prophets to the sacred caste of Sopherim, whose chiefs attained to eminence as the great masters of ethical and theosophic schools, whither disciples flocked to catch each accent from the lips of a Shammai, a Hillel, or a Gamaliel.

Shammai and Hillel¹ were contemporaries of the age immediately preceding the career of Jesus, and founded distinctive schools of scriptural exegesis. The former was a rigid Pharisee, controlled by fanatical devotion to Mosaic ritualism ; but the self-sacrificing and gentle Hillel, imbued with a spirit of generous toleration towards all mankind, was a Master at whose feet Jesus of Nazareth might well have received the training which qualified him for preaching the Sermon on the Mount. ‘Do nothing to thy neighbour that thou wouldst not that he should do to thee,’ said Hillel. ‘Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you,’ said Jesus. Let Jews and Christians decide which of these two illustrious Hebrews may more justly sustain the claim to originality. But if priority of teaching should assign the palm to

¹ Born about B.C. 112.

Hillel, a Turanian claimant appears in the form of Confucius, who uttered a similar apothegm, centuries before the era of the Semitic sage.

As popular conceptions of Divinity are the measure of intellectual and moral progress, the Mosaic Jehovah had been transformed, in the school of Hillel, into the heavenly Father of the age of Jesus—a title assigned for centuries to Infinite Divinity by enlightened Aryans, who, looking towards the heavens for paternal protection, worshipped Dyaus pitar—Heaven Father—the Hellenic Zeus—the Roman Jupiter, in whom the highest minds of antiquity saw, not a national Deity, but the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

Apart from the instruction of learned Rabbis, there arose a demand for less accomplished interpreters (Meturgemanim), who adapted ancient to modern ideas, and taught, with all the freedom of oral exposition, those modifications of Moses and the Prophets disclosed in the pages of the Apocrypha, which records the course of Hebrew thought, within two centuries preceding the birth of Jesus.

In 1 Maccabees, Judaism emerges from the mythical past into the light of history verifiable through the annals of other nations, natural supersede miraculous events, and the fortunes of Judah become amenable to the laws of causation, which impartially control the destinies of Aryan and Semitic races.

Ecclesiasticus (B.C. 200), the Wisdom of Solomon (B.C. 120–80), and 2 Esdras (B.C. 28–25) record the development of Hebrew thought in the schools of Alexandria and Jerusalem, modified by Aryan philosophy and religion, and fill an important place in the evolution of

Christianity by supplying both Jesus and Paul with ideas piously accepted in modern times as original. These books, however, in common with all ancient Scripture, canonical or otherwise, are more or less subject to the suspicion of interpolation, merging sometimes into absolute certainty, as in 2 Esdras vii. 28, 29, where Jesus Christ is named, in imitation of the reference to Cyrus in Isaiah. The first two and the last two chapters of 2 Esdras, absent from the Arabic and Æthiopic versions, are obvious interpolations; but the contents of the original work (iii.—xiv.) sufficiently indicate its influence on evangelical literature. It is remarkable that when evangelical language and ideas disclose their apocryphal source, orthodox theologians do not hesitate to accuse primitive Christianity of interpolating the works of antecedent generations—an admission necessarily involving similar manipulation of all canonical books, for the Apocrypha was sacred Scripture from Clement to Augustine, and is now canonised by the Church of Rome in harmony with the Council of Carthage, which pronounced its infallible decree nearly fifteen centuries ago.

The introduction of foreign ideas into a community formerly so exclusive as the Hebrews necessarily produced that divergence of opinion inevitably resulting in the formation and growth of various sects. The Sadducees were the Conservative supporters of the old Hebrew theology of the Pentateuch, which neither taught the duty of prayer, the immortality of the soul, or the resurrection from the dead, involving an eternity of happiness or misery adjusted to the individual merits of mankind. The Pharisees accepted all these and other innovations drawn from foreign sources, fancifully

authenticated by the unattested theory of oral traditions transmitted from Moses through successive generations; and disclosed their conservative tendencies in rigid observance of the minutest forms of Mosaic ritualism.

The Essenes were, however, the Hebrew sect which exercised a preponderating influence on the evolution of Christianity, and the vast importance of their relationship with the School of Galilee justifies a brief digression in explanation of their presence in Palestine.

In the sixth century B.C. India witnessed the marvellous career of Sakya-Muni, or Gautama Buddha, the greatest and most original moralist of all time, who, although born in the purple, abandoned the social and political advantages of royalty to go forth in early manhood as a philosophical mendicant, and devote six years of ascetic solitude to the evolution of a system which has commanded, in varying form, a greater number of disciples than any other philosophy or religion known to history.

Having reached the needful depth of conviction, Buddha at length appealed to his contemporaries as the apostle of the Kingdom of Righteousness, and taught the highest forms of ethical philosophy, inclusive of the humanity which forgives injuries and returns good for evil, not within the narrow limits of sect or caste, but throughout the wide circle which embraces all mankind. Buddha was, in fact, the original teacher of universal charity; and, if he had preached the Sermon on the Mount, its precepts would have but varied in more specific details of the duties of humanity, inclusive of consideration for our humbler companions of the animal kingdom.

The Kingdom of Righteousness, which involves escape by the Noble Path from the Fetters of human ignorance and passion, is conceived in absolute independence of faith in God and Immortality, and proclaims the highest Good in the attainment of complete enlightenment on earth, through the unruffled serenity of moral purity and intellectual supremacy defined by Buddha as Nirvāna, the Semitic Apostle of which was Paul, who, in his persistent efforts to stamp out human nature through a transcendental spiritualism, was the unconscious exponent of an evangelised Nirvāna.

Buddha commanded his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of righteousness to all mankind; and Buddhism, therefore, became a great missionary religion, gradually and variously corrupted, however, through the pre-existent superstitions of its multitudinous converts. In the third century after the death of Sakya-Muni, in the reign of Asoka, the third Buddhist Council sent forth missionaries to foreign countries, described by extant rock-inscriptions in India as ascetics, commanded to reside in all places and teach men moderation and purity. By the year A.D. 65 missionary zeal had proved so successful in the propagation of the faith that Buddhism was recognised by the Emperor Ming-ti as one of the State religions of China. Is it, therefore, an unreasonable assumption that the zealous missionaries of Buddha had reached the land of Palestine and secured some converts to the faith within two centuries antecedent to the Christian era?

The Essenes, as described in the pages of Josephus, were an important sect, pre-eminent in piety and virtue, filled with love towards God and man, and ever aspiring

to an ideal purity and beneficence. They were distinguished by truth, honesty, justice, and humanity. They inculcated industry, temperance, chastity, and rational control of all human passion. They disapproved of oaths, war, slavery, and commerce, preferring industrial pursuits, especially the cultivation of the soil. They were mutually affectionate, self-denying, and generous to the extent of holding all property in common. They lived peacefully with all men, forbidding injury to any, especially those in authority. They despised riches, rejected pleasure, were unmoved by pain, and disclosed unruffled fortitude in the presence of calamity, torture, and even death. In other words, Nirvāna was the goal of Essene ambition on earth; and if, as we conjecture, the Essene contemporaries of Josephus were the lineal descendants of Buddhist converts, they had combined Aryan morality and philosophy with the Pharisaic form of Hebrew theology which deems men immortal; and had so improved on Mosaic conceptions of Divinity as to have changed the fear into the love of God. It is true that Buddha was at least agnostic as to a life beyond the grave; but later generations interpreted his Nirvāna as Paradise, and, thus modified, his teaching was susceptible of adaptation to religions which profess to solve the problems of eternity.

We do not *yet* hold any historic proof that Buddhist missionaries visited Palestine; and a learned treatise could, no doubt, be written in refutation of our unattested assumption. But, meanwhile, the facts remain indisputable, that antecedent to the Christian era an ascetic sect existed in Judea deeply imbued with

opinions identical with the teaching of Buddha, and that these opinions filled an important place in the evolution of Christianity.

The ascetic retirement in which the Essenes lived naturally developed individual forms of superstitious fanaticism. Philo Judæus, speaking of the kindred sect of Therapeutæ in Egypt, depicts them withdrawing from the distractions of ordinary life, studying Hebrew Scripture in search of hidden and spiritual mysteries, passing whole days, from sunrise to sunset, in mental discipline, and neglecting their physical wants in absorbing contemplation of divine virtue and wisdom—an obvious instance of Semitic adaptation of the Aryan Nirvāna. It has been recently affirmed that Philo's supposed account of the Egyptian Therapeutæ is a Christian forgery of the third century; but, whilst regretting the bad character thus given to primitive Christianity by modern theologians, we need not pause to question the theory, as the evidence of Josephus is sufficiently conclusive as to the Palestinian Essenism of the first century.

Josephus, in his autobiography, informs us that, in personally testing the comparative merits of the several Hebrew sects, he had resided for three years in the desert practising an extreme asceticism as the youthful disciple of Banus, who 'used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food but what grew of its own accord.' Banus was evidently a fanatical Essene, who sought the seclusion of the desert for undisturbed indulgence in drifting thought and dreamy mysticism; but, however excellent his motives, our present knowledge of physiology detects in this blighting

asceticism the growth of insanity, rather than the development of wisdom. Josephus, having thus tested the vanity of famine-born illusions, abandoned the ascetic career, and finally adopted the opinions and practice of the Pharisees, whose system he found somewhat analogous to the philosophy of the Stoics.

John the Baptist was obviously trained in the desert by some professor of asceticism, who rivalled Banus in the mortification of the flesh. The practical Josephus escaped the trying ordeal without losing his head, but enthusiastic John was drawn within the vortex of prophetic fatality, whilst questioning Scripture as to the impending kingdom and the coming man.

About seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, an eminent Hebrew bard, speaking with the privileged vagueness of poets, introduced the following words into his sacred poem: 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'¹ To an imaginative interpretation of this poetic language may be traced the origin of Christianity, as we see a Nazarite hermit, controlled by the hallucinations of asceticism, identify Isaiah's imaginary prediction with himself, and hasten, in the eccentric garb of Elijah, to fulfil prophecy by proclaiming the Kingdom and nominating the Messiah. Is it possible to find a more conclusive instance of alleged prophecy producing its own fulfilment, or a clearer illustration of the illusory superstition which identified men with dubious oracles, and evoked their action in co-operation with the schemes of Providence?

Although convinced of the honesty of the Baptist,

¹ Isa. xl. 3.

we necessarily claim more valid credentials from a divine messenger than his own conscientious acceptance of prophetic destiny ; and we listen with incredulity to all announcements claiming to be supernatural, from the votaries of that asceticism which corrupted Christianity in later generations with the crazy fancies of starving anchorites. Two thousand years ago, an enthusiastic prophet, unconscious of the natural laws controlling his mind and body, in common with more vulgar mortals, might honestly accept the fanciful illusions of his excited brain as the precious whisperings of divine revelation ; but we, who study the eccentricities of saints and martyrs in the light of modern science, can no longer accept the phantasmagoria of cerebral inanition as authentic revelations of the will and purpose of the Deity. And, if the mission of John the Baptist had been postponed to the nineteenth century, on his appearance in our highways as the squalid and famine-stricken messenger of God, he would be arrested by the police, examined by a physician, and sent by a magistrate to some benevolent asylum, where, with cerebral tissues restored by nutrition, his spiritual illusions would gradually vanish, and he would be found, some day, ready to go forth in the garb of civilisation, to fulfil the unambitious duties of ordinary mortals.

But the generation which witnessed the Baptist's dramatic career, filled with vague and excited hopes of national restoration through a Messianic kingdom, applied no rational criticism to the hazy pretensions of John, but hastened to the Jordan to experience a new sensation in listening to the excited accents of a man prepared to restore the lost reputation of the prophets.

Having entered upon his important mission, John, who possessed no original ideas, adopted the ancient rite of baptismal purification, preached the repentance demanded by all the prophets, and followed Daniel in the announcement that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. But the one absorbing purpose of his life was to attain full attestation of his divine mission through a contemporary Messiah, whom he therefore awaited in that condition of mental disturbance so closely allied with religious hallucinations; and in a moment of sudden impulse, mistaken for inspiration, he nominated a Galilean peasant to fulfil the Messianic dreams of prophets, as the predestined victim of ambiguous oracles, luring him to the martyrdom of Calvary.

A time came when, under the depressing influence of a prison, the glow of enthusiastic conviction fostered by the freedom of the desert was exchanged for the hesitation of reactionary reflection; and John then sent his disciples to inquire whether Jesus was indeed the Christ, or Israel still awaited the Messiah—a message which finally disposes of Messianic attestation through the descent of a miraculous dove, and discloses the merely personal impulse which fulfilled the imaginary prediction of prophets.

The prologue of Jordan therefore introduces the central figures of the Galilean drama. John, an enthusiastic visionary, declares that Jesus is the Messiah, and he, in dutiful submission to the revealed will of the Deity, accepts the unknown responsibilities of the undefined position with the same honest facility of belief with which a Pius or a Leo is transformed by acclamation into an infallible Pontiff, invested with all the

resources of divine wisdom as the Vicegerent of God on earth, whilst unconscious of any personal change, and still the Pius or Leo of old to his familiar friends. The possibilities of faith are in fact only restricted within the limits of human imagination; and, if we sceptical moderns could but believe, this nineteenth century might rival the age of Jesus in theosophic mysticism.

With what training in childhood, youth, and manhood did Jesus enter upon his public career? Nazareth, no doubt, possessed its synagogue and Hazzan, or reader, who also fulfilled the duties of village schoolmaster, and taught Jesus to read the Aramaic Targums paraphrasing and expounding Moses and the prophets. As he attained the age of voluntary study, the repulsive contents of the Pentateuch and Joshua necessarily proved distasteful to so refined and gentle a nature; but he found more congenial studies in Isaiah, the Psalms, Apocrypha, and book of Enoch—his favourite authors, whose ideas he freely borrowed. Thus, in the book of Enoch we read: ‘The elect shall possess light, joy, and peace, and they shall inherit the earth;’¹ and Jesus says: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’ How disappointing for the elect or the meek to learn that the idea of rewarding them with so noble an inheritance is not an original suggestion of Jesus!

We know not how or when Jesus became imbued with Essenism. This sect willingly undertook the education of children: can Jesus have been an attendant at their schools? Candidates for admission into their society passed through a year’s novitiate: can he have

¹ Enoch vi.

thus studied their system, or even have become the temporary disciple of a Banus in the wilderness? History or legend gives no answer to these questions. We only know that Jesus taught all which is most excellent in Essenism, and brought to his task the mental characteristics of the contemplative life, through which he presents himself to us as a man of genius who had passed his youth in self-conscious reverie and visionary dreams, vague and purposeless until transformed in maturer life into practical desigus, adopted in response to the promptings of external circumstances suggestive of action.

This age of conventional formalism, harmonising rather with the respectability of collective mediocrity than with the aspirations of personal genius, can but imperfectly understand the individuality of men, gifted with the moral power which awakens the enthusiasm of contemporaries, and fashions the institutions of posterity. In modern life the individual is lost in the crowd; the routine of the schools discourages originality in youth, and the co-operative action of maturity absorbs the man in the multitude. Temporary isolation is, therefore, indispensable to the development of a commanding genius, which must grow in solitude and obscurity until the matured force of a distinctive individuality can withstand attrition with ordinary minds, and maintain a steady front in the presence of hostile systems bristling with the prescriptive rights of centuries. But even then genius is powerless in the present, unless its practical purpose admits of adaptation to the wants of its own generation.

History depicts our great men, not as creating the

tendency of their age, but as embodying its vague conceptions in the definite purpose of their own career, and changing its vacillating theories into accomplished facts. Genius born in advance of contemporary thought, in an age incapable of understanding its designs or adopting its leadership, beats out life against the iron barrier of circumstance, and dies unknown, or possibly transmits the record of its work to a later generation, which grants it the tardy justice of posthumous applause, whilst gratuitously enjoying the fruits of its labours. Genius, therefore, although not always to be found in the supreme crisis of a nation's destiny, cannot command a career independent of time, of circumstance, of place, but must find its field for action in the wants of contemporary humanity.

Jesus proved no exception to this rule. Born and educated at Athens or at Rome, he would have become an illustrious master of moral philosophy, anticipating Seneca and Aurelius in practical lessons of virtue and humanity; but born at Nazareth in the midst of Messianic dreams, fostered by the ambiguous oracles of ancient bards, Jesus drifted from philosophy to superstition, and became the central figure around which later generations grouped the fanciful creations of imaginative piety.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

THE unexpected call to the Messianic office found Jesus unprepared with any definite policy. He therefore remained a passive spectator of events until informed of the imprisonment of John, when he adopted the prophetic formula, 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'—words expressive of nothing more than a popular cry of the day, sufficiently vague for divergent ideals of the phantom kingdom of the prophets.

At length, postponing Messianic responsibilities with the light-hearted philosophy which anticipates not evil, he assumed the *rôle* of a popular Rabbi, or more humble Meturgeman, and, dispensing with school or synagogue, preached the Sermon on the Mount, as *his* imaginative Targum on the law and the prophets.

The genius of Essene Buddhism inspires this famous discourse: 'Blessed are the humble, the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure in heart. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and suffer persecution for its sake, for great is their reward in heaven.'¹ This language might well have been addressed to his disciples by an Essene sage, commending

¹ This form of exhortation was anticipated by the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus xiv. 1, 2, 20).

the virtues which they practised within the circle of an exclusive sect ; but, when Jesus adds, ' Ye are the light of the world ; let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,' he rises above Essene exclusiveness, and invites ascetic piety to go forth into the world, and instruct the multitude in righteousness through the force of example.

In harmony with the freedom of Haggadah, this illustrious Meturgeman of the Mount does not hesitate to denounce all which he finds most objectionable in Moses, even when uttered in the name of Jehovah, and thus sanctions our rejection of scriptural authority, when found conflicting with the reason and conscience of our age. He concurs with Shammai in condemning capricious divorce, replaces Mosaic licentiousness by Essene purity, and emphatically denounces the sanguinary violence of ancient priests and prophets by characterising unjust anger as constructive murder.

The moral genius of Jesus sympathised with the monogamous relationship of the sexes which flourished among Achaian Greeks and Egyptian citizens. He therefore announced that, ' from the beginning ' marriage had been consecrated by Divine decree ;¹ but alas ! *his* ' beginning ' merely dated from the fabulous Eden, in absolute unconsciousness of prehistoric Humanity, and of the countless generations through which woman had not risen above the communal Hetairism, which prevailed before the moral evolution of higher forms of social relationship.

In rejecting oaths, Jesus follows in the footsteps of

¹ Matt. xix.

the Essenes, who, according to Josephus, considered swearing worse than perjury, 'for they say that he who cannot be believed without swearing by God is already condemned.'¹

Disavowing the vindictive spirit of Mosaic legislation, in harmony with the principles and practice of Essene peace-makers, Jesus was betrayed by the feminine softness of his nature into unconditional acceptance of the *doctrinaire* illusion—Peace at any price, which, socially, encourages rogues and ruffians to prey upon the industry of honest and peaceable men, and, politically, invites the aggression of foreign enemies eager for the spoliation of states which see in force no remedy. Eminent apologists assure us that, in commanding us to turn our cheek to the smiter, and surrender our garments to the spoiler, Jesus merely gives forcible expression to the obligations of humanity through an impossible ideal. On the contrary, he personally sanctions the practice of the Essenes, who, according to Josephus, neither bought nor sold anything to each other, 'but every one of them gave what he had to him that needed it, and received from him in exchange what was convenient for himself; and although there may be no requital made, they are fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please.'² This form of socialism was, doubtless, possible in a limited community of pious ascetics, controlled by the laws and customs of the association, but is absolutely irreconcilable with the social and political existence of nations composed of ordinary Humanity. Jesus, however, fell into the serious error of preaching Essene communism to the multitude. And as he personally

¹ *Wars of the Jews*, ii. viii. 6.

² *Ibid.* 4.

acted on the principle of non-resistance throughout the most important events of his career, we necessarily grant him the privilege of meaning what he says, in preference to accepting the unattested theories of apologetic theologians, piously attempting to prove that Jesus was infallible.

Those modern Essenes, the Society of Friends, however they may differ from their ancient prototypes in devotion to commerce, adopt the theory of non-resistance, but, with characteristic prudence, profess these principles as citizens of a powerful empire, which guarantees domestic security of life and property, and shields the *Civis Britannicus* in distant lands with the national prestige, won by the un-Essene heroism of generations, to whom the dream of non-resistance and the fiction of non-intervention would have been but empty sounds. The Society of Friends could, therefore, more effectually test the virtues of modern Essenism by emigrating in a body, with all their possessions, to Central Africa, and there founding a model colony on the principle of non-resistance; where, if exposed to the violence of savages, who still believe in force, they could at least enjoy the pleasing consciousness of proving, at their own expense, the sincerity of their convictions.

A time came when evangelical Essenism proved disastrous to Humanity, as primitive Christians beheld with apathy, or even satisfaction, the appalling calamity of Roman civilisation overwhelmed by savage barbarism. And when, in later generations, the military genius of Mahomedanism threatened Christianity with destruction, if its priests had not disavowed the teaching of Jesus in a policy as warlike as that of Joshua or David,

the crescent would now surmount the cathedrals of Europe, thronged by the disciples, not of Jesus, but of Mahomed.

The pernicious tendency of political Essenism, in modern times, receives lamentable illustration in the culpable leniency extended to the military insubordination of Arabi Bey, whose prompt deposition and enforced exile would have spared the civilised world the appalling spectacle of Alexandria in flames as the funeral pyre of massacred citizens.

Jesus again speaks as a true Essene in commendation of benevolence, but fails to attain the moral height of an Aurelius when he holds out the hope of rewards in heaven as the inducement for deeds of charity. Had he taught men to practise the ennobling duties of humanity without one thought of reward here or hereafter, Christianity might have escaped the mediæval scandal of sinners selfishly pauperising their neighbours for the salvation of their own souls.

Jesus followed the Pharisees in teaching the duty and efficacy of prayer, and concurred with the son of Sirach in condemning vain repetitions. The heathen might importune the gods with tedious volubility, but the worshippers of the true Deity must not trifle with Omnipotence by vainly seeking to participate in the providential government of the world. The Father knows what is best for his children who should, therefore, wisely confide in the guardianship of divine wisdom. In illustration of his meaning, Jesus compiled from extant liturgies the brief formula known as *his* prayer, the simplicity of which should have for ever excluded ritualistic worship from the Christian Church.

If Jesus, revisiting the earth, were to enter our modern churches, and listen to the litanies flowing from the lips of avowedly miserable but apparently self-satisfied sinners, how great would be his amazement in learning that all this pious verbiage is addressed to the Almighty in his name who so emphatically condemned all vain repetitions !

If we had never heard anything more of the opinions of Jesus on the subject of prayer, we might assume that he had almost grasped the scheme of providential government through immutable laws. But the Evangelist depicts him declaring in the same discourse that all things are attainable through prayer ; and, at a later period of his ministry, he makes the startling announcement, ‘ If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.) ’¹ If this language be authentic, its extravagance indicates that Jesus had not risen above the popular superstition which depicts the vacillating gods disturbing the natural sequence of events in response to human wishes, which, in their capricious diversity, would necessarily evoke universal chaos. But, as the bracketed words are an ecclesiastical interpolation, the entire passage may be quite as apocryphal as its final clause.

Ecclesiastical legends sustain the most extravagant views attributed to Jesus by numerous miracles assignable to the prayers of saints and martyrs : but, if these exceptional powers were not purely imaginary, they

¹ Matt. xvii. 20, 21.

cannot have been withdrawn from modern saints, whose prayers should, therefore, cause so appreciable a variation in physical phenomena as to render science an impossibility. Modern physicists engaged in original research, however, fail to trace the abnormal variations due to prayer; and, when they attain attested knowledge of a natural law, its immutable action persistently discredits the pious theory of miraculous variation.

Faith in prayer, in fact, means nothing more than ignorance of law. Each addition to scientific knowledge of causation is a fresh encroachment on the domain of prayer; and Piety, convinced of the naturally inevitable, seeks divine intervention only under conditions of obscure causation, apparently amenable to the supernatural. Threatened by devastating floods, men do not pray that water may flow up instead of down hills; but terrified by storms, they implore divine intervention with the winds, because imperfect knowledge of the laws controlling their action fosters faith in the supernatural direction of their forces.

Piety, from time immemorial, has claimed the couch of the sick and the dying as the special domain of prayer, which reigns supreme in medical, but proves quite inefficacious in surgical cases. No prayer is uttered for the miraculous restoration of a shattered limb; but if, after inevitable amputation, fever should intervene, and demand the presence of a physician, Piety forthwith resorts to prayer and implores divine assistance, because the uncertain course and doubtful result of the disease supplies credulity with the materials of constructive miracles. The Deity, therefore, declines to interfere with the knife of the surgeon, but imparts divinely

healing virtues to the drugs of the physician. Prayer is powerless in the presence of broken bones, but accomplishes miracles in virulent disease.

The Peculiar People, who, in reliance on the promise of an Apostle, logically reject the use of medicine, when charged in our police courts with the crime of manslaughter, must wonder in their fanatical simplicity at the strange inconsistency of legislators who combine belief in the efficacy of prayer with penal enactments against men who honestly desire to reduce their faith to practice.

Illusory miracles of healing, however, vanish in the presence of the statistician. The actuary of an insurance company cannot inform an individual how long he is likely to live, but he can forecast with scientific accuracy the average duration of a thousand lives—an obviously impossible result if the death-rate varied in response to prayer.

No prayers ascend more frequently to heaven than the supplications of trembling mothers imploring divine compassion for their suffering babes; and yet statistics tell us that death deals with them more ruthlessly than with hardened sinners, and not prayer, but sanitation controls the appalling average of infantine mortality.

Evangelical apologists profess to solve all these anomalies.

I. The Almighty only responds to prayer when conformable with the divine will. Then, ecclesiastical liturgies are but a mockery of God and man, and should be forthwith replaced by the a single sentence—‘Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.’

II. Again, we are assured that the Deity only grants miraculous aid when natural resources fail to supply a

remedy ; but is not human ignorance of the remedy identical with its non-existence ? Before the discovery of vaccination, was the plague of small-pox stayed by the prayers of the faithful ? and was pain miraculously assuaged in ages unconscious of the existence of chloroform ? When nations ignorant of sanitary laws were decimated by pestilence, did the prayers of priests or people snatch the doomed inhabitants of undrained cities from the jaws of death ?

III. Other apologists, conscious of the impossibility of reconciling natural law with efficacious prayer, suggest that, although prayer may receive no miraculous response, it exercises a beneficial influence on our minds by fostering pious trust in divine Providence. In other words, theological fictions, deceiving man as to his true relationship with the Deity, are favourable to the interests of Humanity. But men will not pray for objects which they know will not be granted. They must, therefore, be ignorant that they may pray ; and if the utterance of impossible requests fosters piety, we must, necessarily, extend our approval to the ignorance which dictates the prayer.

Faith in prayer has been from time immemorial the very stronghold of the heathen gods. Grant us a fruitful harvest, O Baal ! O Molech ! O Jupiter ! The rain descends, the sun shines, the corn ripens, the husbandman reaps. O mighty Baal ! omnipotent Molech ! beneficent Jupiter ! who thus respond to human prayer. But the clouds refuse their moisture, the earth is parched, vegetation withers ; the gods are therefore angry, and Molech demands a human sacrifice for the devouring flames. See the cloud rising on the horizon

as the victim dies ! Who therefore can question the providential rule of the great fire-god ; or the undoubted efficacy of sacrificial worship ?

The superstition which teaches men to pray is, in fact, an embarrassing heritage from ages which saw in all natural phenomena the personal action of the gods. But now that modern science has revealed the universal reign of law, we necessarily see in prayer a vain illusion fatal to the progress of civilisation ; for not only did trust in the supernatural rob mankind, for ages, of the inexhaustible resources attainable through knowledge of unbroken order in the universe, but it aroused a spirit of bigoted hostility towards the mediæval physicists who sought to question Nature instead of impertuning God ; and if a Darwin or a Huxley had been the contemporary of Bruno and Galileo, his choice would have lain between scientific martyrdom and penitent admission that the origin of man dates from Eden, not quite six thousand years ago.

As the passage which associates miracles with fasting is an ecclesiastical interpolation, Jesus may well be acquitted of preaching the superstitious asceticism enthusiastically adopted, in later generations, by squalid anchorites ignorant of the physical basis of mind. Could these pious men have known that, in refusing to restore the daily waste of their bodies, they were robbing the mental organism of capacity for rational thought, they would doubtless have hastened to restore brain-power by food, and thus exchanged the crazy hallucinations of famine for the rational thoughts of well-fed men, unconscious of Satanic temptation or celestial visions.

It is quite as rational to associate godliness with insufficient air as with inadequate food; and if it had occurred to the hermits of old to practise self-denial in the consumption of oxygen, Hagiology would doubtless record the sufferings of gasping as well as famished saints.

In his personal contempt for riches Jesus was a true Essene: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,'¹ said Jesus. 'The Essenes do not store up for themselves treasures of silver and gold,' said Philo. It was open to Jesus, as to all men of noble and exalted character, to regard the good things of this life with stoical indifference. This form of wisdom is, however, so often found to flourish best among those who have got no riches to despise, that sneering sceptics may unjustly cry, 'Sour-grapes!'; but those who attain to this sublime superiority over human interest in temporal advantages should pause before condemning their weaker brethren, as possibly there is something to be said, even on the side of morality and religion, in favour of riches as compared with poverty. Jesus, however, following in the footsteps of the anonymous author of the Book of Enoch, discredits all possession of property.

'Woe to you who are rich! for in your riches you have trusted; but from your riches you shall be removed, because you have not remembered the most High in the days of your prosperity,'² says the author of Enoch. 'Woe unto you that are rich! for you have received your consolation,'³ says Jesus, thus out-Enoching Enoch by condemning capitalists, not for any alleged breach of duty, but for the guilt of possessing property.

¹ Matt. vi. 19.

² Enoch xciii. 7.

³ Luke vi. 24.

These views of Jesus are fully confirmed in the parable of the rich man and the beggar. We are not informed that Dives was particularly wicked or Lazarus remarkably virtuous; the crime of the former consisted in enjoying the good things of this life, and the merit of the latter in not having them to enjoy. Both these men die. First the squalid beggar, who is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; then the rich man, who is forthwith consigned to hell fire. The cause of so wide a gulf between reward and punishment is clearly explained in the conversation between Abraham and Dives: ¹ 'Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.' It is impossible to mistake the meaning of Abraham. Poverty wins heaven; riches merit perdition. Dives was, however, very deficient in tact, or he would have answered, 'What saith the Scriptures? "Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." ² Why, therefore, art thou not present with me in this torture?'

Apologists may tell us that Dives was not only very rich, but desperately wicked. Abraham, however, made no such charge; and if Dives suffered, not as a wealthy capitalist, but as a hardened sinner, the parable had no meaning until interpreted by modern sages. The views of Jesus, however, receive full confirmation in the narrative of his interview with the young man of great possessions and many virtues, whose countenance was so expressive of nobility as to win the heart of Jesus; and yet, because this youthful Dives declined to cast

¹ Luke xvi. 25.

² Gen. xiii. 2.

the proceeds of his inheritance into the gulf of pauperism, his prospect of entrance into the kingdom of heaven is less than the chance of a camel's passage through a needle's eye.¹

The son of Sirach anticipated Enoch and Jesus in the condemnation of riches: 'What agreement is there between a hyena and a dog? and what peace between the rich and the poor? As the wild ass is the lion's prey in the wilderness, so the rich eat up the poor. As the proud hate humility, so doth the rich abhor the poor.'² Language so extreme obviously indicates the presence of unreasoning prejudice; and if Jesus adopted the fallacies of his age, is it not full time to recognise and admit his error, instead of affirming that he did not mean what he said? Could the Son of Man revisit the earth in this nineteenth century, and witness human progress based on wealth, he would doubtless deplore the primitive ignorance which failed to see in riches the powerful friend of education, knowledge, refinement, virtue, and even religion.

Having condemned riches, Jesus continued his discourse with the following words: 'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the birds of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of

¹ Matt. xix. 16-27.

² Eccclus. xiii. 18-20.

the field ; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these: therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought of the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' ¹

How marvellous is the simplicity and ignorance of this discourse! If flowers are naturally independent of clothing, should man therefore neglect the important art of dressing in seasonable and becoming garments? Could we live the precarious life of birds without resorting to 'picking and stealing'? Do not feathered tribes take thought for to-morrow by seeking food and shelter on distant shores, whilst those of less sagacious instincts, unfed by Providence, perish of cold and hunger in the winter's snows? Has not wisdom, from time immemorial, invited man to follow the example of the industrious ant, rather than the improvident sparrow? Can man, thoughtless of the future, rise above the condition of the savage or the tramp? Is not anxious forethought the germ of human progress?

Modern research discloses that animal existence, throughout the ages, has been dependent on the food-supply gathered, seized, or produced by the strongest, the swiftest, the most sagacious; whilst species inca-

¹ Matt. vi. 25-34.

pable of adaptation to shifting conditions of life have perished, through the inexorable law of 'survival of the fittest,' whose despotic rule knows no variation through divine compassion. Even piety cannot save nations from destruction, which give no anxious thought to their food-supplies. On the eve of famine no people could have been more pious than the Irish race, and yet, because they trusted in Providence and the potato, they perished by hundreds of thousands, although nationally illustrating the policy of the Mount—'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

As modern Christians now, however, practically disavow evangelical economy, apologists tell us that the Greek words *μὴ μεριμνᾶτε* may be translated, 'be not over-anxious,' instead of 'take no thought.' No doubt; but when Jesus, pointing to the lilies of the field, tells us to part with our garments, and give up all our possessions to the poor, we cannot question that he preaches absolute indifference to the wants of tomorrow.

Some theologians affirm that all this is figurative, and depicts an ideal self-denial, impracticable under the ordinary conditions of life. This theory is, however, but another instance of revelation interpreted in harmony with contemporary thought. If Jesus was merely uttering visionary precepts, could he have declared, at the conclusion of his discourse, 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock; and every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand'? Dis-

obedience involved consequences, as appalling as the destruction of a house and its inhabitants, swept away by the force of wind and waves. Did Jesus, therefore, command and threaten without clearly defining the meaning of his words? Could his auditors have been impressed with the authority of a great Master, if he had spoken as a mere doctrinaire propounding the impracticable?

Jesus assuredly spoke with all the force of personal conviction, but his theory of improvidence is not, therefore, less irreconcilable with the conditions of life on earth. The Bohemian maxim, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' may be accepted as philosophy or recklessness, according to the character of the speaker; but if uttered by modern missionaries as a gospel message, the starving millions of India and China, when decimated by famine, may reasonably inquire whether, as disciples of Jesus, they also may be miraculously fed, as the birds of the air.

Anxiety is, in fact, to toiling millions of the human race, the inevitable condition of obtaining daily bread. And the noblest results of human industry and enterprise are identified with the prescient sagacity which plans, with deep and anxious thought, designs which contemplate remote futurity. Too ambitious a glance beyond the visible horizon may result in error, or even calamity; but failure is better than inaction, and through defeat we learn to conquer.

In his uncritical simplicity, Jesus, however, unconsciously refutes his theory of thoughtlessness. The foolish man who built his house upon the sand, obviously selected the site on a fine sunny day, unmindful

of to-morrow's possible change of weather ; but the wise man, instead of trusting to Providence for miraculous protection, selected, in a foundation of rock, a material guarantee against the storms of to-morrow. Can the importance of foresight be more clearly illustrated ?

Where, therefore, shall we seek the source of that misapprehension, through which Jesus, slighting the divine gift of foresight, taught men to limit their cares to the supply of merely daily wants, and would thus have deprived posterity of all the material resources of modern civilisation ? We answer, first, in Essene prejudice against riches ; and secondly, in the illusory dream that the Son of Man, predicted by Enoch, would appear in the clouds within a generation, sitting on the throne of his glory. With that marvellous prospect in view, how insignificant the petty cares of life ! How unworthy of a thought the food and clothing of to-morrow ! How contemptible all motives of personal and family interest ! But if Jesus could have known that, nearly two thousand years later, the natural order of the universe would remain undisturbed by the miraculous, and that posterity, through knowledge of natural laws of which he had never heard, would accomplish far greater marvels than his own signs and wonders, he would have recognised, with characteristic candour, that human intelligence was destined to fill a much more important place in the history of the world, than he had inferred from the predictions of the prophets.

We have already seen that the most famous passage in the Sermon on the Mount, inculcating sympathetic altruism, is older than the Gospel. It is an admirable

precept for Christians morally capable of putting themselves in the place of their neighbours; but ordinary mortals require more definite instruction in the duties of Humanity. We, therefore, inevitably regret the absence from this great discourse of specific reference to the good old-fashioned heathen virtues of truth, honour, and honesty, which, if epigrammatically defined by the Preacher on the Mount, might have saved us from the modern scandal of piety combined with the adulteration of food, and charity flowing from the hands of the fraudulent promoter. And if Jesus had ever read of and commended the heroic virtues of the noblest of the Gentiles who had worthily sustained the dignity of Humanity, we might not now be witnessing the unedifying sight of Christians posing in the garb of miserable sinners, and rolling mankind in the mire of gratuitous abasement. How invaluable to us would have been an Evangelical version of the motto—*Noblesse oblige!* And if Jesus had commended the man who, in rising above his fellows, invites them to follow in the path of progress, we might have escaped the modern superstition of ‘Equality,’ which means pulling down our neighbour to the level of our own attainments.

But the most lamentable omission in the Sermon on the Mount is the question of Slavery. The Essenes were nearly two thousand years in advance of their age in condemning this great social evil, and yet their illustrious disciple leaves unsaid that denunciation of human bondage which would have been a priceless boon to unborn millions, and would have saved Christianity from the shame of sanctioning for centuries that crime against Humanity which, in robbing some of freedom, inflicts

on all the moral debasement involved in the relationship of master and slave.

If Jesus, revisiting the earth at the beginning of this century, had witnessed the spectacle of Christian nations growing rich through the toil and sufferings of slaves, how intense would have been his feelings of self-reproach for the great opportunity lost of advocating on the Mount the emancipation of all slaves, and the final abolition of servile institutions, as the anti-human creation of savage barbarism! Turning in deep dejection from the scene of human debasement, Jesus would be the first to admit that even he had failed to realise, in his teaching, the full force of his own words—‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.’

It is rather startling to find this precept associated with the law and the prophets. Can we trace sympathetic philanthropy in the pages of Moses, or consideration for others in the denunciations of the prophets? Did Elijah put himself in the place of the unoffending messengers of their king when he called down fire from heaven to destroy them? Or did Elisha recall his own thoughtless childhood when he summoned ferocious executioners of prophetic vengeance to accomplish the slaughter of the Innocents?

In chapter v. 17 we read, ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.’ As Jesus forthwith proceeds to condemn the teaching of Moses, this text cannot be a correct record of his

words. Marcion, whom the claimants of primitive orthodoxy branded as a heretic, asserted that the text had been tampered with by Judaizing converts, and that Jesus had really said, 'Think ye that I am come to fulfil the law or the prophets? I came not to fulfil, but to destroy.' This is the only reading reconcilable with the general purport of the teaching of Jesus. If he had spoken as recorded in our version, his auditors would have inevitably inferred perpetuity of obligation to obey the law of Moses. Modern commentators tell us that the Greek words '*ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται,*' more correctly translated 'till all things have come to pass,' refer to the establishment of the Kingdom of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus; but as, however, the congregation of the Mount had never heard of these prospective events, this hypothesis depicts Jesus addressing men, in unintelligible terms, who were liable to extreme penalties for not fulfilling his sayings.

But what law was abolished at the resurrection? The decalogue? But that is read out in our churches as the basis of Christian ethics. The objectionable enactments of Moses? But these were denounced during the lifetime of Jesus. The position is obviously too complex for apologetic adjustment; and we must either reject the passage as it now stands, or admit irreconcilable difficulties in the teaching of Jesus.

The closing verses of the Sermon on the Mount clearly indicate that the kingdom of heaven was attainable rather through practical morality, than orthodox faith. Can we question the orthodoxy of men who prophesy, cast out devils, and work miracles in the

name of Jesus?¹ And yet these eminent spiritualists are rejected in favour of practical moralists, whose merits, according to a later discourse (chapter xxv.), shall be recognised on the day of judgment, in the philanthropy which feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, shelters the homeless, and visits the sick ; in other words, Jesus borrows his ideas of future retribution from the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead,' written at least two thousand years before the Christian era. How marvellous that, in the face of so explicit a declaration, a Christianity of dogma should have succeeded a Christianity of ethics, and that, but a few generations after the death of Jesus, his followers should have adopted saving creeds instead of saving virtues !

Jesus addressed men and women on the Mount who, probably, never had another opportunity of listening to his words. On him, therefore, rested the responsibility of clearly defining all that is needful for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. That *all* consisted of nothing more than simple trust in divine beneficence, and the practice of human virtues, engraved on the ancient monuments of Egypt, centuries before Moses is said to have tortured its inhabitants with appalling plagues. The auditors of Jesus heard nothing of the Fall of man, the necessity for atonement, the regeneration of baptism, the dogma of the Trinity, or the mysterious influence of the Holy Ghost. If it is indeed true that salvation depends on faith in dogmatic creeds, whether Apostolic, Nicene, or Athanasian, many hearers of the Sermon on the Mount will doubtless rise up in the Day of Judgment against Jesus of Nazareth, to

¹ Matt. vii. 21-23.

denounce the fatal silence which left them in ignorance of the ecclesiastical rites and theological mysteries indispensable to candidates for the Kingdom of Heaven.

What, therefore, are our conclusions respecting the Sermon on the Mount? A marvellous discourse from the lips of a Galilean peasant, but disclosing no trace of the originality indispensable to divine revelation. The student of the Apocrypha will find many of the ideas of Jesus scattered through the pages of 2 Esdras, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus; and he who carefully and dispassionately reads the 'Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius,' drawn, not from Christianity, but from Grecian and Roman philosophy, will find all which is most excellent in the Sermon on the Mount, based on the principle of duty towards God and man, even unto death, without one thought of reward here or hereafter.

CHAPTER V

PARABLES.

HAVING formed our ideal of Jesus as a great Teacher from the Sermon on the Mount, we participate in the surprise and disappointment of his disciples, as we see him forsaking the original form and substance of his teaching, to borrow Rabbinical parables from the educational system of men whom he had denounced as blind leaders of the blind. The multitude had found in his simple and straightforward discourses an impressive authority foreign to the style of merely conventional teachers, and yet he imperilled the moral power of direct and definite statement to imitate the enigmatical teaching of his hated rivals.

A vague impression exists in our time that Hebrew parables were judiciously adopted for the instruction of ignorant simpletons ; but this view is not sustained by contemporary opinion in the age of Jesus. The author of *Ecclesiasticus*,¹ writing B.C. 200, assures us that parables were not intended for labourers, agriculturists, or mechanics, but for men of refined taste and learned leisure. Great Hebrew masters, preceding and contemporary with Jesus, addressed their parables, not to the ignorant multitude, but to the youthful pupils who—as Saul of Tarsus—sat at the feet of a Hillel, a

¹ Chap. xxxviii.

Shammai, or a Gamaliel, not to listen to the eloquence of great convictions, but to the casuistical subtleties of men honestly endeavouring to reconcile the faith of Judah with the Rationalism of Greece.

This mode of teaching—examples of which abound in Mishnical and Talmudical literature—is obviously the very reverse of that adopted in the Sermon on the Mount. What, therefore, caused so mysterious and unsatisfactory a change in the policy of Jesus? A clear and definite reply is furnished by the Evangelist. He had fallen under the dominion of the national superstition.

On his disciples inquiring why he had addressed the multitude in parables, Jesus referred them to the following passage in Isaiah :¹ ‘ And he [Jehovah] said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not ; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.’ The Evangelist furthermore removes all doubt as to the subjection of Jesus to prophetic fatality, by informing us that he refused to instruct in any other form than parables, because the Psalmist had written, ‘ I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old.’²

A beneficent Father and a free kingdom of heaven were, therefore, illusory dreams. The words of Isaiah, spoken without any reference to the age of Jesus, now fettered his judgment, controlled his actions, annulled the Sermon on the Mount, and involved the kingdom of

¹ Chap. vi. 9, 10.

² Matt. xiii. 35.

heaven in mysteries hidden from all but the chosen few, gifted with supernatural knowledge of the precious secrets.¹

We have seen from the parable of Lazarus and Dives that Jesus did not possess the critical acumen indispensable to the nice adjustment of analogous conditions disclosed in the fables of an Æsop. Rabbinical parables were, therefore, foreign to the genius of Jesus; and those recorded in the Gospels have only sustained a traditional character for wisdom through the reverential awe of divinity which has silenced the voice of rational criticism. Let us, therefore, consider some of the parables accepted for centuries as master-pieces of sagacity.

‘Behold, a sower went forth to sow: and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured them; some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away; and some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them; but others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold’²

Although the disciples were supposed to possess intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus explained to them the esoteric meaning of the parable. The sower was the Son of Man, the seed was his teaching, and the various descriptions of ground represented the moral condition of his auditors. Now,

¹ Matt. xiii. 16, 17.

² Matt. xiii. 3-9.

if land, virtually incapable of producing corn through the intrinsic defects of its actual condition, symbolises the hearts of men, the failure of the gospel, in their case, is as much a foregone conclusion as the failure of the seed in the ground ; and it follows that none but the naturally virtuous benefit by the preaching of Jesus. How, therefore, is it possible to reconcile this parable with the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness of sins ? How marvellous that it did not occur to any one of the disciples to inquire in what sense the parable of the sower affected men, rendered incapable of understanding the teaching of Jesus by the decree of the prophets !

Again, Jesus declares that the kingdom of heaven resembles a man who has sown good seed in a field in which his enemy subsequently scatters tares, and all are permitted to grow together until the harvest.¹ The disciples, apparently unconscious of their privileged possession of sacred mysteries, seek an explanation, and Jesus states that the sower is the Son of Man, the good seed the children of the kingdom, the tares the children of Satan, and the harvest the end of the world. Mankind are, therefore, predestined to salvation or perdition under circumstances admitting of no individual responsibility ; and if the disciples had been capable of any rational appreciation of their master's meaning, they would naturally have remarked, ' If all men are necessarily wheat or tares, sons of God or children of Satan, why preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, and teach the multitude that men shall be rewarded or punished according to their conduct on earth ? ' But, un-

¹ Matt. xiii. 24-30.

happily for the future of Christianity, the simple-minded peasants whom Jesus had chosen as his companions and confidants were too deeply impressed by his personal superiority to question the infallibility of his teaching. As Jesus, however, habitually silenced all who differed from him in opinion, the sceptical suggestions of disciples would not probably have elicited any very definite reply. When Peter, the boldest of the apostles, presumed to criticise the statements of his master, he was reproved with a severity which practically suppressed inquiry, and thus deprived posterity of the enlightenment which might have resulted from freedom of discussion.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net which was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind ; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world ; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire ; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’¹ Now, what does analogy in this case affirm ? The fish are in their natural condition, which nothing can change when the great drag-net is cast, and in symbolising men, indicate that salvation or perdition is contingent on the natural character of individuals.

Eminent commentators assure us that this ‘parable perforce passes over the fact that in the actual work of the kingdom the very casting of the net may change, and is meant to change, the nature of the fish that are taken in its meshes ; and, therefore, those that remain “bad”

¹ Matt. xiii. 47-50.

are so in the end by their own will.' This is a marvellous effort at accommodation; and, as there is simply no analogy between the parable and these views, ecclesiastical exegesis further confirms the obvious fact that Jesus had mistaken the tendency of his own genius, when he undertook to instruct mankind by parables in the mysteries of the Kingdom. Was he more successful in teaching wisdom and morality, by the Rabbinical method?

Theologians have exhausted the resources of casuistry in apologetic exegesis of the parable of the Unjust Steward; but the fact remains unchanged, that it either sanctions sharp practice in business, or is absolutely destitute of any intelligible meaning. It is vain to weary us with the shifting suggestions of modern hypotheses; we require to know in what sense the parable was understood by the auditors of Jesus, and fail to obtain any satisfactory reply.

The favours lavished on the prodigal son teach us that idle profligacy may attain equal rewards with steady industry; but the omission of all reference to the subsequent history of the prodigal deprives the parable of instructive efficacy. The young scamp, when nearly famished, was eloquent in professions of repentance; but when he found that a vicious career led to nothing worse than a new suit of clothes and a fatted calf, he may have relapsed again and again, and dined so often on penitential veal, that even his affectionate old father lost all patience, and sent him back to husks and swine—a catastrophe which would, of course, materially alter the moral of the tale.

What interpretation shall we give to the parable of

the Talents? ¹ A capitalist, travelling into a far country, called his servants and delivered, to the first five talents, to the second two, and to the third one. The first two adopted mercantile pursuits; and, although nothing is said of their having traded in partnership, each, by a remarkable coincidence, cleared exactly one hundred per cent. profit. These men may have been bold and successful speculators, but to double capital in either ancient or modern times involves risks quite as likely to end in ruinous failure as in a brilliant *coup*. To understand the application of the parable it would, therefore, be necessary to know how these speculators would have been received by their master, had they announced the loss of his seven talents.

The holder of one talent was, obviously, one of those dull plodding men who, in our own time, would prefer keeping a hundred sovereigns in a stocking to investing in Turkish bonds. As he had not the courage to trade, he was condemned for not lending the money at interest; but what if the bank failed? Would he then have been rewarded for good intentions?

Our English Bible, through the interpolation of verse 14, depicts this parable as representing the kingdom of heaven, but we can find no trace of the analogy.

Has no evangelical parable, therefore, given full expression to the teaching of Jesus on the Mount? Yes, that of the Good Samaritan, which, in absolute freedom from Rabbinical mysticism, is inspired by that spirit of humanity which constitutes the moral greatness of the Son of Man.

¹ Matt. xxv. 14-30.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER—FAITH—IMMORTALITY.

THE theology of Jesus affirms the paternal and filial relationship of God and man—a theory of Divine and human affinity anticipated for centuries by Aryan piety, and so familiar to the audience of Jesus that it is accepted without comment as quite a matter of course.

In the opinion of Jesus, faith was the cardinal virtue of candidates for the kingdom of heaven, but a faith which meant nothing more than belief in the Son of Man. Could he have foreseen that the Christianity of futurity would claim the unreasoning assent of mankind to the superstition which transformed the unassuming Son of Man into the second Person of a mysterious Trinity, his homely mother into the Queen of heaven, and his rustic companions into the demi-gods of Christian worship, he would have recognised that a reasonable scepticism is more akin to true religion, than the unquestioning faith which drifts into blind credulity, and solemnly warned his followers to believe nothing of him after his death which they had not heard from his own lips; and thus posterity might have escaped the doctrines, dogmas, and mysteries inflicted by ecclesiastical authority on mankind.

Jesus added nothing original to contemporary thought on the immortality of the soul, or the resurrec-

tion of the body, as borrowed by the Hebrews from heathen philosophy and religion. The Sadducees, however, adopted an ingenious device for testing his views on these important subjects.

According to a most objectionable law of Moses, when a married man died without issue, it became obligatory on his brother to marry the widow. The Sadducees logically inferring that a woman might thus become the wife of seven brothers in succession, inquired of Jesus what would be the relationship of one wife to seven husbands at the resurrection. 'Jesus answered, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.'¹ What scriptures? The Book of Enoch, in which we read, 'And all the righteous shall become angels in heaven.' From this book, therefore, as inspired scripture, Jesus drew his ideas of the life hereafter. He, however, added, 'But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' Jehovah, therefore, in excluding any direct reference to immortality from the Pentateuch, left men to guess at this important doctrine by an ingenious adaptation of words spoken without any apparent allusion to the subject. Could Jehovah have said, 'I was the God of Abraham'? Or if a man should now say, 'I am the descendant of William the Conqueror,' would we accept these words as proof of his belief in the immortality of the soul?

¹ Matt. xxii.

Can we imagine a more destructive blow to the doctrine of immortality, than that he who, according to orthodox faith, existed from eternity, could suggest no more convincing proof of the life hereafter than the forced construction of an isolated passage in an ancient book, which he accepted as the inspired work of Moses, with the same unquestioning faith which canonised the Hebrew fiction of Enoch?

According to orthodox chronology, this discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection as a theoretical question dependent on the interpretation of Scripture, occurred about two years after Jesus had publicly raised the young man of Nain from the dead. What clearer proof can we hold of the purely legendary character of the miracle?

Jesus borrowed his conceptions of the final judgment, the joy of the righteous, and the everlasting torments of the wicked from the Book of Enoch. When we consider his own tender and compassionate nature, and his beneficent ideal of Divinity, his condemnation of sinners to eternal fire becomes incomprehensible until we discover that he is merely reproducing the ideas of an author whom he accepts as an inspired prophet. The independent judgment of Jesus would have detected the fiction of eternal fire in the beneficence of his Father in heaven; but how could he who, in humble reverence for the authority of Scripture, had accepted unmerited persecution and death at the hands of Isaiah, question the inspired oracles of Enoch, whose language left no room for doubt that an appalling futurity of agonising torment was the inevitable doom of all but the elect?

Jesus, therefore, taught that the tares should be cast

into a 'furnace of fire;' that it was better for men to enter the kingdom of heaven as cripples, than to be cast into 'everlasting fire;' and that, in the day of judgment, he should say to those on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;'¹ and to the unhappy beings on his left, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:' words of appalling import, which, when adopted by Christianity as the inevitable consequences of theological error, so hardened the hearts of saints and martyrs, that they rejoiced in the hope of witnessing the awful torments of unbelieving sinners. 'What exultation of angelic hosts and risen saints,' says Tertullian, 'when, in the last judgment, I shall be excited by admiration, joy, exultation, derision, as I behold provincial governors and illustrious monarchs groaning in fiercer fires than they kindled for the followers of Christ! What philosophers! poets! tragedians! tossing on the rolling billows of dissolving flame!'² In later generations this theoretical ferocity assumed the more practical form of anticipating eternal fire, by committing Jews and heretics to the flames before the natural termination of their lives. What more pious duty could Christians perform than to follow the example of angels by contemplating, with callous indifference or joyous exultation, the dying agonies of men passing from temporal to eternal flames?

¹ Matt. xxv. 34.

² *De Spectaculis*.

CHAPTER VII.

THE APOSTLES.

As enthusiastic faith in his supernatural mission made Jesus intolerant of all who differed from him in opinion ; he could not submit his pretensions to the test of rational criticism, and was, therefore, deprived of the companionship and possible co-operation of men of ability and culture. This social isolation, therefore, caused the selection of his friends and future apostles from a class so humble and ignorant that their credulous assent to the imaginative creations of his exuberant fancy was a foregone conclusion. As, however, men of knowledge, wisdom, and experience are generally chosen for important duties, Jesus explained this deviation from the ordinary rules of prudence by the supernatural. His Father had concealed the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes. Does the history of Christianity confirm this pious illusion ?

Within the lifetime of the Apostles we find a member of the sect which Jesus abhorred, presuming to prove by Hellenistic disquisitions that gospel for which Jesus demanded unquestioning faith. And the writings of Saul of Tarsus—the trained pupil of ‘blind leaders of the blind’—exercises, to this day, a greater influence on Christian doctrine than the teaching of Jesus

of Nazareth, or the brief utterances of that very limited minority of the apostles who have not as absolutely vanished out of Christianity as if they had never existed.

In fact, so insensible were the apostles to the sacred duty which they owed to their master and posterity, that they most culpably omitted to jointly compile and unanimously attest an authentic version of the life and teaching of Jesus for transmission to future generations; and thus they thoughtlessly handed over Christianity to the constructive ingenuity of Pharisees, Platonists, Ascetics, Sophists, Dialecticians, Gnostics, Manichæans, Sabellians, Arians, Trinitarians, Scholastics, and heretics of so many divergent creeds, sustained by conflicting gospels, that the Christian Church became the arena of hostile sects struggling for incomprehensible dogmas and sacred mysteries, until the epoch had arrived when the united forces of temporal and spiritual despotism ruthlessly crushed divergent heresies into the nominal Catholicity of Rome, which embodies, not the original teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, but a marvellous combination of Egyptian, Hebrew, Persian, Indian, and Grecian superstitions with the intellectual dreams of Grecian and Roman philosophy.

Such were the disappointing results of making Galilean fishermen the custodians of sacred mysteries, and of relying on supernatural inspiration for issues attainable only through the functions of human reason, to which the final appeal is inevitably made when we contest the usurped authority of sacerdotal despotism.

Do modern Christians concur with Jesus in reliance on simplicity and ignorance? Apparently not; for when our statesmen choose a bishop for consecration, they do

not seek him among the pious but ignorant men who address their humble auditors in our highways with confiding trust in their own election as 'chosen vessels,' but they select his lordship from eminent candidates distinguished by learning, wisdom, and discretion, and his episcopal career generally justifies the choice of uninspired sagacity.

Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, and other silent members of the apostolic brotherhood may, however, plead extenuating circumstances, as how could it occur to them to provide for the religious instruction of posterity whilst expecting the second advent of their Lord and Master within their own generation?

The apostles are, however, merely lay figures in the evangelical drama, except when depicted as envoys or heralds sent forth to announce the advent of the Kingdom, with power to heal the sick, cast out devils, and *raise the dead*, the latter clause being an interpolation absent from the best manuscripts. When we, however, consider that these apostolic missionaries were to carefully avoid Samaritans and Gentiles,¹ that they would not have got through their labours in the cities of Israel before the second Advent,² and that none but the Hebrews would ever, consequently, receive the message of the Kingdom, we necessarily reject this episode as apocryphal, more especially as the Apostles almost immediately re-appeared in the society of Jesus.

¹ Matt. x. 5.

² Matt. x. 23.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCRIBES AND THE PHARISEES.

It is disappointing to find, from his unconditional and persistent denunciation of the Pharisees, that Jesus had not risen above the error, so common among theologians, of denying the presence of conscientious belief and honesty of purpose in their religious opponents. The Sadducees were the conservative supporters of the old Mosaic system as defined in the Pentateuch, which is silent respecting the immortality of the soul, and retribution beyond the grave. The Pharisees had borrowed the great theories of Immortality and Resurrection from the theologies of foreign nations, and gradually invested them with the authority of Mosaic sanction, through the ingenious but untenable hypothesis that the great prophet of Israel had not only received a written, but also an oral law on Mount Sinai, which had been traditionally transmitted from generation to generation. Jesus accepted the heathen doctrines of Immortality and Resurrection at the hands of the Pharisees, without the slightest pretension to more definite knowledge of these great mysteries than was derivable from the popular theology of his age and generation. How, therefore, could he consistently condemn the Pharisees for utilising traditions, through the partial adoption of which he had attained his own most important convictions? Might not the

accused have advisedly answered, 'If you condemn traditions, you reject the resurrection from the dead; why, therefore, do you not join the fraternity of unbelieving Sadducees?'

In the eyes of Jesus, the Pharisees were all, without exception, hypocrites, fools, vipers, serpents, swindlers, murderers, and children of hell condemned to perdition. Is it possible to reconcile this indiscriminate condemnation of a class with reason or revelation? Is there a more unphilosophic mode of judging men than by their cloth? And was it consistent with the Sermon on the Mount, to unconditionally exclude the most important members of the Hebrew community from fellowship in the Kingdom of Heaven?

'Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.'¹ When we consider that this startling announcement is followed by a bitterness of denunciation which brands them as religious impostors, the inconsistency of this teaching becomes as obvious as if Protestant Reformers, instead of withdrawing men's allegiance from the Papacy, had denounced the characters of mediæval Popes, and yet recommended acceptance of their decrees as the Vicegerents of God on earth.

Eminent apologists suggest that the authority of the Pharisees was only valid in their collective capacity as the Sanhedrim. When, therefore, that great Council condemned Jesus to death, all pious Jews, inclusive of his apostles, were bound to concur in the judgment of

¹ Matt. xxiii. 1-3.

the supreme court of the nation. Would it not be more prudent for apologetic theologians to question the accuracy of evangelical annalists, than to explain the inconsistencies of Jesus by conjectural exegesis, which, if even tenable, reaches us with no higher authority than the good intentions of pious apologists?

The severity with which the Pharisees are denounced in the Evangelists is only possible by magnifying all their faults, and denying them every virtue. The Puritans of the age of Cromwell are depicted by their political opponents as merely vulgar hypocrites, parodying Hebrew fanaticism by borrowing the phraseology of prophets, and wielding 'the sword of the Lord and of Gideon;' and yet among their number were many who combined with these fantastic pretensions to inspired godliness an honest devotion to the sacred cause of civil and religious liberty. Were there no conscientious believers and workers among the brotherhood of Pharisees? What of that great Rabbi, Gamaliel, who, whilst Jesus uttered his denunciations, sat in tranquil unconsciousness of evangelical anathemas, with Saul at his feet acquiring the education which was to fit him to become the greatest of the apostles?

The Pharisees were, in fact, the theological product of their age, in the same sense that Franciscans, Jesuits, Lutherans, Puritans, Quakers, Wesleyans, and Ritualists arise in response to some religious tendency of their generation—all moved by an honesty of purpose inseparable from religious zeal, and devoted to the regeneration of mankind through divergent forms of fanaticism. But when the zeal of their founders has as absolutely perished as the fleeting conditions which

evoked their enthusiasm, their followers, in practising the routine of an established system, seem to the superficial to be hypocrites, when they are simply the automata of an inherited faith.

The Pharisees were doubtless immoderate formalists in the time of Jesus; but the vice of that generation had been the virtue of an age when, as enthusiastic saints (*Assideans* or *Chasîdîm*), they had supported the *Asmonæan* dynasty in an heroic struggle with foreign despotism, and recorded their solemn protest against the Hebrew renegades who adopted the habits and customs of their Grecian masters, by that extreme devotion to the minutest requirements of the Mosaic law which is fully justified by the contents of the *Pentateuch*. But in the age of Jesus the *Asmonæan* enthusiasm was dead; national aspirations had been crushed by the invincible power of Rome; and the descendants of the *Chasîdîm* had relapsed into the lethargic formalism which aroused the indignation of the man who had discovered new sources of enthusiasm in excited expectation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

As, however, indiscriminate denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees is irreconcilable with the character and teaching of Jesus, we must seek the explanation in unreasoning acceptance of some Scriptural formula. In the *Book of Enoch* we read, ‘Woe to those who build up iniquity and oppression, and who lay the foundation of fraud! for suddenly shall they be subverted. Woe to those who build up their houses with crime! for from their very foundations shall they be demolished. Woe to you who recompense your neighbour with evil! for you shall be recompensed according

to your works. Woe to you, ye powerful, who with power strike down righteousness! for the day of your destruction shall come. Woe to you who frustrate the word of the righteous! for to you there shall be no hope of life. Woe to you, ye sinners! for with the words of your mouths and with the work of your hands have you acted impiously; in the flame of a blazing fire shall you be burnt.’¹

This is obviously the source from which Jesus borrowed his formulæ of denunciation; and in multiplying woes for scribes and Pharisees, regarded by him as atrocious sinners, he piously followed the example of an inspired prophet.

¹ Enoch xciii.-xcix.

CHAPTER IX.

MIRACLES.

ALTHOUGH science finds no trace in Nature of the supernatural, and evangelical miracles have no historical existence, Reason must still contest their claims, until finally rejected by Orthodoxy in harmony with some ingenious apology, indicating that the gospel is quite as independent of miracles as of eternal fire.

Belief in supernatural healing and exorcism was prevalent among Greeks and Romans as well as Hebrews. Tacitus records miraculous cures effected by the Emperor Vespasian ; and Josephus states that he saw one of his own countrymen extracting a demon through the nostrils of a demoniac.

In harmony with the superstition of their age, the Jews expected a supernatural physician in the Messiah ; and the compilers of Matthew accordingly depict Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons. But these scenes in his life might be repeated in our own time, if we could revert to the superstition which saw in insanity the presence of Satan, and in disease the visitation of God. Under these conditions, some venerable Bishop need but summon around him a crowd of patients, to accomplish wonders in healing the sick and vanquishing Satan. It is true that sight would not be restored to the blind, nor hearing to the deaf ; a man

with a wooden leg would not receive one of flesh and blood ; nor would the bones of a fractured arm unite at the sound of the episcopal voice ; but all forms of disease susceptible of influence through the imagination would be so sensibly relieved by spiritual treatment, that grateful convalescents and enthusiastic eye-witnesses would authenticate the presence of the miraculous ; and demons, being invisible, would be ejected by the score, much to the relief of the possessed, and to the edification of the faithful.

Thus obviously originated the evangelical miracles, which, reaching the Gospel-makers of the second century in traditional versions, had grown into those exaggerated violations of natural law which modern science inevitably rejects, as unattested by any reliable proof.

The legendary complications of tradition are clearly shown in the mental confusion with which the evangelical compilers perform their task. (i.) Jesus begins his career as the publicly recognised worker of numerous miracles, anon he discloses anxiety to conceal that he had effected a single cure. (ii.) He wrought miracles to evoke faith, but in the absence of faith he could not work miracles. (iii.) He admits that miracles were necessary to convince the Apostles, and yet refers others to the sign of Jonas swallowed by a whale. (iv.) He declines to establish his mission by a sign from heaven, and yet refers John the Baptist to miracles as the proof of his Messiahship. (v.) He proved the truth of the resurrection by raising men from the dead, and yet supplies no stronger argument in its favour than that Jehovah had said, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' It is obvious we

cannot accept historical miracles from men so deficient in critical acumen as to overlook the inconsistency of these statements.

The demoniacs of the Evangelists evidently suffered from hysteria, epilepsy, or insanity. When acute mania had subsided in the presence of Jesus, the demon in possession had made his escape; and when an attack of epilepsy had passed away, another evil spirit had been successfully ejected. The Evangelists are silent as to the future history of these cases; it would have been important to learn whether the patients had a relapse. Jesus may never have seen or heard of them again, but in the case of Mary Magdalene—his constant companion—he cast out seven demons; in other words, the hysteria or epilepsy from which she suffered was recurrent, in defiance of the miraculous.

How deplorable that Jesus could not rise above the pernicious superstition of demoniac possession! If it had occurred to him how destructive of his own ideal of a heavenly Father was this monstrous combination of the human and diabolical, he would have assuredly detected and disavowed the divine abasement involved in so barbarous a superstition.

Some evangelical miracles recall the injudicious work of modern editors publishing all available gossip respecting the illustrious dead. How immeasurable the credulity of men who depict Jesus utilising the services of an inspired fish to meet the demands of Roman taxation!¹ Hagiology speaks of a crab which carried ashore in its claws a sacred cross dropped by some saint into the sea. If we piously

¹ Matt. xvii. 24-27.

accept the marvellous fish, can we reasonably reject the wondrous crab? Can moderns who reverence the name of Jesus, accept the miracle of water transformed to wine? How many generations removed from the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount was the man who wrote such words as these!—‘This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed in him.’ Did the Son of Man glorify himself by actions susceptible of imitation by any dexterous juggler? and was the faith of Apostles won by means which impious scoffers might have called mere sleight of hand? If these are the signs and wonders which established Christianity, how boundless the field left open for the charlatanism of false prophets!

The legend of the transfiguration records the miraculous appearance of Moses and Elias conversing with Jesus on a mountain, followed by a voice from heaven announcing the Father’s approbation of the Son. But as Jesus never revealed the miracle to mankind, and Peter, James, and John, the only witnesses, are absolutely silent on the subject, why should we accept the credibility of improbable and unattested phenomena?

It is said that Peter preached the gospel at Rome; let us, therefore, imagine his informing an educated Roman that he had seen Hebrew prophets, who had been dead for centuries, conversing with his Master on a mountain in Judæa. ‘Did you, therefore, hasten to proclaim the miracle?’ ‘No; our Master commanded us to keep the secret until after he had risen from the dead.’ ‘Then he has risen, and you hold the proof?’ ‘He appeared to us, his eleven Apostles, in the solitude

of a mountain. 'What, another private resurrection! But if I accept these statements as facts, shall I also believe the first man who tells me that he has, quite recently, conversed with Romulus and Numa in a valley remote from the haunts of men?'

But what shall we say of miracles involving resurrection from the dead? The first two Gospels record, with conflicting version, but one instance of doubtful restoration to life. Matthew relates that a certain ruler came to Jesus, saying, 'My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hands on her, and she shall live.'¹ But, as Jesus had never professed to restore life to the dead, how could Jairus expect that the ordinary laws of mortality were to be suspended in favour of his daughter? Mark, however, depicts Jairus saying, 'My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her; and she shall live.'²

Jesus, having arrived at the house of Jairus, found the people there lamenting under the impression that the little girl was dead, but he assured them that she was only asleep, and taking her hand, she immediately arose. Jesus then requested all present to keep the matter strictly private. Had they obeyed him, we should never have heard the story, and Jesus does not therefore ask us to believe that this was a case of resurrection from the dead.

Luke furnishes a legendary version of this miracle,³ and adds the resurrection of the widow's son. The motive of this miracle was compassion for a mother's grief; how, therefore, did Jesus escape the importuni-

¹ Matt. ix. 18.

² Mark v. 22, 23.

³ Luke viii. 41-56.

ties of the entire population of Judæa, urgently soliciting the restoration of their dead? There were no telegraphs in those days, to instantaneously communicate to the remotest limits of the Roman Empire that resurrection from the dead had become an accomplished fact; but the means of communication were sufficiently well organised to draw thousands of excited pilgrims from Athens, Alexandria, Rome, and other great centres of population, hastening to the obscure village of Nain, to hear but one word from the lips of the risen dead, and to implore the great Hebrew Thaumaturgist to summon relatives and friends from the unseen world.

The most dramatic instance of resurrection is recorded by the fourth Evangelist.¹ Jesus was the intimate friend of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, who became ill and died. When Jesus heard of the illness of his friend, he said to his disciples, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby;' and, having waited until Lazarus was actually dead and buried, he communicated the fact to his disciples, and said, 'I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.' If, therefore, Apostles, enjoying the privilege of personal intimacy with Jesus, required so marvellous a confirmation of faith, how much more do we, removed from him by eighteen centuries, need a sign from heaven to reanimate convictions paralysed by the disheartening evidence of primitive and mediæval credulity!

The body of Lazarus had lain four days in the grave,

¹ John xi.

but this proved no obstacle to his resurrection. When the stone had been rolled away, Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes.'

The soul of Lazarus had therefore been four days absent from the body in the unknown region where the spirits of the departed dwell. We know not the locality of this shadowy realm, but may reasonably place it beyond the fixed stars, from which a ray of light—requiring about eight minutes to travel from the sun—reaches us, not in minutes, but in years. At a given moment, therefore, the body of Lazarus lies corrupting in the tomb; his soul, removed to an incalculable distance from the earth, reclines on Abraham's bosom, conversing with Moses, Solomon, or Isaiah. Jesus suddenly exclaims, 'Lazarus, come forth!' and the spirit, traveling with a velocity inconceivably swifter than light, instantaneously re-occupies the body, and restores it to uncorrupted vitality.

Restoration to life was a comparatively tame event to the man who had learned the secrets of the unseen world, but when the spectators had recovered from the first sensations of stupefaction and terror, they necessarily crowded around him in frantic excitement, pouring inexhaustible questions into his weary ears. Had he beheld the ineffable glory of Jehovah? formed the acquaintance of angels, and conversed with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Where is heaven? Where is hell? What the joys of the righteous? and the tortures of the wicked? Had he seen the parents, husbands, wives, sons, and daughters of the speakers? and did they prefer

the companionship of angels to the society of their friends on earth?

These are some of the questions which would have been inevitably addressed to the man seen issuing alive from his grave. But in vain we search the pages of the Evangelist for one word from the lips of him, who could have finally closed the controversy between Pharisees and Sadducees by disclosing his personal experience of the life beyond the grave.

We are informed that at a supper at Bethany, Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus, and many came to see the man who had risen from the dead. But although the comparatively unimportant incident of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with a costly ointment is fully recorded, no reference is made to the momentous question of the resurrection. Had Lazarus been forbidden to reveal the secrets of the unseen world, or has the Evangelist suppressed the priceless revelations which would have given mankind the full assurance of immortality?

This miracle was performed so openly, that even the Pharisees were convinced of its truth. They believed in the doctrine of the resurrection, and yet, when they had attained full attestation of its credibility, they hastened to conspire with unbelieving Sadducees for the destruction of the evidence through the murder of Lazarus. Is it possible to conceive the character, motives, and design of men determined to suppress the resurrection from the dead? Have ancient or modern times produced the incomprehensible monster who would not joyfully welcome a traveller returned in the flesh from the region beyond the grave? Did the conspirators

contemplate assassination, or the conviction of Lazarus, before the judgment-seat of Pilate, of the crime of rising from the dead? And would Lazarus, thus arraigned, have disclosed his marvellous experience, and established the supernatural mission of Jesus? But how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? For Pilate would never have consented to the crucifixion of the marvellous being who could summon the dead from their graves. The Roman governor would have assuredly changed the future history of mankind by obtaining incontestable evidence of the miracle, and despatching a swift messenger to break in upon the sullen solitude of Tiberius at Capreae, with the startling announcement that a man had risen from the dead.

If Christianity rests on the credibility of miracles, and eternal happiness or misery is contingent on faith in Christianity, how unfortunate for mankind that the great miracle of resurrection could not have been postponed to the nineteenth century, when scientific investigation could fully attest the marvellous event, and some modern Lazarus, travelling as a public lecturer from city to city, could carry conviction to the minds of even the most sceptical!

What would not we moderns pay to hear the lecturer who could practically solve the spiritual mysteries, which have perplexed the minds of philosophers from Thales to Comte, and of theologians from the first priest who worshipped on the banks of the Euphrates or the Nile, to the eminent apologists who now profess to enlighten us on eternal hope or everlasting despair!

But Orthodoxy assures us that the reticence of Evangelists was intended to screen Lazarus from persecution.

Was he not, therefore, willing to accept the crown of martyrdom that the world might be convinced of immortality? Was he so notable an exception to Christian heroism that he shrank from danger and death into an ignoble obscurity? Had death any terrors for the man who had already triumphed over the grave? Had life any charms for him who had penetrated the secrets of the unseen world? How vain this idle questioning! If Lazarus had lived and died and risen again, he would have borne the wondrous tale to the uttermost limits of the earth, as the greatest of the apostles. How insignificant the teaching of a Peter or a Paul compared with the weight of authority attaching to the man who had reclined on the bosom of Abraham in companionship with Moses before the throne of Jehovah!

The resurrection of Lazarus is, therefore, as apocryphal as the dialogue with Nicodemus; and the credulous author of the fourth Gospel betrays his unintelligent acceptance of pious legends, in his obvious incapacity to recognise the serious blow struck at the doctrine of immortality by unbroken silence respecting the spiritual life of Lazarus, during the four days his body rested in the tomb—a silence which scepticism may accept as indicating his unconsciousness, and the consequent non-existence of the soul apart from the body.

The signs and wonders of the Evangelists may, however, be submitted to a crucial test. If Christian miracles are not purely imaginary, they either ceased on a given date, or still exist within the Christian Church. Rome affirms an unbroken series of signs and wonders, from the marriage in Cana of Galilee to the latest

marvel of Lourdes or La Salette. Protestantism, on the other hand, contends that miracles ceased immediately after the apostolic age. At five minutes to twelve on a given date, Christianity, therefore, possessed the supernatural power of healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead ; but the clock struck, and all these great privileges vanished as the fairy gifts of Cinderella, leaving the Church destitute of all supernatural proof of its divine origin.

What, therefore, was the position of an unhappy bishop who on the previous day had restored sight to the blind, and now breaks down hopelessly in the vain attempt to cure an old woman of palsy? How disastrous the triumph of sneering Jews and scoffing infidels, who ask, with taunting gibes, whether the God of the Christians sleeps, or has deserted His pious worshippers! What answer can the saintly bishop give to this impious mockery? 'I could work miracles yesterday, but have lost the power to-day. This is some device of Satan, which shall be overcome by prayer and fasting.' But days, and weeks, and months, and years pass away, without any revival of the miraculous; the bishop starves himself to death, and the hearts of the faithful are chilled by that hope deferred which gradually assumes the aspect of despair.

But miraculous gifts were not thus abruptly withdrawn from their inspired possessors; each Christian thaumaturgist retained his divine privileges during the period of his natural life, and it was only from his successor that supernatural powers were withdrawn. But the first new presbyter or bishop, appointed in ignorance of these conditions, would also attempt to heal the sick,

and find with deep dismay all his efforts resulting in humiliating failure. How bitter the disappointment! how poignant the anguish! how overwhelming the confusion of the saint thus apparently convicted of imposture! Has he unconsciously committed some sin, rendering him unworthy of the spiritual gifts of his more pious predecessor? Did not some of the disciples of Jesus fail to cast out devils, because they were deficient in fasting and prayer? He has prayed without ceasing, but, alas! he is afflicted with a healthy appetite; it is but yesterday he dined with a wealthy convert, and satisfied his hunger with several tempting dishes. His wounded conscience shudders at the enormity of his offence. He will partake in future of but a mouldy crust, and drink from a pitcher of stagnant water, that he may attain the spiritual refinement indispensable to the Christian thaumaturgist. The unhappy man adopts the most rigorous asceticism, but even when his body is reduced to a skeleton, and his mind is filled with the fantastic imagery of cerebral inanition, he still sees the sad and wistful eyes of the sick, waiting to be healed by miracles which return no more.

As the apostolic workers of miracles dropped off one by one, until the sole survivor of this illustrious band of saints and martyrs approached the close of his career, with what depth of interest must not the Christian community have regarded the man with whom was finally passing away the visible evidence of the divine origin of their religion! and how profound the sensation throughout the Christian world, when it was publicly announced in all the churches that miracles had terminated with the life of the departed saint!

But, marvellous to relate, at the very time during which these sensational scenes may be supposed to have occurred, Christian literature carries on the wondrous tale of miracles as numerous, as continuous, and as startling as the mighty signs and wonders of the apostolic age; so that holders of the theory of the possession and subsequent deprivation of supernatural powers are driven to the conclusion that the Christian Church, instead of honestly publishing, artfully concealed the vicissitudes of miraculous experience, and cunningly devised a system of pious frauds to sustain the faith of the vulgar.

What, then, is the true position of miracles tested in the light of modern criticism?

(i.) Evangelical miracles reach us from an age of superstition and credulity, through anonymous and undated compilations, unattested by any evidence adequate to the verification of supernatural events in the past, which we find absolutely irreconcilable with our experience of the present.

(ii.) Miracles have no existence apart from the faith or credulity which assumes their authenticity as a foregone conclusion. They gradually disappear before expanding intelligence, and finally vanish when confronted by the scientific investigation of modern times.

(iii.) If primitive Christianity was founded on miracles, the power of working them was never withdrawn from the Church; but miracles have no existence in the present, and are therefore equally apocryphal in the past.

(iv.) The assumption of Protestantism that miracles

ceased with the apostolic age is a purely arbitrary compromise between superstition and rationalism; and when modern miracles were rejected on the appeal to reason, it became merely a question of time as to the final surrender of all primitive signs and wonders.

CHAPTER X.

THE MESSIAH.

THE Messianic teaching of Jesus was originally restricted to the ideas borrowed from John—(i.) Repentance and Remission of sins; (ii.) the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

(i.) There was nothing novel to Hebrew ears in the first announcement, as it had been the theme of antecedent prophets; but Jesus introduced the innovation of personally forgiving sins. When a man was brought to him suffering from palsy, he said, ‘Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.’ This announcement was made on merely human authority, for to his auditors, whether friends or foes, he was nothing more than man; and thus the precedent was unhappily established which invited the future priesthood of Christianity to usurp the power of absolution, and even traffic in human guilt. If Jesus could have foreseen the mediæval practice of selling the forgiveness of sins, he would have assuredly taught all men to make a direct appeal to his Father in heaven, for the pardon of their transgressions.

(ii.) As the Kingdom of Heaven was abruptly proclaimed by John without any definition of its meaning, he had obviously adopted a popular term expressive of the approaching advent of the Messiah. And when

Jesus first preached on the Kingdom of Heaven, the scope of his sermon did not exceed the design of publishing his own views on a subject with which his auditors were already familiar.

All Jews had heard of and hoped for the great social and political advantages awaiting them in futurity, and the multitude listened with pleasure to the views of a Lecturer who awakened their curiosity and interest by the impressive authority of his manner ; but if Jesus then believed that he himself was the promised Messiah of Judah, the momentous fact was carefully concealed from the multitude. The announcement of John had, in fact, been too abrupt and startling to admit of Jesus promptly accepting the *rôle* of Messiah ; and when the Baptist was cast into prison, he adopted the compromise of simply occupying the vacant ground, and beginning ‘to preach and say, Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ The lapse of nearly nineteen centuries has disclosed to us that his views of the Kingdom were quite as visionary as national expectation of the throne of David.

When, however, Jesus had grasped the gravity of his position as the nominee of John the Baptist to the Messianic office, he naturally experienced doubt and perplexity in considering his future career. His countrymen expected a king who, occupying with royal splendour the throne of David, would overwhelm their enemies with swift destruction, and permanently restore a temporal kingdom exceeding in majesty and power the glorious empire of Solomon. But temporal power is won and held by the sword ; what affinity could therefore exist between the gentle consciousness of Jesus and

the fierce energy of a warrior king? He, in the feminine softness of his nature, would not shed a drop of human blood, much less take part in the cruel carnage of a battle-field, to gain for himself a throne, or for his race an empire. What, therefore, could mean this strange antagonism between his peaceful disposition and the warlike aspirations of the nation? If he were indeed the Messiah of the prophets, must not his countrymen have mistaken the true meaning of Scripture? He concentrates his attention on the entire range of Hebrew literature, ardently inquiring what was the career predestined for him by the prophets of Judah.

John had attained absolute conviction that he was the predestined forerunner of the Messiah, by arbitrarily identifying himself with the imaginary voice which Isaiah had heard crying in the wilderness; why should not Jesus also discover in sacred Scripture his prophetic destiny as the man in whom the Baptist had recognised the Messiah? He studies Moses, Joshua, and Samuel; weighs every sentence of Job, David, and Solomon; and passes on, without result, through the vague declamation of the prophets, until his attention is suddenly riveted on the anonymous bard of the Captivity, whose poems have been published in the name of Isaiah:¹ 'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:

¹ Isaiah liii.

the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth : he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment : and who shall declare his generation ? for he was cut off from the land of the living : for the transgression of My people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.'

Modern criticism detects in this language of the bard, a poetic description of the unmerited sufferings of that unhappy fanatic, Jeremiah ; but, as Jesus reads the words of the prophet, controlled by the superstition of his age, his heart throbs with one of those sudden and startling convictions which flash through men's minds in the supreme crisis of their career. If he is indeed the Messiah—and who can doubt the declaration of the inspired Baptist?—away with illusory dreams of earthly thrones and kingdoms ! His heavenly Father would not have bestowed on him the soul of a martyr to accomplish the triumphs of a warrior king. The words of Isaiah depict the career of the true Messiah, and the prophetic decree has gone forth dooming him to humiliation, suffering, and death. Now, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, evangelical theologians, sustaining the dogma of the atonement, dwell on this passage of the Hebrew bard as a definite and cir-

cumstantial forecast of the sufferings and death of Jesus, as the predestined sacrifice for the sins of the world; but as we gaze across intervening centuries, and see Jesus rise up from the study of Isaiah with the sad smile of a doomed man on his lips, we know that he has fallen under the dominion of that most pernicious superstition—prophetic fatalism—and will inevitably follow the example of John by fulfilling prophecy, under the fatal delusion of submission to the will of his Father in heaven, as expressed in his reproof of Peter in the garden of Gethsemane: ‘But how then shall the Scripture be fulfilled, that thus it must be?’—words of fatal import, which briefly define the true nature of the superstition in which the religion of Christianity originated.

If Isaiah forecast a crown of martyrdom, from which prophet did Jesus borrow the triumphant glories of futurity? We answer, from the visions of Enoch, which depict with glowing imagery the advent of the ‘Son of Man sitting upon the throne of his glory;’ before whom the book of life is opened, the wicked condemned, and driven forth with shame and confusion to ‘the vengeance of eternal fire,’ in the companionship of fallen angels who had been cast ‘into the lowest depths of the fire in torments, and in confinement shall they be shut up for ever;’ and the righteous rewarded by eternal happiness in the presence of the Son of Man.

We annex the following passages from Archbishop Laurence’s translation of the Book of Enoch:—‘Behold, he comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and re-

prove all the carnal for everything which the sinful and ungodly have done and committed against him.'¹ (See Jude 14, 15.)

'The Lord of spirits sat upon the throne of his glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out over him. The word of his mouth shall destroy all the sinners and all the ungodly, who shall perish at his presence. In that day shall all the kings, the princes, the exalted, and those who possess the earth, stand up, behold, and perceive that he is sitting on the throne of his glory, that before him the saints shall be judged in righteousness, and that nothing which shall be spoken before him shall be spoken in vain.'

'Trouble shall come upon them as upon a woman in travail. One portion of them shall look upon another. They shall be astonished, and shall humble their countenance, and trouble shall seize them when they shall behold this Son of woman sitting upon the throne of his glory. Then shall the kings, the princes, and all who possess the earth glorify him who was concealed; for from the beginning the Son of Man existed in secret, whom the Most High preserved in the presence of His power, and revealed to the elect.'²

'He shall sow the congregation of the saints and of the elect, and all the elect shall stand before him in that day. All the kings, the princes, the exalted, and those who rule over the earth, shall fall down on their faces before him, and shall worship him. They shall fix their hopes on this Son of Man, shall pray to him and petition him for mercy.'³

'Then shall the Lord of spirits hasten to expel them

¹ Enoch ii.

² Enoch lxi.

³ Enoch lxi.

from his presence. Their faces shall be full of confusion. The angels shall take them to punishment, that vengeance may be inflicted on those who have oppressed his children and his elect: but the saints and elect shall be safe in that day; the Lord of spirits shall reign over them, and with this Son of Man shall they dwell, eat, lie down, and rise up for ever and ever.¹

This marvellous book—the boldest and most definite product of Hebrew imagination—was, in fact, the Scripture which supplied Jesus with his vivid conceptions of Angels, Devils, the Resurrection, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Some of its language and imagery is borrowed from Daniel (chap. vii.), but it is to the Book of Enoch we must turn for full and elaborate details of the Messianic kingdom, the Son of Man, the Elect One, the Son of God, supreme in righteousness, knowledge, and wisdom, pre-existent ‘before the creation of the world,’ and ‘proclaimed before the Lord of all spirits, before the sun and the stars of heaven were created.’

How intense the perplexity of Jesus as he studies conflicting prophets! Isaiah has doomed him to ignominy and death, but in the pages of Enoch his career is a triumphal march. Both are inspired prophets, and therefore cannot err; but who can reconcile predictions mutually destructive?

Days and weeks pass away in doubt and perplexity, preventing even a hint to his disciples that he is indeed the Messiah of the prophets. His only confidant is his Father in heaven, to whom he prays for divine enlightenment in this great crisis of his destiny. At length it flashes upon him as a revelation. There are two advents

¹ Enoch lxi.

of the Messiah clearly predicted: one as Jesus of Nazareth, doomed to persecution and death; the other as a glorified Being, appearing in the clouds of heaven to take vengeance on his cruel enemies, and reward his faithful disciples.

Hitherto, even when sending out his apostles as missionaries, Jesus had adhered to the programme of John—‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand;’ but now the time had come for privately disclosing to his disciples that he is the long-expected Messiah of Israel and Judah. Jesus leads up to the question by inquiring what popular opinions were generally current respecting him; and learns that social gossip identifies him with John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. ‘He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.¹ Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.’²

Jesus having thus finally identified himself with the fatal prediction of Isaiah, his persecution and death at the hands of enemies, exasperated by the candour of his denunciations, was a foregone conclusion; and we thus behold him lured by the prophetic superstition to court fulfilment of the fatal programme penned by the gifted personator of Isaiah. But did he predict his

¹ We exclude the interpolated verses 17–19.

² Matt. xvi. 15, 16, 20, 21.

own resurrection, and even name the period of detention in the grave? The reply of Peter, 'Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee,' obviously refers to persecution and death, without any consciousness of a glorious resurrection; and all the Gospels clearly indicate that, at the crucifixion, none of the apostles anticipated the miracle of a risen Saviour.

The warning voice of Peter was powerless to control the growing fanaticism of Jesus, and the severity with which he was rebuked finally silenced all the Apostles. Thus Jesus became hopelessly entangled in the meshes of prophetic illusion, deprived of all advice and counsel which might have shown him that self-immolation, in harmony with the fanciful utterance of an ancient bard, was a form of suicide irreconcilable with the purpose of a beneficent Deity.

Having thus announced to his disciples the sufferings and death which awaited him according to Isaiah, he also communicated to them the Messianic glories predicted by Enoch.

Matt. xvi. 27, 28: 'For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

Matt. xxiv. 30, 31, 34-36: 'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall

gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.'

When we consider that the form and substance of these startling announcements are borrowed from the Book of Enoch, and that, contrary to the expectations of Jesus, nearly two thousand years have passed away without their fulfilment, we inevitably see in him the innocent victim of illusory dreams originating in the Messianic fanaticism of some unknown enthusiast, speaking in the name of a man who had been dead three thousand years.

The author of the Book of Enoch knew nothing of a suffering Messiah. His hopes rested on the triumphal appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, sitting on the throne of his glory. Jesus, as we have seen, reconciled the conflicting predictions of Isaiah and Enoch by adopting the theory of a second advent, as the only possible solution of prophetic destiny; but who was to determine the date of that marvellous event? A general consensus of opinion pointed to that age as the era of Messianic triumph. Although the Jews could not accept the carpenter's son as the promised Prince of Judah, they did not cease to anticipate an early appearance of the national deliverer. Jesus, therefore, inferred that, although the day and the hour were still unrevealed, his second and glorious advent would occur within the lifetime of his disciples. We thus attain the remarkable position that the

Messianic views of Jesus were identical with those of the nation, with the exception that the triumphal advent would be the second, instead of the first appearance of the promised Saviour of the people. And thus the first Christians were simply Jews who participated in the national expectation of the triumphal Messiah of the prophets, but believed he had already passed a brief period on earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAGEDY OF CALVARY.

AT length the tragedy of Calvary was at hand. Jesus had deeply wounded the susceptibilities of the sacerdotal and philosophic formalists of his day, by the mere suggestion of a kingdom of heaven from which they were to be excluded; and, true to the spirit of religious intolerance which has characterised Hebrew and Christian theology, from the slaughter of the Canaanites to the massacre of St. Bartholomew, they doomed the too candid Prophet to destruction, who had dared to form independent opinions on subjects within their own realm of thought.

Conscious that his enemies were plotting his destruction, Jesus retired to the privacy of Gethsemane to finally think out the awful problem of prophetic fatality, and make one last appeal to his Father in heaven for merciful reconsideration of Isaiah's cruel prediction: 'He was taken from prison and from judgment, he was cut off out of the land of the living.' This is the decree of an inspired prophet, but can it be the will of God that innocent blood should be shed? Is there no way of escape from prophetic destiny? Is he doomed to silence before the judgment-seat, to be led forth as a dumb animal to the slaughter? Was not Isaac snatched at the last moment from the sacrificial knife?

and may not a way of escape be found for him also? Alas! no prophet ever predicted the premature death of Isaac; he was not, therefore, inevitably doomed to die, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Enoch speaks only of the Son of Man sitting upon the throne of his glory; why, therefore, should Isaiah destine him to pass through the portals of death to the possession of his kingdom? Alas! it is written; and what mortal can blot out Scripture? 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.'¹ Hush! Is that a voice from heaven? the flutter of an angel's wings? No! it is but the sighing of the wind, which mocks him with one brief moment of reviving hope. He turns for human sympathy towards the men whom he has chosen as his companions in the Messianic career, but even this consolation is denied him. These poor simple-minded peasants, as incompetent for the conception or execution of a great design as a group of modern fishermen, slumber, with childlike indifference to the awful ordeal through which their Lord and Master is passing.

Again and again the predestined victim of the prophets vainly appeals for mercy to his Father in heaven; and at length recognising the impossibility of divine interference with Scripture, even to prevent the judicial murder of the innocent, he yields with pious and noble resignation to the forecast of Isaiah.

Jesus is arrested by the myrmidons of the chief priests and elders. One of the apostles having shown a disposition to resist violence, Jesus said, 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall pre-

¹ Matt. xxvi. 39.

sently give me more than twelve legions of angels? *but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*'¹ Could language give us clearer insight into the nature of that pernicious superstition which lured Jesus into the interpretation and fulfilment of prophecy, under the fatal illusion that he was thus accomplishing the divine will and purpose? What limits can we place to the self-sacrifice of noble minds controlled by the fanaticism which hears the voice of God in the accents of priests and prophets?

Let us, however, assume, in justice to the unknown author of Isa. liii., that could he have anticipated the tragic consequences of his poetic rhapsodies, he would have thrust his right hand into the flames, rather than pen the lines which were to cause the martyrdom of Calvary.

'Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.' Other men of commanding genius have been happy in the choice of friends faithful unto death; but Jesus failed to secure the fidelity of even one disciple in the hour of his desperate extremity. How unfortunate are the ancient Hebrews in their historians, whether Mosaic or evangelical, who so frequently depict them as destitute of the heroism so conspicuous in the annals of Aryan races!

Jesus stands in the presence of his sacerdotal judges, calmly resolute in his adherence to the programme of Isaiah: 'He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.' The meaning of the pro-

¹ Matt. xxvi. 53, 54.

phet is clear. No word in self-defence may pass from his lips. False witnesses appear against him, but Jesus maintains the self-denial of unbroken reticence. The High Priest adjures him by the living God to declare whether he is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus at length answers in the affirmative, and adds, 'Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' Thus Jesus openly declares that he is the Hebrew Messiah; and as his pretensions are apparently irreconcilable with the humiliation of his position, he announces the glories of the second advent predicted by Enoch and Daniel. The words 'Son of God' from the lips of the high priest, if not an interpolation, can only be synonymous with the Messiah; for how could he have anticipated a divinity unheard of till the second century? or why should Jesus, claiming to be the Son of God, reply in words which referred to the Son of Man?

If the Sanhedrim were ignorant of the visions of Enoch, its Pharisaic members were at least familiar with the imagery of Daniel, and might well have listened with compassion to the visionary simplicity of the man who thus identified himself with the dreams of prophetic bards. But why expect compassion, or even justice, from the ministers of a theology prolific in pious cruelty and sacred massacre? Sufficient that a Galilean peasant has proclaimed a kingdom of heaven unknown to Hebrew orthodoxy, and now thus blasphemously speaks of appearing in the clouds of heaven;—away with him to speedy execution! In our compassionate tenderness for the noble enthusiast thus un-

justly sentenced to death, we naturally feel abhorrence of the men who sent him to the appalling ignominy of the cross; but judged impartially, they were doubtless quite as conscientious in their bigotry as the Christian priests of futurity, who piously consigned Jews and heretics to the flames as wicked opponents of the orthodox faith.

Condemned by hostile priests, he might yet find safety in an appeal to Roman justice; but the terrible ordeal of silent self-repression in the presence of his enemies had not shaken the devotion of Jesus to the prophetic superstition, and when arraigned before the judgment-seat of Pilate, he even courted Roman hostility as the self-appointed King of the Jews. But the powerful representative of an invincible empire, unmoved by Hebrew prejudices, could hear with calm indifference of claims to royalty, which to him were but the harmless dreams of an inoffensive visionary; and he would have gladly rescued this interesting enthusiast from the persecution of his enemies, but that, to his amazement, the eccentric prisoner obstinately refused to plead against the fictitious charges of his accusers.

Luke is the only evangelist who records that Pilate referred the case of Jesus to the adjudication of Herod: ¹ ‘Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad, for he was of a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard concerning him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him: and he questioned him in many words, but he answered him nothing.’ Can we imagine a more convincing proof of his unreasoning adherence

¹ Luke xxiii. 7-11.

to the programme of Isaiah? The refusal of the innocent to plead against the false accusations of perjured witnesses is a grave offence against society, for unmerited convictions necessarily encourage malicious prosecutions; but Jesus places prophecy above ethics, and prefers yielding to injustice to casting the slightest doubt on the language of Isaiah.

Restored to the jurisdiction of the Roman governor, who can question that if the eloquent preacher of the Sermon on the Mount had appealed to Roman justice by demanding an impartial investigation into his blameless life, Pilate would have successfully resisted the judicial murder of an innocent man? But how then could the Scriptures have been fulfilled? What is the life of Jesus when weighed in the balance with the words of the great Nâbi, who speaks with the voice of God? Prepare, therefore, the crown of thorns, the purple robe of mockery; erect the cross, that Jesus may die a felon's death in vindication of the prophets!

Had Pilate been one of the noblest of the Romans, even yet he might have saved this silent, obstinate, mysterious Jew, who courts destruction as a phantom king; but being a mere ordinary official, fearing to incur responsibility, he vainly washes from his hands the stain of innocent blood, and surrenders Jesus to the martyrdom around which has gathered the legends, dogmas, and mysteries of ecclesiastical Christianity.

At length the appalling tragedy hastens to its conclusion. Religion nails Jesus to the cross—the future symbol of a new theology, whose priests shall also, in due time, torture and execute the victims of Christian intolerance; the nerves and tendons of his hands and

feet are lacerated by inflamed and festering wounds; swarming flies transform the sensory nerves into instruments of lingering torture; the slightest movement sends a thrill of agony through each quivering limb; the veins reject the superabundant flow from distended arteries; and the blood, turned from its course, presses with swollen vessels on the throbbing brain; the exhaustion of hunger is welcomed as the harbinger of death, but the raging agony of thirst is ever craving for one drop of water to cool the burning tongue; arrested circulation forbids coherent thought, and fills the mind with distracting imagery of horror and despair.

Convinced that we hold the true version of the Messianic illusions of Jesus, we thus imaginatively reproduce his drifting thoughts: 'Nazareth—Galilee—that peaceful life of dreams until the voice had spoken in the wilderness! But what did the Baptist mean by doubt?' 'Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?' 'Another Messiah?—another Son of Man?—another Christ? Am I, then, a dreamer—an impostor? No; these are the whisperings of Satan; the Son of Man shall come with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment on his enemies.—They said I was beside myself, but they knew not the Scriptures: "He is despised and rejected of men, oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison——" Hark!' 'If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross.'—'I healed the sick, I cast out demons, why not release this tortured body? No, the Son must obey the Father.—That group of women, faithful unto death, when men have fled the terrors

of the cross!—Mary! how that woman loves! but the Son of Man has no love to give.—Peter! John! James! —That voice again! ‘He is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him.’ —‘Not yet, not yet a king!—But the time cometh, and is even now at hand, when I shall sit on the throne of my glory.’—‘He saved others, himself he cannot save.’ —‘No, for no voice was heard or angel seen in the garden of Gethsemane.—But why this lingering agony—these ignoble horrors? May not angels bathe this burning brow, or death come quickly to end this mental anguish, this unutterable torture? Not yet, until the Scriptures are fulfilled.’

Thus come and go his drifting thoughts, until Isaiah adds yet another pang to mental anguish. ‘He was numbered with the transgressors,’ therefore must die as the companion of thieves, who snatch some moments from despair to jeer and scoff at virtue ending thus as crime. ‘Is this he who preached glad tidings, healed the sick, made demons tremble, and yet is crucified with us, whose gospel is murder—our heaven, the orgies purchased with the spoils of plundered travellers!’ But Jesus has no answer for these railing thieves. He passes in lethargic stupor into the realm of phantoms, where smiling angels present a flowing cup dashed from his lips by grinning fiends; and Isaiah sings the death-song of the Messiah, interrupted by Enoch bearing a royal crown, which Satan seizes and ascends a throne, from which he is hurled by the archangel hastening to proclaim the final judgment.

Aroused to momentary consciousness of the appalling present, Jesus yields again to torpor, oblivious even of

dreams, to awake at the near approach of death, and hear his bitterest enemies exclaim, 'He trusted in God, let Him deliver him.' It is too much for overtaken humanity. He utters the terrible cry, 'My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?' and thus despairs and dies, the noblest Martyr of theology, sacrificed on the dual altar of prophetic superstition and sacerdotal intolerance.

Thus, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, we discover the long-lost secret of the Messianic illusions of the Son of Man; and detect that, if the unknown author of the visions of Enoch had never existed, mankind would never have heard of the Christian religion. Jesus could not have accepted the Messianic office as the mere man of sorrows depicted by Isaiah; and unless the visions of Enoch had suggested the theory of a second advent with its throne of glory, he would have inevitably rejected the nomination of John, and lived and died a Galilean peasant, as absolutely unknown to posterity as the humblest of his Nazarene compatriots.

If Jesus, therefore, was controlled by prophetic dreams, shown by their non-fulfilment to have been but vain illusions, how shall we explain the marvellous transformation of a simple-minded Galilean peasant into the Almighty Deity of the Gentiles, sharing, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the infinite attributes of Supreme Divinity? Let us seek an answer to this momentous question through a candid and impartial inquiry into the further evolution of Christianity.

BOOK III.—CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESURRECTION.

THE history of Christianity begins with the alleged Resurrection, as recorded in the conflicting narratives of the Evangelists.

According to Mark, Mary Magdalene, with two companions, approached the tomb of Jesus early in the morning, on the first day of the week following the crucifixion, found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, entered and saw, with natural alarm, a young man clothed in a white robe, who informed them that Jesus had risen from the dead, and would meet the disciples in Galilee. ‘And they went out quickly and fled from the sepulchre, for they trembled and were amazed; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.’¹ Thus ends the second Gospel. The remaining twelve verses, absent from the oldest Greek MSS., are the interpolation of a later writer; and thus, the Evangelist, said to have written under the direction of the apostle Peter, is silent respecting the apparition and ascension of Jesus. In the Gospel according to

¹ Mark xvi. 1-8.

Luke we read: 'Moreover, certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb; and when they found not his body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.'¹ This passage, read in connection with Mark's version, and amounting to nothing more than hearsay evidence, obviously reproduces one of the earliest legends of the Resurrection.

But let us test the interpolated passage of Mark by a reasonable criticism. The Apostles could not accept the truth of the Resurrection, on the evidence of three witnesses; and yet, when Jesus subsequently appeared to the Eleven, he said unto them, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.' Salvation is, therefore, denied to all but baptized believers, possessed of a faith impossible to Apostles!

In the same passage we find, among the proposed evidences of Christianity, miracles which would have classed primitive Christians with snake-charmers and jugglers.

We furthermore learn that, 'after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.' It seems strange that the position of honour should be the same in heaven as on earth; but our surprise vanishes when we find that the interpolator is simply borrowing his ideas from Psalm cx. Luke also mentions that Jesus was 'carried up into heaven;'² but as these words are also an interpolation, we thus receive further confirmation of the

¹ Luke xxiv. 22, 23.

² Luke xxiv. 51.

imaginative origin of the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel.

The compilers of Matthew freely accept the legends of their age. Mark's white-robed stranger becomes the angel of the Lord, with a countenance like lightning, descending from heaven to roll back the stone, as if a risen God required miraculous help to burst the fetters of the grave!¹ They also tell us that the chief priests and elders placed a guard of Roman soldiers at the tomb of Jesus, because he had foretold his resurrection;² and yet, the Apostles were so unconscious of the prediction, that they treated the evidence of Mary and her companions as merely idle gossip. They had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, and had received, as apostolic missionaries, the marvellous gift of restoring the dead to life, and yet were incredulous of the Messianic Resurrection.

The Roman guard saw an angel descend from heaven, and Jesus rise from the grave, but instead of rushing forth wildly to spread the marvellous tale, they kept and sold the priceless secret of the Resurrection to high priests, who conspired to defraud the Hebrew race of their Messiah, and mankind of attested Immortality. But, if men ever existed capable of so monstrous a design, could gold, however freely lavished, purchase the unbroken silence of those who had witnessed the marvels of the Resurrection?

The action of the chief priests was a crime against Humanity, and yet Jesus, in seeking the solitude of a mountain, concurred in the design of concealing that he had risen from the dead. If the Roman sentinels,

¹ Matt. xxviii.

² Matt. xxvii. 62-66.

instead of selling the secret, had openly proclaimed the miracle, would Jesus have confirmed their evidence by making a public entry into Jerusalem, or permitted them to be punished as impostors, by his own persistent concealment of his bodily existence ?

The credulous compilers of Matthew's Gospel overlook the fact that, if Jesus had openly forecast the Resurrection, his concealment of the accomplished miracle placed him under the ban of Moses, as a prophet whose prediction had not been fulfilled. But if the prophecy had ever been uttered, could Mary and the Apostles have forgotten what priests and elders so easily recalled ?

Matthew alone records that, when Jesus died, 'the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves *after his resurrection*, and went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many.'¹ Whilst, therefore, these visitants from the unseen world were walking about the streets of Jerusalem attesting Immortality, the Apostles were denying the credibility of the Messianic Resurrection, because they understood not the Scriptures. The chief priests and elders bought the silence of the Roman guards ; did they also purchase the evidence of the numerous witnesses who had seen and conversed with the risen saints at Jerusalem ? But the presence of legendary fiction is at once disclosed in the anomaly of saints restored to life on Friday and remaining in their graves until the following Sunday, that their appearance in the streets of Jerusalem might synchronise with the Resurrection of Jesus—an incongruity probably arising from the interpolation of the words, 'after his resurrection,' to

¹ Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

reconcile the legend with the statement of Paul that Jesus was 'the first-fruits of them that slept.'

The compilers of Matthew depict Jesus carefully concealing his victory over death by meeting his Apostles in the solitude of a mountain, where, although he could now speak with the infinite knowledge and wisdom of Divinity, in freedom from the embarrassing *rôle* of the Hebrew Messiah, he has nothing more to say than that all power is given to him in heaven and on earth, and that his disciples are to teach and baptize all nations, in the name of a Trinity never previously heard of,¹ whose personality is disclosed in the formula—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—unknown to Christianity until the second century.

Convinced of the interpolation of Matthew and Mark, we necessarily reject the legendary accretions of Luke and John. According to the former, Jesus rose from the dead, appeared twice to his disciples, and was carried up into heaven within four-and-twenty hours,² and yet, the same author declares, in the Acts of the Apostles, that Jesus appeared several times during a period of forty days before his ascension.³ According to this Evangelist, however, Jesus said nothing of baptism, creeds, Trinity, or miracles, but simply repeated the Gospel message of repentance and remission of sins, and explained the Scriptures in confirmation of prophetic fatality. He also instructed the Apostles to wait at Jerusalem for power from on high, in which Orthodoxy sees the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. But, on the contrary, John affirms that the Holy

¹ Matt. xxviii. 16–20.

² Luke xxiv.

³ Acts i.

Spirit and full ecclesiastical powers were conferred on the Apostles before the ascension.¹

Do we accept all these incongruities as revelation, recording the utterance of an omniscient Being conscious that the Christianity of futurity would condemn unbaptized babes to eternal fire, consign monotheists to the stake, and claim universal dominion over the reason and conscience of Humanity, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth? Or, are we not rather reading the blundering efforts of credulous Piety sustaining a constructive resurrection through the current traditions of the second century?

Paul, or whoever may have written the First Epistle to the Corinthians, further complicates the story of the resurrection by affirming that Jesus was first seen by Peter, then by the twelve apostles, afterwards by five hundred brethren at once, the majority of whom were then living, and finally by Paul himself, who, in thus classing the vision on the road to Damascus with antecedent appearances of Jesus, assigns to all the character of impalpable phantoms.²

Is it on inspired authority that Peter is thus substituted for Mary; or is this merely Pauline rejection of the important position held by woman in the drama of the Resurrection? But what shall we say of the writer who considered that if Jesus be not risen from the dead, his followers are the most miserable of mankind, and yet neglected to preserve for posterity the names and attested evidence of the surviving majority of the five hundred witnesses?

To what source do we, therefore, trace the legend

¹ John xx.

² Cor. xv. 5-8.

of the Resurrection? The fourth Evangelist records that on the first day of the week, while it was yet dark, Mary Magdalene visited the sepulchre *alone*, saw the stone rolled away, and hastened to inform Peter and John that the body of Jesus had been removed. The two Apostles ran to the tomb, saw that the body was not there, and returned home without further inquiry. But Mary remained weeping at the tomb, and saw an apparition of Jesus.

The bereaved *convulsionnaire*, distracted by the appalling horror of a felon's death inflicted on her dear Lord and Master, went forth with the dawn to visit the sepulchre, in that condition of nervous tension which evokes mere phantoms in all the semblance of reality. What, therefore, more natural than that she should see an apparition of Jesus, and that her excited report of the marvellous vision originated belief in the Resurrection of the Messiah, around which subsequently clustered the unattested legends, accepted as authentic by the evangelical compilers of the second century?

The details of the Messianic apparition are further amplified in the Gospel of John by a conversation between Jesus and Mary, so irreconcilable with Divinity or Humanity as to disclose the presence of legendary fiction. If Jesus had appeared as an omnipresent God, could he have exclaimed—'Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to my Father,'—as if it were obligatory on Divinity to undergo some form of ceremonial purification in heaven, before touching the hand of Mary? If he spoke as the Son of Man, could he have thus repulsed his most faithful and devoted disciple? And if Mary had suddenly passed from despair to joy-

fulness, could she have gone forth from the presence of her beloved Lord, without one more word than *Rabboni—Master?*

Primitive Christianity, therefore, rests on faith in the Resurrection, attested by nothing more than hearsay evidence. And if the Messianic age had been postponed till the nineteenth century, men, who now mistake inherited superstition for rational conviction, would reject with absolute incredulity a Messiah said to have privately risen from the dead, according to the statements of his immediate followers.

Evangelists tell us that the Resurrection was carefully concealed from all but the most intimate friends of Jesus; on what possible grounds could he, therefore, have denied the proofs of immortality to the millions whose salvation depends on the truth of the miracle? Orthodoxy answers that thus our faith is tested by inscrutable wisdom. But this pious formula is equally applicable to the Eucharistic miracle, the Assumption of Mary, and the Trinitarian mystery. Who, therefore, shall determine the limits of faith, when we have parted with the evidence of our senses, the results of experience, and the conclusions of reason?

In harmony with poetic justice, we would, doubtless, all rejoice at the restoration to life of this noble victim of superstition and intolerance. But, in the absence of a single shred of rational proof, to place against the overwhelming evidence of the ages, that the dead return no more, the fiction of Messianic resurrection is but an illusory dream; and it remains for us to deplore the irreparable loss sustained by mankind through the premature death of the Son of Man, which robs us of

the higher wisdom to which he would have attained under the refining influence of maturer years. His brief career, depicted in no attested annals, has become the nucleus of protean systems, identifying his name with the follies, superstitions, and barbarism of the ages; but it has been reserved for this century of vaunted intelligence to witness the dishonour of his memory in the modern craze of martial evangelists, inviting men to join in the spiritual orgies of hysterical fanaticism through the vulgar attractions of flaunting banners and sacrilegious drums, whose sound might well recall the Son of Man to earth to denounce this tumultuous parody of the Kingdom of Heaven.¹

Had Peter, James, or John proposed to attract the congregation of the Mount with brazen trumpets, with what scathing wrath would not Jesus have rejected the mere thought of inviting candidates for the Kingdom of Heaven by the vulgar attractions immemorially associated with the cultus of heathen gods! And could he have foreseen, as he preached repentance and forgiveness on the Mount, that future generations would witness 'converts' hastening to the sound of martial music, to relate their 'experiences' to men, instead of whispering their sins to God, Jesus would have doubtless added the following exhortation to his discourse:—'Take heed that ye do not confess your sins before men, to be

¹ Extract from the 'Times,' September 22, 1882:—'A brass band accompanied the songs of the Army. Besides brass instruments, all diversities of stringed and other instruments served to swell the volume of sound. There were cymbals, tambourines, concertinas, and "bones." Among the incidents of the evening was the spirited rendering of a song descriptive of the army as the "Lord's Brigade," with the motto "blood and fire." The vocalist, who had been an acrobat, jumped as he sang.'

heard by them : otherwise ye have no forgiveness from your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou wouldst confess thy transgressions, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men ; but enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, confess thy faults to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret will grant thee forgiveness.'

But the Son of Man believed too firmly in his second advent within a generation to anticipate future forms of human error ; and all which he has left unsaid has given free scope to the fanciful creations of erratic piety, passing beyond the school of Galilee into the realms of superstition and fanaticism.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST—THE GALILEAN APOSTLES.

THE Acts of the Apostles, purporting to be written by the author of the third gospel, is first heard of late in the second century. Its contents disclose the pious design of constructing a history of the earliest days of Christianity from legendary materials, which assumed, in a credulous age, the form of attested facts. Free handling was, doubtless, indispensable to a coherent narrative; but the author drifts into historical romance when he puts speeches into the mouths of Peter, Stephen, and Paul, so much alike in form and substance, that we inevitably detect his own imaginative version of what *ought* to have been said on each occasion.

The opening chapter records the assembly at Jerusalem of the Apostles, with Mary the mother of Jesus and her female companions. They had quite recently conversed with the second person in the Trinity, from whom they might have learned lessons of priceless wisdom; and yet we find them occupied with the old superstition of prophetic fatality, adapting ancient Scripture to the actions and fate of Judas. According to Peter it was inevitable that the doomed apostle should betray his Lord and Master, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Jesus had taught the duty, and set the example of compliance with the demands of pro-

phency. Was Judas, therefore, a pious man, imitating Jesus in blind obedience to the will of the Deity ; or a mere automaton in the grasp of prophetic fatality, predestined to crime, and therefore irresponsible for his actions ?

It was necessary to nominate a successor to Judas ; so these men who might have referred the question a few hours previously to the Second, or a few hours later, to the Third person in the Trinity, proceeded to elect an apostle by drawing lots !

The compiler of the Acts, in harmony with the previous statement of Luke, unauthenticated by any other Evangelist, records that Jesus instructed his Apostles to wait at Jerusalem until invested with power from on high ; but this mystical innovation has no affinity to the previous teaching of Jesus as recorded in the first two Gospels. When, according to Matthew, the twelve Apostles were sent forth to preach the Gospel, Jesus said to them :—‘ But when they deliver you up take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it is not ye that speak but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.’¹ Jesus, therefore, knew nothing of the mysterious Being introduced into the Godhead after his death ; and to him divine inspiration meant nothing more than the influence of the spirit of his Father on the minds of his disciples, possessed of the same divine efficacy during his lifetime as after his death.

The simplicity of Jesus could not, however, save his disciples from the superstitious delusions which corrupt all religions, when their founders have passed away from the scene of their labours. When the Day of

¹ Matt. x. 19.

Pentecost was fully come, they were all together in one place, waiting for some novel manifestation of the miraculous. Long vigils spent in fasting and prayer had prepared them for the hallucinations of cerebral exhaustion. They fancied Jesus had predicted some sign from heaven; and the supposed prophecy produced its own fulfilment. ‘Suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them’¹—a clear case of thunderstorm. If they heard a sound like the wind, was it not the wind? If their faces were illuminated as if by fire, why not by flashing lightning? But was not the presence of the Holy Ghost fully attested by the miraculous gift of tongues, through which all present addressed a cosmopolitan crowd with colloquial fluency in several languages?

This sensational myth was, however, finally disposed of by Saint Paul in 1 Cor. xiv., according to which the fabulous gift of tongues were unintelligible sounds without meaning to speaker or auditor unless interpreted. Paul cherished extreme distrust of polyglottic mysticism; but, instead of openly condemning, he discussed the superstition with a dexterous diplomacy which was probably more effectual in its extirpation than avowed hostility. How great a master of subtle irony is Paul, when he assures the Corinthians that, although speaking with tongues more than any of them, he preferred five words of common sense to ten thousand spoken with tongues; and that there were

¹ Acts ii. 2, 3.

three courses open to the possessor of the dubious gift—to find an interpreter, or interpret himself, or hold his tongue. These simple rules no doubt silenced many ambitious spiritualists, for Paul does not recur to the subject in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

The Day of Pentecost, therefore, witnessed a fanatical outburst of ecstatic devotion, seeking frenzied utterance in vocal sounds so destitute of meaning, that some irreverent spectators suggested new wine as the source of inspiration—an obviously impossible idea to men listening to words of wisdom in their native tongue.

But, as Peter rises to address the assembly, may we not expect so lucid an explanation from his inspired lips that our ignoble scepticism shall vanish as mists before the sun?

Marvellous to relate, this eminent Apostle, now the medium of Divinity, has added nothing to his ideas since last addressing us respecting Judas. He still moves in the fetters of prophetic fatality. The mysterious linguists of Pentecost are not drunk, for it is yet early in the day; but are simply fulfilling the predictions of the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants, and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’

Paul had, therefore, omitted to study Joel, and was ignorant of Peter’s speech when he wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians; for he makes a marked distinction between prophecy and tongues, and sternly

denies to women the gift of spiritual utterance. Did Peter therefore err in connecting Joel with the Day of Pentecost; or does Paul discredit an inspired prophet, when he quenches the Spirit in female breasts?

The marvels of Pentecost converted three thousand souls—the natural result of religious excitement which, in modern times, assumes the form of ‘Revivals,’ as zealous as evanescent. Jesus placed practical morality above ecstatic mysticism, and but one hundred and twenty of his followers answered to the roll-call after his death. Peter persuaded himself and his auditors that they were under the spell of supernatural influence, and, forthwith, thousands were won by this novel and exciting superstition.

As one of the important results of the Day of Pentecost, it is recorded that ‘all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.’ The adoption of communism from the Essenes, no doubt assumed a reasonable aspect in the eyes of men expecting the second advent of Jesus within their own generation; but if the Apostles could have foreseen that nothing would be heard of the Messiah for nearly two thousand years, they would not have invited social chaos by encouraging the idle and improvident to live at the expense of the thrifty and industrious. We have implicit confidence in the honest fanaticism of primitive Christianity; but yet there may have been some among the motley crowd who preferred the excitement of ecstatic devotion to the drudgery of earning daily bread.

But was the experiment of communistic socialism a

success? We find the answer in chap. iv. 1: 'And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.' Let modern Socialists take the lesson to heart that even among men and women as disinterested as primitive Christians, communism was a miserable failure.

The hasty and imprudent adoption of an Essene custom resulted in a startling tragedy. Ananias and Sapphira his wife sold some property, and kept back a portion of the price. Perhaps Ananias was a shrewd practical man, distrustful of socialism, and desirous of holding something in reserve for possible contingencies. Or Sapphira may have hinted that, if anything should happen to her husband before the Advent of Jesus in the clouds, she would not like the position of a pauper scrambling among the other widows for her daily rations. Whatever may have been the motives of the doomed couple, if they had been arraigned before Jesus, he would have assuredly condoned so trivial an offence; but under the new *régime* of the Holy Ghost, this unhappy husband and wife were condemned to instant execution.

Ananias enters the assembly. The president, who had, quite recently, denied his Lord and Master, and received free pardon for the offence, is now transformed into a pitiless judge, sternly interrogating this half-hearted communist—'Why hath Satan filled thy heart?' Could Ananias solve this psychological mystery? Had he not, just now, been filled with the Holy Ghost; how, therefore, could Satan have gained possession? And

could he feel quite certain of his own identity, whilst passing thus abruptly from human to divine, from divine to diabolical? No time is granted for inquiry; he falls down dead, and is forthwith hurried to his grave, without even the knowledge of his nearest kinsmen.

If there had been in that assembly one true disciple of their tender and loving Master, would he not have sought out the unhappy Sapphira to gradually disclose the appalling tragedy? Did these divinely inspired men thank God, as the Pharisee condemned by Jesus, that they were not sinners like this man Ananias, whilst they waited for the condemnation and execution of Sapphira? Or were the feelings of humanity stifled in their breasts by personal fear that the horrors of Jehovistic despotism had again been restored in Israel?

Whatever may have been the motives of the assembly, Sapphira is permitted to enter the presence of her inflexible judge without one word of warning. No time is granted for confession, repentance, or absolution. She is entrapped into a lie, condemned, executed, and carried forth for burial beside her husband!

There were no coroner's inquests in those days; but, if a full and searching inquiry had been made into these mysterious deaths by some Roman official, how could Peter have explained the startling tragedy? Jesus of Nazareth had preached a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins, but he had died, risen again, vanished in the clouds, and sent to mankind an invisible Being, invested with the awful power of striking men and women dead who even unconsciously offend him. Would such an explanation have satisfied a Roman

magistrate; or would not the terrible suspicion of secret poisoning have aroused so general a feeling of indignation against the new sect, as to have imperilled the existence of Christianity?

‘And great fear came upon the whole Church, and upon all that heard these things.’ In fact, a reign of terror was established among the new converts; and the wonder grows how men who had ever listened to the teaching of Jesus became reconciled to the intervention of the Paraclete. But has not the time arrived for modern piety to vindicate the consistency of Trinitarian Providence, by recognising in the story of Ananias and Sapphira an extravagant legend, indiscreetly authenticated in an uncritical age by the too credulous compiler of the Acts of the Apostles?

The logical result of the Day of Pentecost was uniformity, and consequent infallibility, of belief; for how could minds filled with the Holy Spirit have any room for error? The compiler of the Acts accordingly affirms that all believers ‘were of one heart and one soul’; when, therefore, dissensions had arisen among the faithful, Christianity had practically surrendered the theory of divine inspiration.

Centuries later the Church recognised that the existence of ecclesiastical Christianity was contingent on suppression of the theological controversies which raged on every side, and, forthwith, proceeded to stamp out, by decree of Pope and Council, the pretensions of human reason to question the necessarily infallible conclusions of divine inspiration; and thus, the superstition born on the Day of Pentecost forms the basis of Roman pretensions to infallibility. But when Protestantism

evolved divergent sects preaching conflicting gospels, the inference thenceforth became inevitable that either inspiration is a mere illusion, or, as in Judaism, there is a Chosen Race, so also in Christianity there is a favoured sect, whose members are the true heirs of Pentecost. If, however, we accept the broader view that conflicting Protestants are all divinely enlightened, is there not greater consistency in the Pope who claims to be infallible because he is inspired, than in the Protestant who claims to be inspired, and yet is not infallible?

Roman and Anglican theologians concur in believing that the miracle of Pentecost is periodically renewed by Episcopal manipulation. The author of the Acts admits the obligation of proof by recording the gift of tongues; but we moderns are asked to believe that the young deacon or priest, in whom we find no vestige of the transformation, goes forth from the presence of his Bishop a divinely inspired minister of the gospel.

As the Messianic superstition had, in due time, produced a Messiah, so also illusory expectation of the Paraclete, unsatisfied by the Pentecostal fiction, eventually evoked personal candidates for the divine office. If the eternal Logos was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, why should not the Paraclete also appear in the form of man? So Montanus, Manes, and Mahomed have each, at different epochs, claimed to be the mysterious visitant said to have been promised by the Hebrew Messiah; and thus a Christian superstition has become the source of kindred illusions, culminating in the Moslem fanaticism which rivals Christianity in spiritual dominion over the races of mankind.

Peter, having explained the marvels of Pentecost through the prophecies of Joel, proves the Resurrection by the Psalms of David! That monarch had sung—‘neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption’—therefore, as the body of Jesus could not be decomposed, he must inevitably have risen from the dead! According to Paul five hundred witnesses could have attested the miracle; but Peter relies not on an attested, but on a constructive Resurrection. He, however, quotes the sixteenth psalm from the Septuagint, which erroneously translates the Hebrew plural ‘Holy One,’ instead of saints; the Resurrection was therefore inevitable because the author of the Acts did not understand Hebrew!

When we, however, subsequently find Paul proving at Antioch that Jesus had risen from the dead, by the same fallacious argument adopted by Peter at Jerusalem, we necessarily infer that the Acts of the Apostles is as much a work of fiction as ‘The Abbot’ or ‘Kenilworth,’ but infinitely inferior to the productions of Scott, in judicious adaptation of imaginative eloquence to the lips of traditional or historical personages.

This view receives further confirmation through the speech of Stephen, one of the seven appointed to superintend the communistic commissariat, but who at once attained apostolic pre-eminence by brilliant disputation with Hellenistic Jews, whom he overwhelmed by his enthusiastic eloquence. We are ignorant of the subjects of debate, nor can we trace in the teaching of Jesus any materials or encouragement for theological controversy. His gospel was a simple question of faith in the Son of Man, unattainable through polemical dis-

putation ; and, in arousing the angry passions of his opponents, Stephen anticipates the suicidal mania for martyrdom which characterises a later generation of Christians.

Arrested and arraigned before the Sanhedrim, this noble fanatic is depicted as a man full of faith, wisdom, and the Holy Ghost ; when, therefore, the High Priest calls for his defence, we necessarily anticipate a discourse as absolutely divine as if uttered by a voice from heaven. Jesus was doomed to silence by prophetic destiny, but Stephen may freely utter, in the presence of the great Council of the nation, so lucid an exposition of the gospel of Jesus that it may furnish mankind throughout all time with an infallible guide to the eternal truths of Christianity. Are these reasonable expectations fulfilled in the speech of Stephen ?

Turning to that discourse, we find nothing more than an inaccurate *résumé* of the history of Judaism from Abraham to Solomon, followed by a fanatical outburst of hostility towards his judges, and a declaration that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God—an announcement which awakened the furious indignation of his adversaries, and won for him the second crown of martyrdom in the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus we witness the fruits of religious intolerance. Stephen denies the existence of all honesty of purpose in his adversaries ; and they, as the party in power, proceed to exterminate heresy by violence. The time came when all this was changed, and Christianity, as the dominant religion, consigned the descendants of the Sanhedrim to the flames, for the honour and glory of God.

But is there not an air of improbability about the entire narrative? Could men, so studious of legal forms at the trial of Jesus, have thus suddenly become seditious violators of Roman justice? Or could members of the Council, controlled by the judicious advice of so moderate a theologian as Gamaliel,¹ have been transformed into wild beasts rushing on their prey, with the consent and approval of that sage's most distinguished pupil, Saul of Tarsus?²

Jesus having personally chosen the chief missionaries of the Kingdom of Heaven, we might reasonably expect a record of the life and teaching of each in the Acts of the Apostles. But, when their names have been recorded, Peter assigned a prominent place in the first chapter, James enrolled among the martyrs, and John and Philip briefly mentioned, the entire twelve disappear out of the narrative to make way for a member of the Hebrew sect abhorred by Jesus. Apostolic biography is thus left at the disposal of legendary fiction; and we lose all trace of the Galilean disciples until brief epistles appear, in the second century, in the names of Peter, James, and John.

The epistles of James, 1 John, and 1 Peter, when and by whomsoever written, confirm the simplicity of the Gospel, and the promise of a speedy re-appearance of Jesus in the clouds of heaven. 'Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh,'³ said James. 'The end of all things is at hand,'⁴ said Peter. If this is the language of Apostles, there can be no question as to the meaning of Jesus when he said:—'There are

¹ Acts v. 34-40.

³ James v. 8.

² Acts xxii. 3.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 7.

some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.' ¹

The Second Epistle of Peter discloses its later origin in apologetic reference to the adjourned advent. 'Be not ignorant of this'—says the unknown author—'that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'² How analogous the accommodative theories of primitive and modern apologists! One day may mean a thousand years; six days, geologic periods of unknown duration! A father tells his son to expect his arrival within four and twenty hours; he comes not for days, for months, for years, but sends a message that to-day, to-morrow, or ten years hence are all the same to him. If this conduct is unjustifiable in man, how impossible to Divinity!

The authorship of the Epistle of James is contested, but its contents so closely follow the Logia of Matthew, that we detect in the pages the kindred mind of the Lord's brother, who obviously listened with enrapt attention to the Sermon on the Mount, and never forgot its precepts. He, accordingly, teaches that pure religion consists, not in faith shared with devils, but in the practice of human virtue; and, if James had never been a disciple of Jesus, we might assume that he had studied the practical wisdom of Socrates, and anticipated the moral purity of Aurelius. The author is quite unconscious of saving creeds and dogmatic mysteries, says nothing of the Fall of man, divine atonement, regenerative baptism, or an inspiring Paraclete; he is silent as to an incarnate God and an incomprehensible Trinity; and when he treats of the supernatural, so

¹ Matt. xvi. 28.

² 2 Peter iii. 8.

unconscious is he of contemporary miracles, that he sustains the efficacy of prayer by reference to Elijah's control of the rainfall, and to the dubious miracle which even modern piety is supposed to work, through private or congregational prayer, for the recovery of the sick.

Was James thus negligent of all which Orthodoxy deems essential to salvation? Was this epistle inserted in our Bibles by some device of Satan, to lure us through the fatal mirage of pure morality, to the dread perdition which waits on heresy? Or has not rather this great Apostle of common sense followed in the footsteps of his Lord and Master by proclaiming a Gospel which means nothing more than preparation, through a virtuous life, for the impending advent of the Hebrew Messiah?

Discerning in this epistle the very mind of Jesus of Nazareth, we necessarily ask how it stood in the estimation of primitive and mediæval Bible-makers, and learn with amazement that it was unknown to the ante-Nicene Fathers from Justin to Tertullian, assigned a secondary place by Origen and Eusebius, and viewed with suspicion at the era of the Reformation by Roman, Greek, and Protestant theologians. Luther, in fact, gave so decided a preference to the subtle disquisition of Paul on justification by faith, that he pronounced James a mere 'epistle of straw.' Thus antagonistic theologians concur in rejecting the simplicity of Jesus, when found irreconcilable with the conclusions of ecclesiastical Christianity; and if this priceless epistle barely escaped exclusion from modern Bibles, how many faithful records of Jesus and his apostles may not have been rejected in favour of more pretentious versions of the mystical and the miraculous?

Historical criticism inevitably rejects the remaining Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude, and the Apocalyptic Rhapsody, whose author freely borrows the imagery of Enoch, and curses in anticipation the daring men who have rashly translated his work with various readings, notwithstanding the dread anathema pronounced on those who imperil the meaning of the prophet by the addition or erasure of a single word.¹ For fuller knowledge of the evolution of ecclesiastical Christianity we therefore turn to Saul of Tarsus.

¹ Rev. xxii. 19.

CHAPTER III.

PAUL, THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES.

APART from tradition and the Pauline Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles is our only source of information respecting the conversion and apostolic mission of Paul. We have already expressed incredulity as to the sudden persecution of the disciples of Jesus immediately after his death with a lawless violence foreign to the social order of a Roman province; but as Christian annalists have depicted Paul anticipating the sanguinary intolerance of mediæval inquisitors, we can only read his story through the materials placed at our disposal.

Tradition presents to us a man deficient in height, with lofty narrow forehead, grey eyes, aquiline nose, close eyebrows, and a pleasing expression. If to this personal sketch we add the temperament of genius, the brain of a metaphysician, the conscience of a saint, the endurance of a martyr, and the fanaticism of a prophet, we have before us one of those gifted men who reconstruct religions, and devote the resources of an inexhaustible enthusiasm to the propagation of personal convictions, held with unyielding tenacity as divine revelation. The outlines of this ideal character are, however, drawn not from the Acts of the Apostles, but from the autobiographic sketches of the Pauline Epistles.

Born, and passing his boyhood at Tarsus, a city as celebrated as Athens or Alexandria for literary culture, the studies of Saul not only embraced the records and traditions of Israel, but also the literature and philosophy of Greece—a breadth of culture which, however, failed to eradicate the heritage of intolerance, fostered for centuries by the religious egotism of the Chosen Race. Aroused from his studious repose at the feet of Gamaliel by the rumour of strange doctrines subversive of Moses and the Prophets, he listened to the Gospel of the Kingdom with an unreasoning fury which hurried him into the persecution of inoffensive visionaries, and assigned to him an ignoble place among the murderers of Christianity's second martyr. From his epistles we infer that Saul was of a sympathetic and affectionate disposition; when, therefore, he looked upon the face of the dying Stephen, the tumult of conflicting emotions necessarily produced that mental disturbance which, drifting towards the borderland of insanity, conjures phantoms in all the semblance of reality.

The well-balanced mind of his master, Gamaliel, might learn the lesson of religious toleration from the martyrdom of Socrates; but the uncompromising zeal of the pupil partook too much of the spirit of Elijah the Tishbite, to tolerate divergent conceptions of Divinity. So Saul hastened on the road to Damascus, haunted by the sad, reproachful, forgiving eyes of Stephen, and yet driven by fanaticism to fresh deeds of violence and bloodshed.

From the conflicting record of narrative and speeches, we detect the natural phenomenon which assumed a supernatural form to the future Apostle of the Gentiles.

As he proceeded on his way, prepared by nervous tension to see the miraculous in any startling event, he suddenly beheld a blinding flash of lightning, fell to the ground deprived of sight, saw an apparition of Jesus, and heard, in reverberating thunder, an imaginary voice exclaiming, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'¹—the voice of suppressed remorse, denouncing the cruelty of the theologian, appealing to the humanity of the man, and producing that swift revulsion of feeling which piety calls miraculous conversion.

Recovered from temporary loss of sight, Saul became an enthusiastic convert to Christianity; but, according to his Epistle to the Galatians, instead of hastening to the twelve apostles, to Mary Magdalene, and to the mother of Jesus, to learn the truths of the Gospel, he rashly assumed that he had received a special revelation, declined to communicate with the companions of Jesus, declared that he had been taught nothing by man, and pronounced an anathema on all whose evangelical views differed from his own.² The Creed of the Mount was repentance, forgiveness, reformation, and faith in Jesus; but, by engrafting on this simplicity the creations of his own imagination, Saul became the first Christian heretic, and thus set the example which fostered, in later generations, the prolific growth of doctrines, dogmas, and mysteries, subversive of the original teaching of Jesus.

Although addressed from heaven as Saul, a change of name follows conversion, and henceforth we know him as Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The Pauline portion of the Acts is little more than

¹ Acts ix.

² Gal. i.

a record of missionary journeys interspersed with speeches, as obviously assignable to the invention of the author, as the language put by Livy into the mouths of his historical personages. How strange that this apostolic annalist could produce nothing more worthy of the author of the Pauline Epistles than the discourses at Antioch, Athens, and Cæsarea!

The speech at Antioch is on the same model as that of Stephen, and Paul preaches, not an attested, but a constructive Resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead, not because five hundred witnesses proclaimed the miracle, but because a misinterpreted passage in the Psalms prohibited the decomposition of the Holy One.

The speech at Athens on the text—‘To the Unknown God’—(Ἄγνωστω Θεῷ) might have been uttered by a heathen philosopher, sustaining the Unity of Divinity; but when Paul suddenly announces to an audience as critical as the Athenians that the Deity would judge the world through a man whom he had raised from the dead, what could he reasonably expect but courteous incredulity or supercilious scorn, in the absence of any proof of the miracle?

But the poverty of imagination disclosed by the author of the Acts culminates in the speech at Cæsarea. Paul attains the privilege of preaching the Gospel before King Agrippa, Bernice, and the Roman Proconsul, Festus, and yet instead of uttering an eloquent discourse on the life, teaching, and attested Resurrection of the Son of Man, he egotistically dwells on his own phantasmal experience, and the alleged predictions of Moses and the Prophets, forecasting the sufferings and Resurrection of Jesus. Thus, on one of the most im-

portant occasions on which the Gospel was preached, it was found resting on no more credible basis than the vision of Paul, and what ought to have occurred because predicted by prophets.

Can we wonder if a practical Roman statesman saw in Paul the victim of religious hallucination; or that Agrippa should exclaim, with sarcastic pleasantry,—‘With but shallow reasoning you desire to make me a Christian.’¹ In other words—‘Where is the proof of your statements?’ Paul had said, ‘Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?’ but this is merely dealing with the theory of the Resurrection, and the gist of the matter lay in proof that an individual man had actually risen from the dead. Modern piety believes all things possible to God, but would reject the rumour of a specific resurrection without conclusive evidence of the miracle. Why, therefore, should Agrippa, Bernice, or Festus prove less sceptical than modern Christians, and if even Galilean apostles demanded material proof, should not Paul have brought some of the five hundred witnesses into court to satisfy the doubts of men less facile of conviction than himself?

The apostolic annalist is silent as to Bernice’s views of Paul. If he possessed the winning smile which tradition gives him, she probably pitied the interesting fanatic, and wondered whether a woman’s voice might not some day charm him more than vocal thunder.

We all know what would be the fate of Paul summoned in modern times before a bench of magistrates in connection with some popular commotion. The

¹ Acts xxvi. 28, incorrectly translated in the A.V.

narrative of Voice and Vision would be listened to with courteous incredulity and bland compassion ; and remanded for medical inquiry, Paul would be pronounced insane, removed to an asylum, and there detained until the exhausted tissues of his brain had been sufficiently restored to silence supernatural voices and banish celestial visions.

Turning from anonymous fiction, let us seek more reliable information of Paul in the writings attributed to his pen. Historic evidence of the existence of Pauline literature dates from the second century. The author of 2 Peter speaks of the writings of Paul as Scripture difficult of comprehension by the ignorant—language impossible to a Galilean apostle, who would have necessarily condemned all doctrinal innovations on the simplicity of his Lord and Master. Irenæus and Tertullian canonise thirteen Pauline Epistles to the exclusion of Hebrews, variously assigned to Clement, Barnabas, Apollos, and Luke. This anonymous Epistle, the fruitful source of primitive, mediæval, and modern controversies, can no longer be numbered among the works of Paul, but assigned to some great Unknown of the second century, who exhausted all the resources of apologetic ingenuity in the hopeless task of reconciling the irreconcilable, through the fanciful adaptation of Hebrew legends and Mosaic ritualism to the story of Jesus of Nazareth. How profound would have been the indignation of Jesus, could he have foreseen that he, who abhorred priestcraft, and was slain by priests, would yet be proclaimed a Supreme Pontiff after the order of Melchizedek !

It matters not who wrote the brief and simple letter

to Philemon. The Pastoral Epistles, addressed to Timothy and Titus, disclose their post-Pauline authorship through reference to a more advanced episcopal organization than existed in the age of the apostles. Are the seven remaining epistles the veritable autograms of Paul? Internal evidence gives us the option of one preacher of conflicting doctrines and transitional revelation, or a Pauline school modifying the teaching of its founder, through interpolated versions or pseudonymous epistles. On the theory of progressive revelation in Paul, the absence of metaphysical mysticism from the Epistles to the Thessalonians assigns to them the earliest place in Pauline literature; and as they teach nothing more than faith in Jesus, and preparation through a blameless life for the second advent of the Messiah, they stand in much closer affinity to the Galilean, than to the Pauline school.

The author borrows freely from the Book of Enoch. 'The word of his mouth shall destroy all the sinners, and all the ungodly, who shall perish in his presence. . . . Trouble shall come upon them as upon a woman in travail. One portion of them shall look upon another: they shall be astonished, and shall abase their countenances, and trouble shall seize them when they shall behold the Son of woman sitting upon the throne of his glory.'¹ Whilst in the Epistles to the Thessalonians, we read:—'Then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.'² The wicked whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the pre-

¹ Enoch lxi. 4-9.

² 1 Thess. v. 3.

sence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.’¹ If this is the language of Paul, he obviously followed Jesus in accepting Enoch as the great authority on the miraculous future of Christianity.

The group of Pauline Epistles, consisting of those addressed to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, disclose priority of composition in less exalted conceptions of the Messiah than are manifest in the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In Romans, Jesus is merely man declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection of the dead;² but in Colossians he becomes ‘the First-born of every creature,’ and even the Creator of all things ‘in the heavens and upon the earth.’³ The secret of this startling transformation will appear, when we hereafter discuss the Divinity of Jesus.

The epistles holding priority of place in the New Testament tell us that Paul is a divinely elected Apostle, and the Christians, whom he addresses, divinely elected saints.⁴ The foolish, the weak, and the base are chosen in preference to the wise, the strong, and the noble;⁵ and the nomination of men to salvation or perdition is quite as arbitrary a proceeding as the decision of a potter respecting the shape of a pitcher. Men are therefore irresponsible automata controlled by destiny; ‘for whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the First-born among many brethren: and whom he foreordained them he also called: and whom he called them he also justified: and whom he justified, them

¹ 2 Thess. i. 9; ii. 8.

² Rom. i. 3; v. 15.

³ Col. i. 16.

⁴ Rom. i. 1, 7.

⁵ 1 Cor. i. 26-28.

he also glorified.’¹ Paul does not even shrink from the admission that God, in harmony with his treatment of Pharaoh, ‘hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.’² Moreover, no presumptuous mortal has any right to question the Divine justice which determines the perdition of unborn millions as a foregone conclusion.³ Thus, Paul limits membership in the Kingdom of Heaven to a divinely chosen minority, and yet subsequently declares that God will render to every man according to his works;⁴ and that ‘he who confesses with his lips that Jesus is the Lord, and who believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead, shall be saved.’⁵

Mankind are naturally at enmity with God, and incapable of obedience to his will unless divinely inspired.⁶ It therefore naturally follows, as admitted by Paul, that sin is not imputed, and there is no transgression in the absence of revealed legislation.⁷ But the visible works of creation disclose the infinite attributes of Divinity; and because the heathen did not, therefore, discover and glorify the true God, who practically neglected them in favour of a Chosen Race, he abandoned them to every conceivable form of crime and iniquity, for which they shall suffer appalling retribution in the day of the righteous judgment of God.⁸

Having thus introduced chaos into the kingdom of heaven, Paul apostrophises ‘the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past

¹ Rom. viii. 29, 30.

² Rom. ix. 18.

³ Rom. ix. 19-25.

⁴ Rom. ii. 6.

⁵ Rom. x. 9.

⁶ Rom. viii. 6-9.

⁷ Rom. iv. 15, v. 13.

⁸ Rom. i.

tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor!’¹ Thus theologians, in every age, presumptuously interpret providential action, and attribute their own irrational conclusions to the inscrutable wisdom of God which, from their lips, generally means the metaphysical mysticism of man.

Notwithstanding that the conflicting views of Paul are accepted by modern Christians as Divine revelation, they do not even possess the merit of originality. Many of his ideas are borrowed from the unknown author of the *Wisdom of Solomon*; and the following citations from that great work of the Alexandrine school, can leave no doubt as to an important source of Pauline inspiration.

‘Surely vain are all men by nature who are ignorant of God, and could not, out of the good things that are seen, know him that is: neither by considering the works, did they acknowledge the workmaster.’²

‘The potter, tempering soft earth, fashioneth every vessel with much labour for our service: yea, of the same clay he maketh both the vessels that serve for clean uses, and likewise all such as serve to the contrary: but what is the use of either sort, the potter himself is the judge.’³

‘For who shall say what hast thou done? or who shall withstand thy judgment? or who shall accuse thee for the nations that perish whom thou hast made?’⁴

¹ Rom. xi. 33, 34. ² *Wisdom of Solomon* xiii. 1; compare Rom. i.

³ *Wisdom of Solomon* xv. 7.

⁴ *Wisdom of Solomon* xii. 12; compare Rom. ix.

Turning to Pauline views of the resurrection, he tells us that Jesus died, was buried, and raised again 'on the third day *according to the Scriptures.*'¹ And in discussing the theory of the resurrection, he declares that 'if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised . . . yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised.'² How overwhelming the proof that primitive faith in the resurrection of Jesus originated in visionary phantoms, invested with the semblance of reality through the imaginary predictions of prophets! Jesus rose from the dead, not according to the five hundred witnesses, but according to the Scriptures which, in the light of modern criticism, contain not one word on the subject.

If it had ever been a demonstrable fact that Jesus had died, was buried, had risen again the third day, and had satisfied the Eleven, to say nothing of more numerous witnesses, that he was indeed the Son of Man who had lived with them in the familiar companionship of Galilee, how could it be reasonably affirmed that, if there be no general resurrection, therefore Jesus has not risen? It is not a question of theoretical belief, but of attested facts; and we inevitably detect through the language of Paul, that he had never heard of Lazarus coming forth from his tomb, or of apostles raising the dead, and therefore rested all his hopes of immortality on a constructive resurrection. But this

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 4.

² 1 Cor. xv. 13-16.

was quite sufficient for the enthusiastic faith of Paul, who exclaims:—‘Behold I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory’¹—a noble outburst of human aspirations towards the Infinite, which has consoled millions of bereaved men and women, as a voice from heaven, at the graves of the dead, but, nevertheless, as purely an imaginative flight of human genius, as though it flowed from the pen of a Dante or a Milton. Paul possessed an equally enthusiastic faith in the immediate return of Jesus;² but this Messianic dream was the ideal creation of the unknown author of Enoch, who, no doubt, felt quite as certain of his visionary facts as the Apostle of the Gentiles.

As a politician Paul considered all rulers to be divinely appointed, and therefore entitled to the implicit obedience of their subjects. And as he affirmed that none but the guilty need fear punishment, he necessarily assumed invariable excellence of administration.³ No *de facto* Government, whether Monarchical, Republican, or Communistic, should, therefore, be resisted by modern Christians on any grounds whatsoever; and in Pauline politics, the maxim reigns supreme—‘What is,

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 51–54.

² Phil. iv. 4, 5.

³ Rom. xiii.

is right.' A Hampden or a Washington would, accordingly, have been to Paul the enemy of providential design in legislation and government; and liberty was to him so vain a sound, that he accepted slavery as a divine institution, and recommended all men, whether freemen or slaves, to remain in the same social position in which they had become converts to Christianity.¹ These views, so fatal to individual and national progress, are obviously the result of faith in the impending advent of the Messiah; but can modern statesmen and philanthropists accept the social and political theories of Paul as infallible wisdom?

Pauline denunciation of the flesh—the only medium through which we know even the noblest of our race—has been accepted for centuries as divine revelation, and yet it simply reproduces the teaching of Socrates, as it reaches us through his illustrious interpreter, Plato. In the 'Phædo,'² we read that the soul and body exist under conditions of mutual hostility; that the true philosopher endeavours to attain to spiritual purification by separating the soul as much as possible from so great an evil as the body; and that we shall attain to greater knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, in this life, by avoiding all unnecessary communion with the flesh, and keeping ourselves uncontaminated by its influence, until finally released by the Deity. When, therefore, Paul affirms that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,' he speaks as a disciple, not of Jesus, but of Socrates, and engrafts on Christianity a philosophic superstition, as untrue to the constitution of man as to the school of Galilee. For, has not science taught us,

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 20-24.

² Phædo ix.-xii.

in modern times, that moral and intellectual excellence has no existence apart from the condition of our cerebral tissues; and that the slightest injury to the organ of mental function may transform saints to satyrs, and genius to imbecility?

Paul, having thus become imbued with the ascetic mysticism which teaches that the soul, as a spiritual essence, is degraded by its companionship with the body, and should be held in subjection through the mortification of the flesh, rejoiced in bodily suffering, that he 'might fill up on his part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ.' With language such as this in their infallible Bibles, how can Protestants disavow the hair shirts and whipcord of their Roman Catholic brethren? And does not this great Apostle of asceticism stand confessed as the patron of future saints, who degraded humanity with naked, unwashed, and ulcerated bodies, exposed in pestilential marshes, or pilloried on ascending columns?

The visions of Paul did not terminate with his conversion. He was subsequently 'caught up,' he knew not whether in the body or in the spirit, to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words unlawful for human utterance.¹ Enoch also was 'snatched up by a cloud,'² into the heavens, and records the wonders of his celestial journey; but Paul more modestly declines to depict the marvels of Paradise, and thus we are happily rescued from the obligation of accepting his spiritual hallucinations as divine revelation.

Paul firmly believed in evil spirits, and accepted Satan as the God of this world.³ He declared that the

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 2-4.

² Enoch xxxix. 3.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

sacrifices of the Gentiles were offered to demons, and thus, in accepting Olympian phantoms as spiritual powers, practically admitted a plurality of gods.¹

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul declares that ‘we have been discharged from the Law;’² but according to that addressed to the Corinthians this emancipation is limited to men; for women are to ‘be in subjection, as also saith the Law,’ and are to form their religious convictions second-hand through their husbands,³ to whom they are to be as docile as the Church to Christ.⁴ Women of the nineteenth century cannot, therefore, even approach the question of the equality of the sexes without first disavowing the inspiration and infallibility of an important Pauline epistle.

But let hope revive in female breasts. All this is changed when we turn to the Epistle to the Galatians, and learn the enfranchisement of *all* through faith, which sweeps away every distinction between Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and female, for all are one man in Christ Jesus.⁵ If Paul was really the author of all these flagrant contradictions, he obviously kept no copies of his correspondence; and Luke was so careless or incompetent a secretary, that he failed to assist the memory of his great master, who thus became the object of his own anathema through conflicting gospels.⁶

The most famous of Pauline doctrines is Justification by Faith, involving the obvious fallacy that guilt or merit can attach to opinions which, whether true or false, have been attained through the exercise of our natural faculties: as if the wilful perversion of human reason,

¹ 1 Cor. x. 20.

² Rom. vii. 6.

³ 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

⁴ Eph. v. 22-24.

⁵ Gal. iii. 28.

⁶ Gal. i. 8.

by the suppression of independent thought when adverse to alleged revelation, could possibly win the favour of the Deity !

When, in this age of intellectual freedom, we use the right of private judgment in rejecting the Immaculate Conception or the Infallibility of the Pope, we do not dread that even if these doctrines be true, we imperil our salvation by accepting the negative conclusions of reason. Can we, therefore, concur with Paul in assuming that the justification of his contemporaries was contingent on their belief in an unattested vision and a constructive resurrection, which assumed to them the form of illusory dreams? And if they even succeeded in silencing the voice of reason in the hope of salvation, had they not finally parted with all intellectual guarantees against the extremes of religious fanaticism ?

Pauline faith, although passing beyond the simplicity of Galilee, paused so immeasurably short of the doctrines, dogmas, and mysteries of futurity that, if the great Apostle could have foreseen the mediæval conditions of justification, not by faith, but by credulity, he would doubtless have used more caution in eulogising a Christian virtue so susceptible of transformation into a pernicious superstition ; and the Christianity of futurity might thus have partially escaped the cumulative demands of ecclesiastical authority on the religious credulity of mankind.

The Reformation, in restoring the empire of reason within the realms of theology, practically destroyed the doctrine of Justification by Faith ; for if its chiefs might legitimately exercise the right of private judgment by

rejecting the Eucharistic miracle, we also, in the fuller light of our generation, may disavow the Christian mysteries which they left untouched, and seek our justification, not by the faith which fosters credulity, but by the scepticism which worships truth.

Paul seems to have been absolutely ignorant of the true and simple story of Jesus whom he was determined to know, not as the unassuming Son of Man, but as the pretentious phantom of his own imagination,¹ in which is hidden the mystery of God²—as if the candid and straightforward Preacher of the Mount could possibly have had anything to conceal from the children of the Kingdom! The Pauline is not, therefore, the Galilean Messiah, but the ideal creation of metaphysical fanaticism, investing the truly human character of the Son of Man with a spiritual mysticism utterly foreign to his personal pretensions.

The Protean theosophy of Paul necessarily encouraged independent flights of speculative thought among aspiring converts, as confident as their master of their own divine inspiration; and, in due time, we therefore find the great founder of Gentile churches denouncing heresies and endeavouring to stifle freedom of discussion through the terrors of excommunication³—a fatal precedent which lent the sanction of a great name to the sacerdotal intolerance of later generations!

Apart from the ascetic and metaphysical mysticism of Paul, we see in him a great moralist who, in studying the social obligations of mankind, gathers from the collective wisdom of Jew and Gentile the principles and practice forming the sum of contemporary progress in

¹ 2 Cor. v. 16.

² Col. ii. 2, 3.

³ Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

the ethics of civilisation. Relying less than Jesus on the comprehensive rule of mutual beneficence, Paul more specifically inculcates the social duties of truth, honesty, justice, kindness, forbearance, forgiveness; and the personal virtues of industry, moderation, purity, endurance, and fortitude. Love he depicts, with enthusiastic eloquence, as greater than the gift of prophecy, the working of miracles, or the knowledge of mysteries—love known to us as charity, through the Authorised Version, but more correctly defined as the modern virtue of humanity, which, in its highest form, irrespective of creed or clime, grants to the calamities of every race the voice of sympathy and the boon of help.

But Pauline ethics virtually rest on a foundation of sand. Experience tells us that the family circle is the school of virtue. Paul, however, considered that both men and women are hampered in the career of saints by domestic ties, and would have all the faithful ascetic celebrates as himself. This Pauline fanaticism, in due time, filled caves with anchorites, and cells with monks and nuns flying from the spiritual danger of being men and women, and transferring the business of life to the profane multitude guilty of adherence to the old—old fashions of Humanity, but willing to contribute to the support of unproductive piety, in exchange for the prayers of saints and the benedictions of hermits.

Modern Christians, conscious of the contrast between Pauline and Mosaic ethics, attribute the apparently abrupt transition to a new revelation: but in the long interval between the last of the prophets and the first of the apostles, the contact of Judaism with Persian,

Grecian, and Roman civilisation had modified ancient Hebrew barbarism ; and the disciples of a Hillel or a Gamaliel were instructed in the borrowed wisdom of the Gentiles, under the patriotic illusion that they were listening to the traditional teaching of Moses.

Roman philosophy had passed, in the age of Paul, from speculation to practice ; and his illustrious contemporary, Seneca, discoursed of religion and morality in terms which piety accepts from the lips of Paul as divine revelation. Seneca was not only hostile to Paganism, but depicted the Deity as the friend and father of mankind, inspiring them with good resolutions, never far off from the objects of his beneficent care, and worthy of the love and devotion of his children. In morals he taught the obligations of charity, kindness, and benevolence, through the comprehensive principle of the brotherhood of man. He maintained the rights of slaves, condemned the ravages of war, and denounced the wickedness of gladiatorial shows. He inculcated ascetic indifference to wealth, voluntary poverty, and unbroken fortitude in the presence of calamity, persecution, and death. It is true that Seneca did not practise what he preached ; but his faults are chronicled by hostile critics, whilst the character of Paul is written by himself or his admiring friends. If he, as Seneca, had been exposed to the temptations of an imperial court, and had his biography written in the malignant spirit of a Dio Cassius, we should then, doubtless, recognise the merely human elements of his moral greatness.

The teaching of Paul was, therefore, the product of the ages ; and its coincidence with the philosophy of Seneca tells us nothing more than that each had given

expression to the highest forms of contemporary thought, evolved from antecedent systems of philosophy, interpreted through the practical sense of duty preached by Cicero before the birth of Paul. These conclusions being, however, irreconcilable with the theory of Pauline inspiration, primitive Christians met the difficulty with a forged correspondence between Paul and Seneca, through which the teaching of the latter was placed to the credit of Christianity. But there is no proof that Seneca had ever heard of Paul, or borrowed from his gospel. Christians he necessarily confounded with Jews, for whom he ever expressed the same contempt with which his brother, Junius Gallio, as proconsul of Achaia, refused to listen to the accusers of Paul.¹ The pious fiction of an evangelised Seneca having, therefore, perished in the light of modern criticism, we retain the conviction that Pauline ethics were naturally attainable by uninspired humanity.

Uncertainty as to the authorship of the Pauline epistles involves no doubt of the existence of a great Apostle, who accomplished a missionary work among the Gentiles, impossible to the simplicity of Galilee. There can be no question that an illustrious Jew, the disciple of Hebrew sages, exchanged the cherished convictions of his ancestral creed for his own ideal version of the Gospel of Jesus, joined the community of saints awaiting the second advent of the Messiah, founded a Pauline school of zealous disciples, and devoted all the resources of an inexhaustible enthusiasm to the propagation of the Faith among those Gentile communities which proved the germs of future Christian churches. But in the

¹ Acts xviii. 12-16.

presence of the spiritual conquests of Buddha and Mahomed, there are no reasonable grounds on which we can accept the work of Paul as anything more than the achievements of human genius, acting in absolute freedom from the controlling influence of the miraculous—an assumption which receives full confirmation through his failure to establish a permanent form of Christianity, and the almost immediate corruption of his teaching through the progressive Gnosticism of his successors in Gentile churches.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVOLUTION OF DIVINITY.

AN impenetrable cloud rests on the first century of Christianity, and modern Orthodoxy holds no authentic record of that mysterious blank in ecclesiastical history.

When the curtain rises on the evangelical drama of the second century, we recognise the work of the Galilean Apostles in the simple faith of the Ebionites of Pella, the scattered remnant of the Nazarene Church of Jerusalem, who, as faithful disciples of Jesus, combined the ritualism of Moses with the precepts of the Gospel, and were unconscious of any other saving creed than implicit trust in the speedy return of Jesus to confound their enemies and reward their devotion. They possessed a Hebrew Gospel which probably consisted of the original Logia of Matthew, in which the mythology of the first chapter in our version found no place. To them their Lord and Master was merely a man (*ψιλὸς ἄνθρωπος*) divinely inspired to fulfil, in life and death, the will of his Father in heaven, and predestined to reappear in the clouds as the triumphant Messiah of the prophets. Some of them were perhaps already drifting into the heresy of a supernatural birth, but the novel doctrines of a divine Logos and a triune Deity, then in various stages of incipient development among Gentile

communities, were quite external to the primitive theology of the Ebionites.

What, therefore, was the faith of Gentile Christianity? Hegesippus, a Hebrew Christian, who visited several churches when travelling to Rome, about the middle of the second century, wrote a history of Christianity in continuation of the Apostolic age, which has disappeared through accident or design, with the exception of a few imperfect fragments preserved in the works of the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius; according to whom, Hegesippus states that 'he received the same doctrine from all the bishops with whom he conversed on his journey to Rome; and that in every episcopal see and city, the prevailing doctrines were in accordance with the declarations of the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord.'¹

Hegesippus then enumerates the principal heresies extant in his generation, including those of the Marcionites, Valentinians, and Basilidians, and adds: 'From these sprung the false Christs, false prophets, and false apostles, who destroyed the unity of the Church by introducing corrupt doctrines against God and against his Christ.' Now, as this Christian Jew had thus become familiar with the doctrines of Nazarene and Gentile churches, with the result of attributing unity of faith to all, it inevitably follows that Gentile orthodoxy, about the middle of the second century, was identical with Ebionite faith in the unity of God and the humanity of Jesus, whilst the only recognised heretics were believers in false Christs and false conceptions of divinity.

The catholicity which had impressed Hegesippus during his tour of inspection throughout the Christian

¹ Eusebius, *His.* Book IV. chap. xxii.

churches was, however, merely superficial. The eminent prelates, with whom he conversed at Corinth and at Rome, had, doubtless, placed under lock and key the ecclesiastical skeleton then rattling its bones in episcopal cupboards; theological speculation had not yet assumed sufficiently definite forms to cause an open rupture between Hebrew and Hellenistic Christianity, but beneath the seemingly unruffled surface of Christian unity were drifting divergent currents yet destined to overflow, with cumulative force and volume, the boundaries of primitive orthodoxy, and rush onwards in independent channels, until diverted by new forces into the great Dead Sea of Roman despotism.

Let us briefly trace the origin of this impending revolution.

Paul supplies us with a graphic sketch of primitive association among the Christians of Corinth—a motley crowd of men and women, assembled in convivial commemoration of the social feast at which Jesus bid farewell to his Galilean companions in the work of the Kingdom—all eager for distinction as psalmists, doctrinaires, prophets, polyglots, and interpreters, divinely enlightened by supernatural dreams and miraculous visions.¹ This spiritual confusion was most distasteful to Paul, who told the Corinthians that ‘if anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace;’ but who could determine whether the second speaker had not silenced an inspired brother; was he sole judge of his own inspiration; and, if interrupted by yet another prophet, was he also to give place to a third revelation?

¹ 1 Cor. xiv.

But later on, all this perplexing confusion was changed among the Gentile Christians by the magic of Roman organisation. Notwithstanding the spiritual resources at their command, primitive Christian communities borrowed the system common to Roman guilds or clubs, incorporated for trading, social, dramatic, or literary purposes, with administrative committees of Presbyteri or Episcopi, and a chairman or president who, in the case of Christian associations, gradually drifted into permanent primacy and eventual supremacy, as the Episcopus or Bishop, invested, in the further process of ecclesiastical evolution, with supernatural authority over the reason and conscience of his flock, and accepted by modern piety as a divinely appointed pontiff, miraculously inspired through episcopal manipulation.

If presbyters and bishops succeeded in imposing reverential silence on the crowd, its members, however, retained the right to freedom of thought ; and episcopal rulers enjoyed the privilege of independent teaching, long before the central power of Metropolitan, Pope, or Council had claimed the right to define the creed of orthodoxy, and pronounce the doom of heretics. And thus, philosophical Christians, both lay and clerical, worked in freedom at the hopeless task of reconciling Judaism and Christianity with the mythology and philosophy of India, Persia, and Greece, with results which supplied future generations with abundant materials for constructing the colossal fabric of mediæval Christianity.

The Mosaic dispensation had been, for centuries, a theosophic mystery, carefully withdrawn by the chosen

race from sacrilegious contact with alien nations abhorred by the God of Israel. But when, after the conquests of Alexander, Hebrew colonies had been established in regions where Greek became the familiar language of expatriated Jews, a demand arose for a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was accordingly produced at Alexandria, about B.C. 280, first as a translation of the Pentateuch, and subsequently as the full Greek version known as the Septuagint, the origin and authorship of which is invested with the marvels of legendary fiction.

Justin Martyr and Irenæus,¹ the primitive canon-makers of the New Testament, declare that Ptolemy Lagi being desirous of adding a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to the literary treasures of his famous Alexandrian library, the Jews of Jerusalem sent seventy elders, skilled in both languages, to Alexandria, where they were placed in separate cells on their arrival, with the marvellous result that all produced independent versions exactly agreeing throughout in every word and sentence, so that it was clearly shown that the Hebrew Scriptures had been translated by the inspiration of God. If Orthodoxy accepts apostolic Gospels from the hands of Irenæus, why not also the verbal inspiration of the Septuagint, sustained by even the weighty authority of that great Latin saint, Augustine?

The more practical Origen, who devoted inexhaustible industry to the correction of the text, however, candidly admits 'that there are evidently great discrepancies in the copies of the Septuagint, whether

¹ Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, iii. 21.

attributable to the carelessness of scribes, or to the rash and pernicious alteration of the text by some, and the unauthorised interpolations and omissions of others'—a view fully confirmed by modern criticism of both uncial and cursive MSS. dating from the fourth to the fourteenth century, which disclose in numerous discrepancies the unrevised work of different translators, imperfectly acquainted with the original Hebrew, and using the Macedonic dialect, corrupted by Egyptian words.

Some instances of departure from the Hebrew original are traceable rather to theological design than to human error; thus Hellenistic Jews, desirous of cloaking Mosaic anthropomorphism, translate 'the mouth' by the word, and 'the hand' by the power of Jehovah—variations which some apologetic theologians explain by the divine purpose of adapting Hebrew Scripture to the minds of the heathen, who therefore had higher conceptions of Divinity than the Chosen Race!

The Greek version of the Sacred Scriptures, therefore, became the Holy Bible of Hebrew colonists, scattered throughout the Roman Empire at the period immediately preceding the Christian era. But, more especially at Alexandria, the populous centre of Hellenistic Judaism was the Septuagint industriously studied and interpreted in harmony with the fashionable philosophy of Alexandrian sages, who had transformed the anthropomorphic imagery of effete mythologies into mere symbols of philosophic mysticism. The allegorical system of exegesis was, therefore, fully adopted by the Hellenistic apologists of Moses and the prophets, who would, doubtless, have heard with amazement, could they have risen from the dead, that whilst uttering what they

honestly believed to be the oracles of divine wisdom, they were simply obscurely symbolising the more spiritual systems of heathen philosophy, reserved for the enlightenment of future generations; and thus had called down the vengeance of Jehovah on the unhappy children of Israel, for neglecting a theological system unintelligible to all, until explained by Plato and his disciples.

About four centuries before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, Plato, an illustrious Athenian, having applied the highest faculties of human genius to sublime speculation on the attributes of Divinity, conceived that the Supreme Being is of Trinitarian essence, namely, the self-existent First Cause, the Logos or Reason emanating from the First Cause, and the Spirit of the universe—a scheme of Oriental mysticism which was doubtless suggested to Plato during his Eastern travels throughout regions where divine Emanations and Avatars have been the imaginative creations of Indian theosophists from time immemorial.

If a mere heathen philosopher could fuse so sublime a system with the mythology of Greece, what marvels might not the Oriental imagination of Hebrew sages accomplish through the spiritual interpretation of Mosaic materialism! Alexandrine Jews accordingly Hellenised Hebrew annals, rendered the precepts of Leviticus into verse, dramatised Exodus in the name of Ezekiel, and sustained the immortality of the soul through the Wisdom of Solomon, published as the autogram of a monarch who nearly eight centuries previously had declared, ‘There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, for that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth

them ; as one dieth so dieth the other ; yea, they have all one breath : so that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast : for all is vanity.'¹

The zealous author of this philosophic movement had successfully anticipated evangelical apologists, in showing that Hebrew oracles mean something very different from what they seem to utter, when Philo Judæus, one of the most gifted sons of Israel, appeared upon the scene (B.C. 20—A.D. 50), attained pre-eminence among the Alexandrine sages of Judah, and out-Platoed Plato through the startling discovery, in the pages of the divinely translated Septuagint, that the Logos of philosophy, the *πρωτόγονος*, or first-born of God, was the Jehovah of Moses and the prophets !

The philosophic mysticism of the Alexandrine school, thus sanctioned by the greatest of the Hebrew disciples of Plato, necessarily exercised an important influence on the Judaism of Palestine ; and Paul, educated in the Rabbinic school of Jerusalem, owes more to the Platonism of Philo of Alexandria, than to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.

We speak of Alexandria as the cosmopolitan centre of Platonic Judaism ; but facility of intercourse throughout the Roman Empire brought numerous other colonies of Hellenistic Jews in contact with theosophic mysticism. When, therefore, Paul went forth to evangelise numerous cities inhabited by both Jews and Gentiles, he did not merely meet with ritualistic votaries of Judaism, and pious worshippers of Olympian gods, but earnest thinkers, moved by the spirit of their age to turn from ancient shrines to modern ideals of Divinity,

¹ Ecclesiastes ii. 24, iii. 19.

and prepared to embrace with enthusiasm any theological system harmonising with their spiritual dreams.

Philo had declared that the Septuagint had been the work 'not of mere translators, but of men divinely chosen and appointed, to whom it was given to understand and clearly express the full sense and meaning of Moses.' This alien version of Hebrew Scripture, allegorically interpreted in Alexandrian schools, therefore became the corrupted source of inspiration to the compilers of gospels and the authors of epistles, who relied more on imaginative interpretation of ancient Scripture than on the actual facts of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the unknown author's exaggerated symbolism at once discloses the presence of a pupil of Philo, rather than of a disciple of Jesus.

The Jews and Gentiles evangelised by Paul, doubtless followed the example of the Beræans in studying the Scriptures daily through the Alexandrine version; but instead of being instructed in its spiritual meaning through the revelations said to have been personally made by Jesus to the Galilean apostles after his resurrection, the source of interpretation is found in the school of Philo. 'Now, a certain Jew named Apollo's, an Alexandrine by race, a learned man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught carefully the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John.'¹ But being further instructed in a more advanced Christianity by Priscilla and Aquila, mere

¹ Acts xviii. 24, 25.

novices who had recently arrived from Pontus and been evangelised by Paul, Apollos started on an independent mission to Achaia, where ' he helped them much which had believed through grace ; for he powerfully confuted the Jews, showing publicly by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.'

Thus, at the dawn of Christianity, an Alexandrine sophist goes forth to preach the Gospel, not of Jesus of Nazareth, but of a constructive Christ, evolved from the pages of an alien version of Moses and the prophets interpreted in the light of Alexandrine mysticism. Alas for the visionary dreams of Galilee ! The voice which asked for nothing more than simple faith in the Son of Man is silent, and forthwith polemical evangelists undertake to prove the Gospel from the pages of a book which Jesus never read ; and clamorous controversialists appear before proconsular judgment-seats, to meet the contemptuous scorn of a Gallio, whose practical sagacity excludes theology from the scope of Roman judicature.

Gentile converts being thus referred to the Septuagint, in confirmation of a Gospel which depicts the Deity as the beneficent Father of all mankind, heard with incredulous amazement, of the Hebrew Jehovah, whose patriarchal and royal favourites outraged the noblest precepts of heathen virtue ; and piously massacred defenceless women and children in honour of a Divinity who thus shared the thirst for sacrificial blood with the most sanguinary deities of remote mythology. If the votaries of Olympian gods could be inspired with the wisdom and virtue of a Socrates or a Plato, why not attribute to the objects of their worship supremacy

in divinity over a God whose personal government could evolve no wisdom higher than the cynical pessimism of a Solomon, no virtue nobler than the mercenary piety of a David? Or if these ancient deities were to be degraded to the rank of Dæmons, assigned to them by Paul, why not also dethrone the Hebrew Jehovah in favour of the risen Jesus, deified as the Divine Reason (*θεῖος λόγος*), the Second God (*ὁ δεύτερος θεός*) of Platonic theosophy?

On the other hand, Hebrew converts, won to Christianity during the first outburst of enthusiasm which announced the presence of the Paraclete, suffered all the chilling influence of reaction, when more calmly criticising the startling paradox that he, who had been condemned to the appalling ignominy of the cross by those who occupied the seat of Moses, was the promised Messiah of the Prophets.

How, therefore, were these perplexing problems, as yet but floating in the atmosphere of Palestine and Greece, to find solution in the Catholic Christianity of the future? Hebrew monotheists, unconscious, through national egotism, of the irreconcilable attributes of the Mosaic Jehovah and the Supreme Ruler of the universe, had inflexibly sustained, from the period of contact with Persian theology, the absolute unity of the Godhead. How, therefore, was the power, wisdom, and justice of the ideal First Cause of heathen philosophy to be vindicated without compromising the character, or even endangering the position of Jehovah; and if the Hebrew God were assigned a secondary place as the Logos of Philo, how was Jesus of Nazareth to satisfy Gentile aspirations by sharing the honours of Divinity,

without violating the principle of monotheism inseparable from the modern form of Judaism?

These questions remained long unanswered before finding solution in the reconstruction of primitive Christianity. Numerous sects arose external to the Church, composed of educated and wealthy Gentiles, who exhausted all the resources of imaginative piety in the vain attempt to reconcile Moses, Jesus, and Plato, through shifting combinations of theosophic mysticism. But the first heresy, which effected a permanent lodgment within the pale of orthodoxy, was the supernatural birth of the Messiah—a theory which, however irreconcilable with the true story of Jesus of Nazareth, harmonised with the popular aspirations of the second century for the exaltation of the Messiah, without disturbing the principle of monotheism.

As was the case with a constructive Resurrection, so also a constructive Incarnation was proved by the arbitrary interpretation of a single word in the Septuagint. In the authorised version of Isaiah vii. 14, we read:—‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son—which is more correctly translated—‘Behold, the young woman is with child, and beareth a son.’ The Hebrew word *hâalmâh* is translated in the Septuagint by *παρθένος* which denotes a virgin. Aquila of Pontus, and Theodotion of Ephesus, Jewish proselytes who published Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures in the second century, however, adopt the word *νεάνις*, applicable to any young woman, married or single; and as Irenæus, when maintaining the theory of the Incarnation, discloses, in his arguments, that it never rested on any more reliable basis than the miraculous translation

and verbal infallibility of the Septuagint, which, he asserts, is the version from which Peter, John, Matthew, and Paul quoted the Prophets,¹ we inevitably recognise a pious fiction of the second century in the dogma of the Incarnation.

Irenæus, however, seeks to establish the miraculous birth of Jesus through another line of argument.² The genealogy contained in the Gospel according to Matthew traces the descent of Joseph through Jechoniah, thus denounced by the Prophet Jeremiah:—‘Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.’³ From this Irenæus infers that if Jesus were the son of Joseph, he would be the descendant of a disinherited man, and therefore not the Hebrew Messiah; and that the Holy Ghost had thus spoken respecting Jechoniah, that posterity might know that Jesus was not the son of Joseph! How analogous the paucity of wisdom by which men are governed and religions evolved!

Eminent apologists may, possibly, be prepared to show that Jeremiah, Matthew, and Irenæus are all equally right; but more sceptical inquirers may reasonably ask—Is not the erroneous interpretation of a single word, in a translation abounding with errors, more probable than the miraculous violation of a natural law, unattested by the shadow of a reasonable proof?

The origin and growth of this superstition is obviously traceable to Christian piety desirous of exalting

¹ *Against Heresies*, iii. 21.

² *Ibid.* iii. 21.

³ Jer. xxii. 30.

the Hebrew Messiah. It was humiliating to listen to sneering polytheists contemptuously comparing the lowly birth of Jesus with the divine origin of the Olympian gods; accordingly, aspiring believers, beginning to inquire whether so great a personage as their Lord and Master—said to have restored sight to the blind, and even life to the dead—could be merely mortal, turned from the teaching of his own lips to the fascinating pages of the Septuagint, where imaginative theologians, by adopting the modern system of allegorical interpretation, could find ample confirmation of their most fanciful theories.

As we have already seen, the fiction of virgin maternity was discovered in Isaiah; and, in harmony with the custom of his age, some zealous apostle of the Incarnation interpolated Matthew with this mythical episode unknown to Jesus, Peter, John, or Paul, and if faithful Nazarenes denounced the pious fraud, they were accused of mutilating the Gospel, as if any possible motive for denying the miraculous birth of Jesus could have existed in the minds of men, who had received the doctrine through the autogram of a Galilean Apostle!

If any doubt remains as to the mythical origin of the Incarnation, it is removed by the language of Justin, saint and martyr of the second century, addressing the Emperor Antoninus, the senate, and the entire Roman people, in apologetic defence of the doctrine:—‘And when we maintain the supernatural birth of the Word (Logos) the first-born of God, we say nothing different from your own belief in the sons of Jupiter, more especially Mercury, the interpreting Word (Logos) and

teacher of all men. Moreover, if Jesus be merely man, he is worthy, on account of his wisdom, to be called the Son of God; for all writers (Heathen) call God (Jupiter) the Father of gods and men.’

If these broad views were acceptable to Roman polytheists, they might assume a dubious aspect in the eyes of Christian converts. Justin accordingly makes the startling announcement that the wicked Dæmons, whom he supposes to have deceived the human race in the name of the Olympian gods, having heard the language of the Hebrew prophets concerning Christ, put forward many as the sons of Jupiter, with the malicious design of identifying Jesus with the marvellous tales of the poets respecting Bacchus, Perseus, Hercules, and Æsculapius! ¹

Justin proceeds to prove this theory by facts! He quotes the following words of Jacob as a prediction committed to writing by Moses:—‘There shall not fail a prince from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until he shall come for whom it is reserved; and he shall be the desire of the Gentiles, binding his foal to the vine, washing his robes in the blood of grapes.’ ²

Justin, at variance with Matthew, declares that this is the prophecy which was fulfilled when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on an ass; and explains that, ‘when the Dæmons heard this prediction, they said that Bacchus was the son of Jupiter. They also included the ass among his mysteries, and taught that, after being torn in pieces, he ascended into heaven. And because the prophecy did not name the Son of God, or mention whether he would remain on earth or ascend into

¹ 1 Apol. liv.

² Gen. xlix. 10, 11.

heaven riding on the foal; or whether it would be the foal of a horse or of an ass, the Dæmons declared that Bellerophon, a man born of man, ascended to heaven on the horse Pegasus. When the Dæmons also heard Isaiah say that he should be born of a virgin, and ascend into heaven, they pretended that reference was made to Perseus.¹

Justin records other demoniacal imitations of the career of Jesus, and finally consoles himself with the fact that none of the creatures of the Dæmons imitated the crucifixion because they did not understand the cross, although disclosed in a universal symbolism, as by a common pickaxe, the yards of a ship, the human form, and the nose on a man's face!² In consideration of these and many other similar *facts*, Justin assures emperor, senate, and people that if they don't believe, he, at least, has done his best to produce rational conviction. It is important for our readers to recollect that this credulous saint, who thus professes to read the thoughts and record the actions of imaginary Dæmons, is one of the pillars of orthodoxy, the first defender of the faith whose works have reached posterity, the first professed expounder of Messianic Divinity which, in the hands of the more advanced theologians of the fourth century, was yet to attain consubstantial equality with the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

Trinitarian Divinity was not, however, reached through the fiction of a supernatural birth, which even Judæo-Christians might have accepted without disturbing the national faith in monotheism. Whilst the prodigy of virgin maternity had been in process of evolution, a

¹ 1 Apol. liv.

² 1 Apol. lv.

more ambitious theory had possessed the minds of philosophic Gentiles, burning with pious zeal for the deification of Jesus through the Oriental system of divine emanations, Hellenised by Plato, and Judaised by Philo. These aspirations had, however, to pass through many phases of imaginative theosophy before the final admission of Jesus within the pale of orthodoxy, as the divine Logos (*θεῖος λόγος*) and only Son of God (*μονογενής*).

Philosophy approached Christianity with a system which materially facilitated the deification of Jesus. Plato had depicted the highest order of celestial beings as Emanations from the great First Cause. From these proceeded others in graduated sequence, until at length the spirit-world produced the souls of men, the pre-existent tenants of human forms on earth. The idea of spiritual incarnation being therefore quite a matter of course, it was only necessary to assume that the body of Jesus had been occupied, not by an ordinary soul, but by one of the brightest emanations of the Supreme Deity, in order to forthwith proclaim him a God.

Among primitive Christians the most enlightened believers were called Gnostics, from the Greek word *γνωστικός*, sagacious; but this title was restricted, at a later period, to those whose theosophic speculations had resulted in heterodox conclusions. The design of Gnosticism, when it had forsaken the simplicity of Galilee, was to engraft on Christianity the Platonic doctrine of divine emanations, to account for the origin of evil, and to devise a scheme for the redemption of human souls from the contagion of matter, and their restoration to communion with Divinity.

The more simple forms of Gnostic Christianity are represented by the system of Cerinthus, who taught that there is one supreme, self-existent God (*ἄυτόθεος*), from whom proceeded the divine *Æon* who created the world, and became the national God of the Hebrews. The administration of Jehovah, however, proved ineffectual for the spiritual regeneration of mankind; the Christ, a second *Æon* from the same divine Source, accordingly descended on earth, and became united with the man Jesus, at his baptism. This celestial Being, incapable of suffering, departed, according to Cerinthus, from the human Messiah before the crucifixion, but will again become united with him when he returns to establish the millennium at Jerusalem.

Basilides (A.D. 125), the apostle of a more advanced form of Gnosticism, depicts a supreme, unnameable God (*Θεὸς ἄνονόμαστος*), from whom proceeded Mind (*Nous*), from Mind, Reason (*Λόγος*), from Reason, Prudence (*φρόνησις*), from Prudence, Wisdom and Power (*Σοφία, Δύναμις*), and from these, Powers, Principalities, and Angels, in completion of the first kingdom of spirits (*οὐρανός*). Then came forth a descending series of spiritual kingdoms, until the lowest compartment of the spirit-world was reached, and its chief Angel or Archon (*ἄρχων*), coming in contact with Chaos, became the Creator of the earth and its inhabitants, and assumed the *rôle* of Jehovah, the Hebrew God.

The intentions of the Archon were good, but his power was inadequate to the task of saving spiritual beings from the corrupting influence of matter. *Nous*, the highest *Æon*, the primal Emanation from the su-

preme God, accordingly descended on earth as the Saviour of mankind, became united with the man Jesus, but, incapable of suffering, departed from his human companion before the crucifixion, and ascended to the kingdom of spirits, where he has secured free entrance for the souls of all men who have been purified from the contamination of matter.

The later system of the Gnostic Milton, Valentinus, as disclosed in the pages of Irenæus,¹ is a yet more elaborate version of the celestial drama. Valentinus depicts the supreme Deity, a pre-existent Æon (Bythus), as unbegotten, invisible, incomprehensible, self-existent, and remaining from everlasting in impassive serenity. With him was Ennœa (Idea), also called Charis (Grace)—the feminine element of Infinity.

Bythus, also called Propator (First Father), having decided on the evolution of all things, brought forth Nous (Mind), and Aletheia (Truth).

From Nous, also known as Monogenes (Only Begotten), and Aletheia proceeded Logos (Word) and Zoe (Life), who brought forth Anthropos (Man), and Ecclesia (Church).

These Æonic Emanations being designed to glorify the Father, Logos and Zoe produced ten, and Anthropos and Ecclesia twelve more Æons, thus completing the mystical number of thirty, constituting the PLEROMA, which combined with diversity of persons, the unity of substance attributed by later generations to the Trinity. The only new members of this Divine community, to whom we shall have occasion to refer, are Paracletus (Advocate), and Sophia (Wisdom).

¹ *Against Heresies*, Book I.

Nous or Monogenes, the primal Æon, is the only Being similar and equal to the Father, and capable of understanding his greatness. But Sophia, the latest emanation from Divinity, yielded to a passionate desire for knowledge of the ineffable First Cause, and thus introduced elements of confusion into the spirit-world, which resulted in her bringing forth an Æonic monster of amorphous substance. The sight of this shapeless mass of matter filled Sophia with grief and terror. The other Æons took compassion on her misery, and appealed to the Father for her restoration. Bythus then sent forth an Æon, Horos or Lytrotēs (the Redeemer), who restored her to her original condition in the Pleroma, and expelled the Æonic abortion from the spirit-world.

Order being thus restored in heaven, the Pleroma glorified the Father by producing a Being, on whom each conferred whatever quality was most excellent in himself; and this highly gifted Æon, Jesus, the star of the Pleroma, they named Saviour, Christ, and Logos.

Meanwhile, the amorphous Being called Achamoth, drifted in misery and despair through darkness and vacuity, until the Christ descended, bestowed on her form and figure, and then returned to the Pleroma. But, being still involved in darkness, Achamoth supplicated Phōs (Light), that is Christ, and he sent to her the Paraclete, whose action produced a combination of Matter and Spirit, from which the Demiurge, an emanation from Achamoth and the future God of the Hebrews, evolved this world and its inhabitants.

The spiritual Essence, emanating from the supreme First Cause, being thus contaminated by the contagion

of matter, the work of redemption is undertaken by the Divine Logos, the Christ who, in the fulness of time, descends on the man Jesus at his baptism, and becomes the Saviour of Humanity.

In consequence of the existence of many modifications of the system of Valentinus when Irenæus wrote his work on heresies, some confusion is apparent in the names of the Æons, but the obvious tendency is to unify Monogenes and Logos in Christ, the Saviour of the world.

The Æonic romance is virtually the personification of Plato's system of ideas. To many it may seem a page from the annals of fairyland; but the pious design of Valentinus and his disciples was to account for the existence of evil, apart from the design of the First Great Cause, and to vindicate His justice and beneficence through the future triumph of spirit over matter. How vast an influence these ideas exercised over primitive Christianity will become obvious when we again refer to the contents of the fourth Gospel.

These theories, which assigned a divine origin to the Mosaic dispensation, were not hostile to Judaism; but another form of Gnosticism, taught by Cerdo and his disciple Marcion, depicts Jehovah as an evil Deity, hostile to the beneficent God (*Θεὸς ἀγαθός*), who was unknown to man until revealed through the advent of the Christ.

Marcion, finding the objectionable character and actions of Jehovah, as recorded in the Pentateuch, confirmed by his own candid admission, through Isaiah,¹ that he is the Author of Evil, accepted him as the

¹ Chap. xlv. 7.

Demiurge or Creator of this world, and the national God of the Hebrews ; but he also inferred the necessary existence of a second Deity whose character harmonised with the teaching of Jesus, and who had sent down his Christ from heaven to redeem the souls of men from the dominion of the Demiurge, and restore them to communion with the hitherto unknown God.

As a fanciful solution of the incomprehensible union of the human and divine in Jesus, Marcion adopted the startling theory that he had never been born, but appeared in Galilee in full maturity as the phantom form assumed by the Christ in fulfilment of his mission among men—an idea originating in pious horror of a divine Being suffering the ignominy of the cross.

The origin of all this fantastic theosophy is obvious. Gentile Christians, with the damaging evidence of the Septuagint in their hands, could not accept the Hebrew God as the supreme Deity idealised by philosophy ; some, therefore, assigned to him a lower grade in divinity, whilst others thought that they saw in him a principle of evil. They could not accept the simple Humanity of the Son of Man ; they therefore bestowed on him an imaginative Divinity, utterly foreign to his personal pretensions. They could not reconcile divinity with suffering, so they changed the form of the Son of Man into the phantom of the Son of God, and sustained all these theories by arbitrary interpretation of Scripture.

During the evolution of the more advanced forms of Gnosticism, what progress had been made with the constructive Divinity of Jesus within the pale of orthodoxy ? The Alexandrine manuscript of the Scriptures, known as Codex A, now in the British Museum, contains two

epistles attributed to the pen of Clement, the companion of Paul.¹ The first, probably dating from the close of the first century, adds nothing to the Christology of the Pauline epistles. The author makes no nearer approach to the doctrine of the Trinity than may be found in the words:—‘Have we not one God and one Christ? Is there not one spirit of grace poured out upon us?’—a form of teaching which had not yet departed from primitive Unitarianism.

Diversity of style in the second epistle discloses a different authorship, and consequent uncertainty of date. Its contents throw no further light on the impending deification of Jesus than may be inferred from the opening passage:—‘Brethren, it is desirable that you should think of Christ as of God . . . for, if we think little of him, we can only hope to obtain little from him.’ If Jesus had ever taught mankind that he was God, this argument would have been not only superfluous, but unintelligible; the anonymous author, therefore, unconsciously discloses the true source of Messianic Divinity in human selfishness, hoping to receive more from the Son of God than from the Son of Man.

We have already referred in this work to the modern discovery of the primitive Syriac version of the epistles of Ignatius to Polycarp, to the Ephesians, and to the Romans, disclosing the extent to which the two Greek recensions have been interpolated, in harmony with the progressive development of dogmatic theology.

The Syriac version shows no departure from the simplicity of one God and one Saviour, Jesus Christ.

¹ Phil. iv. 3.

The author, in addressing Polycarp, says :—‘ Consider the times. Look for him who is above the times, him who has no times, him who is unseen, him who for our sakes became visible, him who is impalpable, him who is insensible to suffering, him who suffered for our sakes, him who endured all things for our sakes.’

The author obviously holds some indefinite idea of the Messiah as a supernatural being ; but let us contrast his language with the parallel passage in the more copiously interpolated Greek recension—‘ Look for Christ, the Son of God, who was before time, yet manifest in time ; who was naturally invisible, yet seen in the flesh ; who, as being without a body was impalpable to the touch, and yet, for our sakes, became what might be touched and handled in the body ; who was incapable of suffering as God, but became sensible to suffering for our sakes as man ; and who endured all things for our sakes.’¹

If primitive documents, dating from the close of the first century, were thus tampered with to establish the definite Divinity of Jesus, can we refuse to recognise in his deification, as parasitic a growth as the Immaculate Conception or the Eucharistic mystery, of a yet more advanced form of ecclesiastical Christianity ?

In the light of modern criticism the interpolators of Ignatius were literary forgers, who wilfully perverted primitive Christianity ; but, judged according to the lights of their own age, they were simply zealous Christians, whose ardent piety accepted the more advanced theology of their own times, as fresh revelations from the mysterious Paraclete. They, therefore,

¹ Chap. iii.

hastened to engraft these saving doctrines on earlier confessions of the Faith, that apostolic names might win adherence to new dogmas, now deemed indispensable to the salvation of souls.

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who suffered martyrdom about A.D. 167 in the eighty-sixth year of his age, wrote an epistle to the Philippians, which, by some most happy accident, escaped the notice of pious interpolators, and has reached posterity in its apparently primitive form. Irenæus, writing at the close of the second century, states that, when quite a youth, he himself had seen the venerable Bishop of Smyrna, 'who had been instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Jesus.'¹ Irenæus adds, 'Polycarp had always taught the doctrines learned from Apostles, and handed down by the Church as the only true faith. There is also a most conclusive epistle addressed by Polycarp to the Philippians, from which those who wish, and are anxious for salvation, may learn the nature of his faith, and the preaching of the truth.'

We are thus in possession of an epistle written about the middle of the second century in harmony with apostolic teaching authenticated by the orthodox Church. What therefore do we learn from its priceless pages? The opening lines might well have been a salutation from the pen of Paul:—'Polycarp and the presbyters associated with him, to the Church of God at Philippi; mercy and peace from God Almighty, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, be multiplied unto you.' The author then follows the example of the Preacher on the Mount, by dwelling on the obligations

¹ *Against Heresies*, Book III. chap. iii.

of morality as the most important element in the Gospel; and teaches no more advanced theology than faith in God, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered death for the sins of mankind, was raised from the grave by his heavenly Father, and glorified by a throne on his right hand, whence he will again return as the judge of the living and the dead. The saintly bishop and future martyr thus prays for the Philippian Church—‘May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ himself, who is the Son of God, and our eternal High Priest, sustain you in faith, truth, and meekness, gentleness, patience, fortitude, forbearance, and purity. And may he grant you a place and portion among his saints, and to us also, and all that are under heaven who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in his Father, who raised him from the dead.’¹ Thus is the kingdom of heaven again thrown open to all who hold the simple creed of faith in God and his Messiah; and this truly Galilean epistle closes not with a benediction in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but in the simple sentence—‘Grace and safety be with you all in the Lord Jesus Christ.’

We, however, learn more of the orthodox creed of the middle of the second century through what is absent from, than from what is present in, this most important epistle. Polycarp quotes from Matthew, Luke, Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John, but makes no reference to the supernatural birth of Jesus, his transformation into the Divine Logos, or his absorption within the Triune Godhead, the third member of which is not even named

¹ *Polycarp to the Philippians*, xii.

in the epistle. The inference is therefore inevitable that the mythical chapters and Trinitarian formula were absent from the primitive versions of Matthew and Luke in the hands of the bishop; and that he had never heard of, or absolutely rejected, the heretical gospel published in the name of the apostle John; for how otherwise could he have preached salvation through the simple creed of his Epistle to the Philippians?

Thus, independent lines of evidence converge at a point which establishes the orthodoxy of Unitarianism in the second century. We have already seen that Hegesippus, visiting Rome about A.D. 160, after his tour of inspection among the Christian churches, records catholicity of faith among the bishops, harmonising with 'the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord'—a creed which most assuredly excluded the deification of Jesus through Platonic or Trinitarian mysticism; and now we hold an epistle, written by one of the bishops contemporary with Hegesippus, and clearly attesting the truth of his statements.

The Epistle of Barnabas, accepted by Clement of Alexandria and Origen as the work of an apostle, becomes, in the light of modern criticism, an apocryphal book of the second century from the pen of an unknown author, seeking to confer 'perfect knowledge' on his readers through fanciful interpretations of erroneous quotations from Hebrew Scripture, mingled with extracts from works as apocryphal as his own. When, therefore, under the impression that he is inspired with knowledge of sacred mysteries, he tells us that, when God said, 'Let us make man in our image,' He

addressed the pre-existent Messiah, we necessarily seek some more reliable exponent of primitive Christology.

The Pastor of Hermas, accepted by Clement of Alexandria and Irenæus as the divinely-inspired work of the Apostolic Hermas named in the Epistle to the Romans, is the Pilgrim's Progress of some primitive Bunyan of the second century, accepting, as miraculous visions, the fantastic creations of his own imagination. And as his Christology depicts the Son of God as the Holy Spirit incarnate in the man Jesus,¹ modern Trinitarians necessarily decline to canonise his work, although sustained by the same ancient authorities who authenticated the present books of the New Testament.

Passing from the Apostolic to the Ante-Nicene Fathers, to whom we owe the evolution of the Trinitarian mystery, we first turn to Justin, who was born in Palestine about A.D. 114, and suffered martyrdom in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, about A.D. 165. He commenced life as an ardent student of philosophy, first as the pupil of a Stoic, then of a Pythagorean, and finally of an eminent professor of Platonism, whose lessons filled him with admiration of the divine wisdom disclosed in the system of its illustrious founder.

Whilst indulging philosophic flights in contemplative solitude, Justin was one day addressed by a venerable stranger, through whose conversation his attention was directed to Christianity, with the ultimate result of his conversion. But so ignorant was his anonymous mentor of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, that he recommended no surer guides to the knowledge of Christ than the ancient Hebrew prophets. Instead, therefore, of con-

¹ Similitude V. chap. vi.

sulting the orthodox bishops, with whom his contemporary Hegesippus had conversed, Justin mingled, in strange confusion, his own fanciful interpretations of the Septuagint with the foregone conclusions of Platonism, and became an independent preacher, at Rome, of doctrines which were *then* external to the creed of Orthodoxy.

The extant works of Justin, generally accepted as authentic, are two Apologies for Christianity, and the Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew. Justin is our first Christian author who assigns definite Divinity to Jesus. He anticipates Irenæus in accepting the supernatural birth through the verbal infallibility of the Septuagint, quoting, in proof of the miracle, not merely the famous passage supposed to establish the prodigy of virgin maternity, but the following words from the Psalmist:—‘In the beauties of thy holiness have I begotten thee from the womb, before the morning star’—thus translated in the Anglican version:—‘In the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning, thou hast the dew of thy youth.’ And in the margin:—‘In the beauties of holiness, more than the womb of the morning, thou shalt have the dew of thy youth.’¹ This passage, interpreted through the *inspired* translation in his hands, Justin accepts as a prediction of the miraculous birth and proof positive of the pre-existence of Jesus.²

In his controversy with Trypho Justin accuses the Jews of mutilating the Scriptures, and in proof of his statement quotes from Esdras:—‘If you will not believe him, and will not attend to his words, you shall be a laughing-stock to the nations’—but this passage has no

¹ Ps. cx. 3.

² Dialogue with Trypho lxiii.

existence in any modern version. Again, as a prophecy of the crucifixion, he quotes from Psalm xcvi. :—‘Say among the nations that the Lord reigneth *from the wood.*’ The words in italics, accepted by Justin as an inspired prediction of the death of the Messiah, and consequent proof of Christianity, are an interpolation, through which we learn how fictitious were the materials at the disposal of Justin for the evolution of his Christology.

Justin, unwilling to part with his favourite Platonism, adopts the impossible theory that the Athenian philosopher borrowed his system from Moses.¹ Thus, in the *Timæus*, Plato speaks of the soul of the world, as impressed on the universe in the form of a *χίασμα*, or letter *χ*. ‘This,’ says Justin, ‘is borrowed from Moses; for when the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness, the prophet, inspired by God, formed a brazen cross, by looking on which the sufferers were healed. Plato reading these things, and not clearly understanding the figure of the cross, said that the Power next to the first God was placed cross-wise in the universe. And he speaks of a third (Divinity) because he read of Moses saying :—‘The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ Thus, the first of the Ante-Nicene Fathers discloses the Platonic source of Trinitarianism, as yet but embryonic in constructive Christianity.

Philo, in fusing Platonic with Hebrew theosophy, assumes that the Logos is the God of Israel; but Justin teaches that the Mosaic Jehovah, the Platonic Logos, and the Incarnate Christ, are personally identical, as

¹ 1 Apology lx.

the secondary God or angel, who, as the Minister of the Supreme Deity, came down to inspect the tower of Babel, shut up Noah in the ark, appeared to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, and finally assumed the form of Jesus of Nazareth, in the great drama of Galilee.¹

Justin also personifies the Word and Wisdom of Hebrew Scripture as the Christ, and detects, in the metaphorical flights of David and Solomon, the pre-existence and divinity of the Son of Man.

The views of Justin respecting the Holy Spirit are too indefinite to identify his teaching with the later doctrine of the Trinity. His conclusions, in fact, establish the existence of two distinct gods, who preserve unity in divine administration, through the implicit obedience of the inferior Deity. Jesus, according to Justin, may be the Son, Wisdom, the Word, the Logos, the Lord, and even God, but he is also the Angel, ministering to the will of the Supreme Deity from whom he derives existence, power, and divinity, and could not therefore have claimed the divine equality, assigned to him in the Trinitarian mystery of later generations.

The deification of Jesus was, however, a merely speculative problem in the mind of Justin, evolved through arbitrary and fanciful interpretation of ambiguous passages in the Septuagint; for, in his controversy with the Hebrew, Trypho, he says:—‘There are some of our community who admit that Jesus is Christ, but maintain he is a man born of man. Now though I should fail to prove his pre-existence as the Son of God, it will be more correct to say that I am mistaken in this

¹ Dialogue with Trypho cxxvii.

respect, than to deny that he is the Christ should he appear to be a man of men (*ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων*), and to have become Christ by election.’¹

If some—which may be more correctly understood most—Christians of the age of Justin accepted the simple Humanity of Jesus, this was assuredly the primitive faith of Galilee; for how could men, who had once received, forget or deny the Divinity of the Messiah; and if the Galilean apostles had ever taught that Jesus was divine, in any other sense than man inspired by God, would not this marvellous revelation have been so clearly disclosed in the Logia of Matthew, as to spare philosophic piety the task of constructive divinity? Or, if the Godhead of Jesus had ever been an apostolic tradition, would not Justin have appealed to episcopal authority, rather than to Platonic Judaism, in confirmation of his theosophy? No fact stands out more prominently in the works of Justin than that he identified the Hebrew Messiah with the divine Logos of the Alexandrine school, in absolute independence of the fourth Gospel, the existence of which was unknown to him, unless we assume that he rejected its authority. In confirmation of these conclusions, we find Justin following Philo in giving to the Logos the title of Protogonos (*Πρωτόγονος*, first-begotten), whereas Pseudo-John, as shown in the following chapter, borrows the title of Monogenes direct from the Valentinians.

Justin, although now a canonised saint, was in fact a Gnostic heretic in the second century, forming his convictions external to the school of Galilee, but posthumously enrolled among the orthodox of the fourth

¹ Chap. xlviii.

century, when his works had been utilised in finally establishing the Divinity of Jesus.

Justin is followed by Athenagoras, an Athenian philosopher who became a convert to Christianity, and addressed an eloquent appeal to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (about A.D. 176) in defence of the morality and religion of his fellow-Christians. He sustains the moral purity of the Gospel by citing Matthew; but his theology is simply Platonism engrafted on Christianity through the adoption of Jesus of Nazareth as the divine Logos.

CHAPTER V

THE GNOSTIC GOSPEL—THE DEIFICATION OF JESUS.

WHILST philosophers were vainly striving to reason on the incomprehensible, a contemporary of Justin conceived the bold design of publishing, in the name of an apostle, that famous fourth Gospel through which Jesus has been deified within the pale of orthodoxy. Antecedent constructors of Messianic divinity had courted failure and oblivion, by submitting their doctrines to the test of controversy; but the more sagacious author of the Gospel attributed to John, aware that he who would win theological success must speak as a voice from heaven, adopted the pious fraud of writing in the name of a Galilean apostle, and thus escaped companionship with contemporary heretics.

To establish the Divinity of Jesus, this unknown evangelist adopted a dogmatic formula—‘In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was Divine. The same was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him; and without him nothing came into existence. That which hath been made in him was Zoe (Life), and Zoe was the Phōs (Light) of men, and Phōs shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not . . . And the Logos became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of Charis (Grace) and Aletheia (Truth). And we beheld

his glory, glory as of Monogenes (the Only-Begotten) from the Father.’¹

Further on Jesus is called Soter (Saviour) of the world,² and he promises to send Paracletus (Advocate), who proceedeth from the Father, and shall bear witness of Christ.³

Thus, Pseudo-John adapts the theosophy of Valentinus to the Gospel of Jesus.⁴ Condensing the Pleroma, he unifies Christ in Monogenes, Logos, Phōs, and Soter, who, through Æonic relationship with Charis and Aletheia, is full of grace and truth. Zoe proceeded from the Logos; ‘therefore that which hath been made in him was life.’ The Christ of Valentinus descended from the Pleroma as Phōs in the midst of darkness, and was incomprehensible to the chaotic substance from which man was formed; the darkness, therefore, apprehended him not. He again returned to the Father, and sent forth Paracletus to complete the work he had left unfinished. What, therefore, is the exordium of John but an adaptation of the system of Valentinus to the Gospel of the Kingdom, confirmed by the alleged promise of Jesus to send the Paraclete to finish the work of enlightenment begun by himself on earth?

Pseudo-John was, therefore, a pious Gnostic who, in his zeal for the deification of the Messiah, modified the Pleroma of Valentinus in the name of an apostle, and thus engrafted Gnosticism on the simplicity of the Gospel, under the personal illusion that the Paraclete had reproduced in him the veritable teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵ Can we, therefore, experience any sur

¹ John i. 1-5, 14.

² John iv. 42.

³ John xv. 26.

⁴ See p. 335.

⁵ John xiv. 26.

prise on learning from Irenæus that the disciples of Valentinus confidently appealed to the exordium of John as the apostolic attestation of their doctrines?¹

Although orthodox theologians contend that traces of the fourth gospel are found at an earlier period, the work had no historical existence until the last quarter of the second century; and, as Valentinus flourished A.D. 140–160, the weight of evidence obviously assigns the authorship of the Æonic fiction to the earlier theologian, more especially as the language of Pseudo-John is absolutely irreconcilable with the Logia of Matthew. But, if modern orthodoxy prefers to see, in the fourth Evangelist, the plagiarist of Philonism, borrowing Monogenes or Logos direct from Alexandrine theosophy, this Judæo-Platonic source of revelation is equally irreconcilable with the claims of an inspired Evangelist.

Even the most advanced believers in the Deity of Jesus, in the age of Pseudo-John, had not yet invested him with more than subordinate Divinity. The Gnostic Evangelist, therefore, teaches that the Father is the only true God (ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς Θεός), and the Son whom he hath sent, merely θεός—a Divine personage, the faithful servant of the Supreme Deity. The words—‘I and my Father are one’—cannot annul the declarations of Jesus, that he owes life, authority, and power to the Father, and came down from heaven, not to accomplish his own, but the will of him who sent him. And, in fact, Christians of even the third century understood the text—‘I and my Father are one’—as implying nothing more than unity of disposition. Origen says:

¹ *Against Heresies*, Book I. chap. 8.

‘Consider that text—“all who believed were of one heart and one soul,” and then you will understand this—“I and the Father are one.”’¹ Again, when Jesus was accused of blasphemy for saying—‘I and the Father are one’—he quoted the words of the Psalmist—‘I said ye are Gods,’—and asked, ‘If he called them Gods, unto whom the word of God came, say ye of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?’² The pretensions of Jesus, in the opinion of the Gnostic Evangelist, fall therefore infinitely short of equality with the Father.

Can we trace Johannine Gnosticism in other passages of New Testament Scripture? In the Epistle to the Colossians we read—‘Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him were all things created in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For the entire PLEROMA was pleased to dwell in him’ (ὅτι ἐνα ὑτῶ ἐυδόκησε πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι).³

This passage is quite as Gnostic as the exordium of Pseudo-John. In the ‘First-born of all creation’ we have the Monogenes of Valentinus, from whom proceeded the celestial Æons, and through whom all things came into existence. In ‘dominions, principalities, and

¹ *Against Celsus*, viii. 12.

² John x. 35, 36.

³ Col. i.

powers,' we find the terminology of Basilides for Æonic Emanations; and, when the author or interpolator of the Epistle to the Colossians affirms that the entire Pleroma dwelt in Jesus, he simply reproduces the Valentinian fiction that each member of the Æonic group had bestowed his highest attribute on Christ. What, therefore, means the language of the Authorised Version—'For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell'?

The primary meaning of the word Pleroma is fulness or completeness; and in this sense the term was adopted by Valentinus and his disciples as the title of the Æonic group completing the number of thirty divine Emanations. But all this had been, for centuries, forgotten when the Reformers translated Scripture in harmony with the foregone conclusions of contemporary theology; and in the arbitrary introduction of the Father, they simply followed in the footsteps of primitive compilers of Scripture, who introduced into the text what, in their opinion, *ought* to have been found there.

We have named the interpolation as Colossians i. 15–19. But, as the twelfth and thirteenth verses reproduce the Valentinian terminology of 'light and darkness,' and as the twentieth verse is involved both in the Greek and English versions, the interpolation probably embraces the entire passage from the twelfth to the twenty-second verse.

Valentinian theosophy again appears in Colossians ii. 9—ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς—which we translate, 'For in him the entire Pleroma of Divinity wholly dwelleth.' This Gnostic phraseology is changed in the Epistle to the Ephesians

iii. 19, into *πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ Θεοῦ*—‘the entire Pleroma of God.’

The Greek word *αἰών* (Æon), signifying an age, a generation, or time everlasting, having been adopted by Valentinus as the title of the divine Emanations, the following Gnostic passage has been misinterpreted by English translators:—*τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν*—thus rendered in the A.V., ‘Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations’ (Col. i. 26). We, however, translate—‘The mystery concealed from the Æons and from their offspring.’ And thus, through the discovery of the verbal fossils of Gnosticism, we learn that the Pauline epistles, which invest the Son of Man with a mysterious Divinity unknown to the School of Galilee, are interpolated versions of the second century, or the actual works of the Gnostic writers of the same era, who borrowed the name of an apostle to authenticate the newly discovered Divinity of the Hebrew Messiah. But this question being once raised, it is no longer dependent on merely verbal criticism; for no knowledge of ancient languages is necessary to determine that the Gospel of Jesus contains no mystery, and that the concealment of the alleged mystery from ‘ages and from generations,’ conveys no intelligible meaning.

So universal was the taint of Gnosticism in the second century, that even the Gospel of Matthew could not escape infection. What is the alleged descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism but a Gnostic fiction? And in the following words:—‘No one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the

Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him,'¹ we have an obvious reproduction of the theosophy of Valentinus, who affirmed that the Father is invisible and incomprehensible to all but Monogenes, the Only-Begotten.

Reverting to our discourse on the fourth Gospel, we find that its author, having proclaimed the Logos, through his Æonic exordium, to Christians of the second century familiar with the Gnostic system, proceeds to construct the ideal career of a supernatural Being on earth, in apparent unconsciousness that no explanation has been given to the contemporaries of Jesus, of the pre-existent divinity of a man, whom they can have only known as the son of Galilean peasants. He accordingly transforms the Messiah into an incomprehensible mystic, speaking in terms so vague of his superhuman origin and divine mission, as to be quite unintelligible to Jews, expectant of a merely human Messiah.

Thus Jesus says, 'If a man keep my word, he shall never see death.' The Jews inquire, 'Art thou greater than Abraham and the Prophets who are dead?' Jesus answers, 'Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.' 'Thou art not yet fifty years old,' exclaim the Jews, 'and hast thou seen Abraham?' Jesus answers, 'Before Abraham was, I AM.'² Is it through insoluble enigmas that the Hebrew Messiah sought to win his countrymen for the Kingdom of Heaven? Can any candid and impartial student of the Logia of Matthew believe that the Son of Man ever claimed the title of Jehovah?

Again, the Gnostic Evangelist depicts Jesus saying,

¹ Matt. xi. 27.

² John viii.

‘I am the Door of the sheep; all that came before me are thieves and robbers.’ In what sense was a Hebrew audience to understand this sweeping denunciation of Moses and the Prophets?

‘Jesus said to those Jews which had believed on him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered, We be Abraham’s seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?’ Then ensues an acrimonious discussion, in which the Gnostic Jesus applies to his recent converts the epithet of ‘children of the devil!’

These are but a few of many instances through which Pseudo-John robs Jesus of the dignity of Humanity to invest him with the glamour of Divinity. Is not the time come for all who reverence the memory of the Preacher on the Mount to vindicate his character by final disavowal of the Gnostic Evangelist?

The Gnostic source of the fourth Gospel is, furthermore, disclosed in its careful exclusion of all which would have interfered with the theory of Divinity. The supernatural birth is irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Logos, and therefore finds no place in its pages. Monogenes, descending from heaven as the Saviour of the world, could not have been begotten by the Holy Spirit, tempted by Satan, or consoled by Moses and Elias; nor could he have suffered mental agony before or during the crucifixion. These evangelical episodes are, therefore, rejected by Pseudo-John; and Monogenes, in harmony with the Gnostic theory of an impassible Saviour, uncomplainingly fulfils the prophetic

programme of Calvary, exclaims 'I thirst' to fulfil the Scriptures, announces all 'is finished,' and submits to death, as the voluntary action of a God.

We have thus treated the fourth Gospel as the work of an individual author; but as it contains admitted interpolations, and the final chapter, supposed to attest a Johannine origin, discloses, in diversity of style, a later appendix, the Gnostic passages may also have been engrafted on a pre-existent work, which formed some unknown author's ideal of the Hebrew Messiah.

How, then, was the Gnostic Gospel eventually accepted by the Christian Church? It is first heard of through Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, writing about A.D. 185, who states that John, the disciple of the Lord, published a Gospel when resident at Ephesus in Asia. The Bishop, however, supplies no evidence of date or authorship, and accounts for the existence of the fourth Gospel in the following manner:—'It is impossible that the Gospels can be more or less than they are. For, as there are four zones in the world which we inhabit, and four principal winds, while the Church is spread abroad throughout the earth, and the pillar and basis of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life, it is right that she should have four pillars, exhaling immortality on every side, and bestowing renewed vitality on men. From which fact it follows that the Word has given us four versions of the Gospel, united by one spirit.'

The man who reasons thus is, obviously, trying to believe in Pseudo-John. He participates in the desire of his age for the deification of the Son of Man, and willingly accepts its dogmatic affirmation when published in the name of an apostle. He is aware that the

Valentinians appeal to the new Gospel in attestation of the Æonic Procession from the Father, and yet is induced to accept the Johannine modification of their system as Divine revelation.

Credulity, sustained by fallacies and unattested facts, however, reigns supreme in the mind of Irenæus. Thus he assumes that to become an accomplished teacher of mankind, it is necessary to attain, at least, fifty years of age, and thence infers that Jesus was an old man when crucified, 'as proved by the Gospel, and all the elders who obtained this information from John and the other Apostles.'¹ Now, how are these views attested by the Gospel? Irenæus answers by the question addressed to Jesus by the Jews, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' from which he infers that Jesus was then close on the age of fifty. If, therefore, we accept these statements of Irenæus, we convict the Gospels of error; if we reject them, what is the value of his evidence as to the authorship of the Gnostic evangelist?

In accepting the Gnostic Gospel, however, Irenæus only attributes a secondary Divinity to Jesus. He states that 'all the gospels declare that there is one God proclaimed by Moses and the Prophets; and one Christ, the Son of God. He addresses the Deity as the supreme and only true God; and as he knew nothing of the future dogma of Trinity in unity, his creed was practically Monotheistic whilst accepting Jesus as divine.

Clement of Alexandria, a heathen philosopher who, on his conversion to Christianity, became head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, towards the close of

¹ *Against Heresies*, Book II. chap. xxii.

the second century, adopts the Gnostic Gospel as the autogram of the Apostle John, and identifies the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth. But, as he also cites Clement of Rome and Barnabas as apostles, and calls the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom divine, his acceptance of Pseudo-John fails to authenticate its apostolic authorship.

The Æonic deification of Jesus received its most important development at the beginning of the third century, through the eloquent advocacy of Tertullian, a Punic presbyter, who, believing himself inspired by the Paraclete, speaks with absolute authority on all subjects, human or divine, and discloses as intimate an acquaintance with the substance, attributes, and actions of the Deity, as if he had studied the phenomena of Divinity, and the designs of Providence, throughout countless ages.

Tertullian accepts the Gnostic Gospel as apostolic, with the same facility of belief which marks his adoption of the Book of Enoch as antediluvian. He admits the analogy between the Æonic Emanations of Valentinus and the Divine Logos of John; and, as the evangelist supplies no explanation of the startling coincidence, Tertullian proceeds to prove the doctrine by fanciful adaptations of Hebrew Scripture, interpreted through the Septuagint.

The author of the thirty-third Psalm glorifies the God of Israel by attributing creation to his verbal decree:—‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth’—language meaning nothing more than the utterance of the Deity, as when he is depicted saying,

‘Let there be light, and there was light.’ But in the Septuagint ‘word’ is rendered by Logos, and Tertullian forthwith personifies this Verbal Phantom as the Logos of the fourth Gospel, through whom all things were made.

This conclusion is sustained by even greater ingenuity in verbal adaptation. In the Authorised Version of the forty-fifth Psalm we read :—‘My heart is inditing of a good matter,’ referring simply to the subject of the ode. But, as in the Septuagint, matter is rendered by Logos, Tertullian reads, ‘My heart hath emitted my most excellent Word,’ and declares that this is the language of the Deity, announcing the emission of the Logos. How marvellous the credulity which thus discovers in the Hebrew bard the Æonic Phantom of a later age! ¹

This psalm was composed centuries before Plato conceived the ideal Logos proceeding from the great First Cause, and was translated into Greek long after the death of Plato; and yet Tertullian assumes, through the arbitrary interpretation of a single word, that the Hebrew prophet anticipated the fanciful theology of the Athenian philosopher, and that the Athenian philosopher forestalled the revealed theology of an inspired apostle!

Tertullian supplements the doctrine of the Logos by affirming that Wisdom, personified in the Book of Proverbs, is identical with the Word, who, therefore, thus addresses the Deity :—‘At the first, the Lord created me, as the beginning of his ways, with a view to his own works, before he made the earth, before the

¹ *Against Marcion*, Book II. chap. iv.

mountains were settled; even before the hills was I brought forth.'¹

Acceptance of the Logos in those primitive days, before ecclesiastical authority had proclaimed the Trinity as an incomprehensible mystery, involved the complication of reconciling the existence of two Deities with the principle of Monotheism. Tertullian could devise no means of sustaining the unity of the God-head, but by admitting the inferiority and subjection of the Logos to the Supreme God. The Word is therefore the Hebrew Jehovah, who, as the visible and active agent of the Almighty Invisible God, *rehearsed* the future rôle of the Son of Man on earth, through personal intercourse with Adam, Abraham, and Moses, and through the performance of numerous other duties derogatory to the majesty, and irreconcilable with the attributes, of Him whom no man hath seen or can see. Tertullian is, in fact, indignant at the mere thought of depicting the Most High, walking in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening, shutting up Noah in the ark, partaking of food with Abraham, and calling to Moses out of the burning bush. And he explains that imperfections in Divinity, such as repenting of the creation of Man, tempting Abraham, as if ignorant of his nature, and being offended and reconciled with men, although unworthy of the Father, are suitable enough for the Son, made lower than the angels, and predestined to the sufferings and death of Humanity.²

From these scriptural episodes Tertullian infers the existence of two Deities, the Visible and the Invisible,

¹ *Against Praxean*, chap. vi. See Prov. viii. 22-25.

² *Against Marcion*, Book II. 27; and *Against Praxean*, chap. xvi.

and adds, 'It was the Son who was always seen, and who always conversed with men; and the Son who has always acted by the authority and will of the Father; for 'the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing.' Again: 'The Father is the whole substance, and the Son a derivative part of the whole, as he himself admits, 'My Father is greater than I.' In the Psalms his inferiority is defined as 'a little lower than the angels.' Thus the Father, being greater, is distinct from the Son, as he who begets is one, and he who is begotten is another; and he also who sends is one, and he who is sent is another. Furthermore, is not distinct personality announced in the separate name of Father and Son.¹ It is important to observe that, according to Tertullian, the inferiority indicated affected the divine status of the Logos from the beginning of his existence, and was not subsequently acquired through the Incarnation, as dogmatically asserted by Pseudo-Athanasius in the formula—'equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.'

All doubt as to the secondary Divinity attributed to the Logos in the theosophy of Tertullian is set at rest by his affirming the nativity of the Word as a Divine emanation, when God said, 'Let there be light.'² A Deity who was thus only four thousand years old—about the age of the Egyptian pyramids—when Tertullian wrote, stands in such humble relationship with Infinite Divinity, that equality with the Father was still a question of remote futurity.

Notwithstanding the clearness with which Tertullian

¹ *Against Praxeas*, chap. ix.

² *Ibid.* chap. vii.

teaches Ditheism, he still clings to the illusion that the principle of Monotheism may be sustained by affirming that the Son, as a Divine emanation, is of the same substance as the Father, and absolutely subservient to His will. 'As the Divine monarchy,' says Tertullian, 'is administered by angelic legions, and is yet the dominion of One, why should God be thought to sustain division in the Son and the Holy Spirit, who hold the second and third places, and are so closely united with the Father in His substance, when he incurs no such division in the multitude of angels, who are members of His substance, His dearest children (Pignora), and the instruments of His power?'¹ In the opinion of Tertullian, therefore, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and Angels are all consubstantial; in other words, he adopts the Æonic theory of Valentinus.

Prior to the time of this famous theologian, primitive views of the Holy Spirit were vague and indefinite; and the conception of a distinct personality seems to have originated in the reference to the Paraclete contained in the Gnostic Gospel. Tertullian is occasionally incoherent on the subject, but eventually undertakes to prove the individuality of the Spirit, through the arbitrary interpretation of isolated passages in the Septuagint. Thus, he quotes Isaiah xlv. 14, 15: 'The Sabeans, men of stature, shall go over to Thee, and they shall come after Thee in fetters; and they shall worship Thee, because God is in Thee; for Thou art our God, although we knew it not; Thou art the God of Israel.' Tertullian thence infers that the statement 'God is in Thee, and Thou art God,' specifies two who are God, namely Christ

¹ *Against Praxean*, chap. iii.

and the Holy Spirit.¹ By turning to this passage in the Authorised Version, our readers can form their own judgment of the strange materials from which the personality of the Spirit was evolved.

Again, Tertullian cites the passage:—‘The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool;’² and infers that this is the Holy Spirit speaking as a third person to the Father respecting the Son. ‘In these citations,’ he adds, ‘distinction of persons in the Trinity is clearly defined: for there is the Spirit who speaks, and the Father to whom he speaks, and the Son of whom he speaks.’³

Thus, nearly two hundred years after the death of Jesus, Tertullian discovers a constructive Trinity, of which neither the Son of Man nor his Apostles had ever heard, calls it a divine Economy (*οἰκονομία*), and betrays its purely ideal origin in the following candid admission: ‘The simple—not to call them foolish and uneducated—who are always the majority of believers, are shocked by the Economy, because their rule of faith withdraws them from polytheism to the one only true God, not comprehending that He must be accepted with His own *οἰκονομία* (Economy). The numerical distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the unity; but the unity which evolves the Trinity out of itself is sustained not destroyed by it. *They are constantly accusing us of preaching two Gods and three Gods*, whilst they assume the credit of being worshippers of the one God; as if the unity with irrational conclusions did not produce heresy, and the Trinity reasonably considered constitute the truth.’⁴ Is it possible to read

¹ *Against Praxean*, chap. xiii.

² Psalm cx. 1.

³ *Against Praxean*, chap. xi.

⁴ *Against Praxean*, chap. iii.

these words, and avoid the inevitable conclusion that, at the close of the second century, the orthodox faith, held by the majority of Christians, was Unitarianism ?

Tertullian was obviously, in his own generation, a Gnostic heretic, who effected an imaginative fusion between Æonism and the Gospel. But when, in the fourth century, Trinitarianism had been transformed into Orthodoxy by the magic of a conciliar decree, supported by the temporal power of a Roman emperor, Tertullian became a very pillar of the Church, and the votaries of the fashionable creed adopted the obvious fiction that his Unitarian contemporaries—not Tertullian himself—were the heretics of the second century. Were these views supported by any reasonable evidence ?

Eusebius, who was present at the Council of Nicæa, and therefore familiar with all which could be advanced in favour of Trinitarianism, admits that the Christians of the second century who believed in Christ as a mere man, maintained that theirs was the primitive faith of the Apostles, preserved in the Church until the time of Zephyrinus, fourteenth bishop of Rome, when the truth was corrupted.¹ In refutation of these statements, Eusebius appeals to the Holy Scriptures, without naming any special passages, and to the writings of Justin Martyr, Clement and Irenæus, as if their fanciful theology could be accepted as the original teaching of Jesus and his apostles !

Epiphanius, another writer of the fourth century, sustains the fiction of orthodox belief in the Divinity of Jesus in the second century by affirming that

¹ *Eccles. Hist.* Book V. c. 28.

disbelievers in the Logos at that time were a heretical sect called Alogi. But the purely imaginary existence of both sect and name is disclosed by their absence from the works of antecedent authors writing on the heresies of that period; and when Tertullian candidly tells us that the majority of his Christian contemporaries rejected his Trinitarian economy, as the worship of two or three gods, he transmits to us the priceless knowledge that, at the close of the second century, not only the Judæo-Christians of Palestine, but also the more numerous members of the Gentile congregations, remained true to the primitive apostolic Faith of one God, and one Christ, the Man Jesus of Nazareth. And these are the men unjustly branded as heretics, when a spiritual and temporal despotism had transformed evangelical simplicity into Trinitarian mysticism!

Notwithstanding the fantastic theories of Tertullian, he defines the rule of faith to be belief in 'one only God, who produced all things through His Word, the primal Emanation called His Son, who was seen on various occasions by the patriarchs, under the name of God, heard at all times through the prophets, and brought down by the Spirit and power of the Father to go forth as the Incarnate Christ to preach the kingdom of heaven. He wrought miracles, was crucified, rose again, ascended into heaven, and sent, instead of himself, the Power of the Holy Spirit, to inspire believers.' 'This creed,' he adds, 'was taught by Christ, and originates no controversies among us except those introduced by heretics.'¹ If this was the creed of Christendom in the age

¹ *Prescription against Heretics*, chap. xiii.

of Tertullian, he stands self-convicted of heresy, for it gives expression to no more advanced form of Trinitarianism than the subordinate divinity of Jesus, and the impersonal manifestation of the Spirit of God.

Origen, whose career extends into the middle of the third century, makes still further progress in the deification of Jesus. He says that 'as Monogenes (the only-begotten Son of God) is called by a variety of names, according to circumstances and the fancy of individuals, it is desirable to ascertain what he really is. Thus he is called Wisdom by Solomon, and the Firstborn of all Creation, and the Power and Wisdom of God by Paul.'¹ All these titles Origen identifies with the Logos of John, and maintains his eternal existence by affirming that, as the Father could not have existed for a single moment without having generated wisdom, and the Son is Wisdom, and Wisdom is the Logos, the Logos is without beginning, and therefore co-eternal with the Father. 'Let him,' says Origen, 'who assigns a beginning to the Word or Wisdom of God, beware of impiety against the unbegotten Father, by denying that He had always been a Father, and had generated the Word, and possessed Wisdom throughout all ages.'

Having thus provided the Son with a constructive eternity, Origen furthermore invests him with constructive omnipotence, by affirming that, as he holds all things in common with the Father, his attributes are equally infinite. How marvellous the contrast between the Parvenu Logos of Tertullian and the Eternal Logos of Origen! Can we fail to detect in the divergent views of these pioneers of Trinitarian mysticism the theosophic

¹ *De Principiis*, Book I. chap. ii.

dreams of men, moulding the primitive faith in harmony with the imaginative creations of their own fancy?

Had Origen really formed any definite idea of Messianic Divinity? Writing in defence of Christianity against Celsus, he says:—‘We must not consider Wisdom and Righteousness as females, on account of their feminine names, for they are, in our opinion, the Son of God, as declared by his true disciple, when he said of him, “who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;” and although we may call him a second God, let all understand that by the expression second God we mean merely a virtue, competent to include all other virtues, and a reason comprehending all reason diffused throughout creation.’¹ From this passage we learn how phantasmal was the divinity of Jesus, even about the middle of the third century.

Again, referring to the prevalence of Unitarianism, Origen says:—‘Hence we may relieve the apprehensions of many pious persons who, through dread of making two Gods, fall into errors and wicked ideas. We must tell them that He who is God of Himself (*ἀυτόθεος*) is *the* God, as Christ praying to his Father says, ‘that they may know Thee, the only true God,’ but that whatever is God external to the self-existent God by communication of divinity, cannot be called *the* God, but rather *θεός*, a Divine Person.’ From this language we infer that a numerous body of Christians were still opposed to the doctrine of the Logos, and yet were regarded, not as heretics, but as pious members of the Christian Church.

¹ *Against Celsus*, Book V. chap. xxxix.

As Trinitarianism, however, made further progress, its votaries adopted the fiction that their Unitarian brethren were heretics. Novatian, a Roman presbyter, writing a treatise on the Trinity, in the second half of the third century, admits, by citing the language of his theological opponents, that believers in the divinity of Jesus were accused of affirming the existence of two Gods:—‘If the Father is one, and the Son another, and the Father is God, and Christ is God, then there is not one God, but two Gods; and if God is one, then Christ must be a man that the Father may be one God.’¹ This, Novatian calls the sacrilegious utterance of heretics; and yet when he undertakes to refute the damaging charge of Ditheism, he says:—‘God proceeding from God as the Son, a person second to the Father, takes not from the Father the characteristic of being one God . . . Had Jesus been formed without beginning as the Father, this would have constituted two beginnings, and would therefore have presented us with two Gods. Had Jesus been invisible, as compared with the Invisible, and pronounced equal, he would have manifested two Invisibles, and thus proved them to be two Gods.’²

In the Epistle to the Philippians, ii. 6 is thus erroneously translated in the Authorised Version:—‘Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.’ The meaning in the original is, ‘Who, being in the form of God, counted it not an attainable object to be on an equality with God.’ Novatian cites this passage, and adds:—‘For although he was conscious of being God from God, he never com-

¹ Chap. xxx.

² Chap. xxxi.

peted or associated himself with the Father, remembering that he was from his Father, and that he possessed his Being as the gift of the Father¹—language which clearly confirms our version of the passage. Both the text and the commentary are, obviously, of Gnostic origin, and mean nothing more than that the Christ, who assumed the form of Jesus, was an Æonic Emanation from the Father, ‘God from God,’ unconscious of any pretensions to equality with the Almighty Author of his being.

Having thus traced the fiction of the Logos to its original source, let us briefly review the results attained about the middle of the third century.

According to the Logia of Matthew, the Son of Man is the Son of God, in no other sense than as the Hebrew Messiah. He knew nothing of his Æonic divinity, whether dating from creation or eternity, and in his avowed humility, ignorance, and acceptance of prophetic destiny, claimed to be nothing more than man, submissive to the will of his Father in heaven.

It is, doubtless, through the pious myth of the supernatural birth of Jesus, that he is accepted by most modern Christians as the only-begotten Son of God; but the fiction of the Nativity stands absolutely apart from the heritage of divinity, involved in the title of Monogenes, borrowed from Platonic Gnosticism.

The genius of Plato conceived the system which depicts the ideas existent in the mind of the supreme Deity, as the archetypes or models of all things which were to come into existence through His Reason or Logos.

Philo personified the Logos as a secondary God.

¹ Chap. xxii.

Gnostic Christians conceived a Pleroma or spirit-world, inhabited by Æonic phantoms, whose names disclose that they were nothing more than the personified ideas of Plato.

Pseudo-John selected from the Æonic group Monogenes or Logos and Paracletus, with whom he identifies Jesus of Nazareth, and the Holy Spirit; and his disciples, Tertullian and Origen, present us with a secondary God, variously depicted as a little older than the hills, and as existent from eternity.

Tertullian recognised the haziness of Æonic divinity by exclaiming:—‘ You will say, What is a word but an empty incorporeal sound? but I affirm that nothing unsubstantial could have proceeded from God, nor could that be devoid of substance which came forth from so great a substance.’ Thus Tertullian supplied the constructive substance of the Logos, over which future generations had yet to fight the sanguinary battle of the Trinity. And we, reviewing the records of that fatal third century, so prolific in materials for the future corruption of the Galilean Gospel, behold the majestic form of the Son of Man overshadowed by an ideal phantom evoked by the spell of Platonic mysticism, and marvel at the blind credulity of men who, with the Logia of Matthew in their hands, could have become the willing dupes of a Gnostic evangelist, speaking rather as a disciple of Valentinus than as an apostle of Jesus.

Orthodox commentators of our own generation, who candidly admit that the fourth Gospel has no historical existence till the last quarter of the second century, yet sustain its Johannine authorship through implicit trust

in the evidence of Irenæus, Clement, and Tertullian, who, they tell us, were the greatest thinkers of their age, incapable of deception, possessed of information lost to us, and watched by theological opponents, who would have assuredly detected and denounced unauthorised acceptance of an unattested gospel.

What is the value of these arguments? The honesty of the Ante-Nicene Fathers is beyond suspicion, but it is the honesty of credulity. If, however, the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel is contingent on their veracity, and we vindicate their honour by acceptance of the Gnostic evangelist, are their modern witnesses to character also prepared to receive at their hands the Book of Enoch as the work of an antediluvian patriarch, and the Epistle of Clement as the veritable autogram of an inspired apostle, attesting the legend of the phoenix as the archetype of the Resurrection?

If the Ante-Nicene Fathers were the greatest thinkers of their age, depth of thought in those days meant nothing more than confirmation of foregone conclusions, by reasoning from unattested facts. Thus, Tertullian affirms the impiety of wearing coloured garments, and sustains Divine disapproval by inferring that, otherwise, Providence would supply us with coloured materials from the backs of blue and scarlet sheep.¹ He also assumes that hair is nourished by the substance of the brain, and thence infers that the whole head of hair is of luxuriant or scanty growth, in proportion to the supply of brain²—an alarming conclusion for some of us, whose attenuated locks thus betray our imbecility! If men, who reasoned thus, were pre-

¹ *On Female Dress*, chap. viii.

² *On the Soul*, chap. li.

sented with a fourth gospel, in the name of an apostle, the contents of which gave form and substance to their own aspirations towards the deification of Jesus, whether would they more probably have credulously accepted this confirmation of their hopes, or hastened to test its authenticity by a sceptical criticism tending to the detection and exposure of the literary forgery ?

Did proximity of time to the Galilean drama give even the writers of the second century more authentic data for forming reliable conclusions than are possessed by theologians of this nineteenth century? Let Irenæus, who in his youth had met with the venerable Polycarp, answer the question. He tells us that, according to the evidence of elders who received their information direct from John and the other Apostles, the life of Jesus extended over a period of at least fifty years. If the first Christian writer who names the fourth gospel is thus deceived by traditional gossip respecting so simple a fact as the age attained by the Messiah, can his doubtful facilities for verifying the authorship of John override the internal evidence which indicates the presence of a Gnostic mysticism, impossible in a Galilean apostle ?

But *was* Pseudo-John accepted by the contemporaries of his first disciples? On the contrary, Tertullian candidly admits his rejection by a majority of Christians through their denunciation of the polytheism involved in the doctrine of the Logos. And, if we are deprived of more direct proof of their loyalty to the primitive faith, we must seek the explanation in the destruction of their literature by the Trinitarians of a later generation, who anathematised primitive orthodoxy as heresy, in harmony with the Gnostic fiction that Justin, Irenæus,

Clement, and Tertullian were the orthodox theologians of the second century. But the absence of the Divinity of Jesus from the primitive faith could not be concealed even in the fourth century; and we accordingly find Athanasius, the supposed apostle of Trinitarianism, endeavouring to explain this anomaly by saying that ‘all the Jews were so decidedly of opinion that their Messiah was to be merely a man like themselves, that the Apostles were necessarily extremely cautious in disclosing the doctrine of the proper divinity of Christ!’ Is not this an apologetic admission of Galilean Unitarianism? And yet, it is the language of the man in whose name modern orthodoxy condemns to eternal perdition all who now believe in the original teaching of the Apostles! Well may we ask, in blank amazement, whether human souls were lost in that fatal interval of silence when truths essential to salvation were diplomatically concealed from perishing Humanity? Or were men held guiltless until a General Council, overshadowed by imperial power, had so clearly defined the Divinity of Jesus, that sceptics could no longer claim immunity from the dread results of episcopal imprecation?

The question yet remains, why was not Pseudo-John rejected by the numerous Gnostic sects denounced by Irenæus? For the obvious reason that they joyfully accepted and confidently appealed to the fourth Gospel as the apostolic attestation of the Æonic system of divinity.

Some modern theologians affirm that, although first named by Irenæus, there are sufficient traces of the fourth Gospel found in antecedent authors to assign it an earlier date. Thus, we are referred to the following

passage, which we quote from the Syriac version of the Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans: 'I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, and I seek his blood, which is incorruptible love.' But in the same epistle, the author referring to his impending martyrdom, says, 'I am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become the pure bread of God.' This form of metaphor, therefore, belongs to the author, but if it is associated with the language of Pseudo-John, the Ignatian epistles have been too freely handled by literary forgers to assign a date to the publication of the fourth Gospel.

We are next referred, for further traces of Johannine phraseology, to the anonymous author of the epistle to the unknown Docetus; as, for instance, when he says, 'Christians live in the world, but are not of the world,' and 'He sent his only-begotten Son as loving . . . not condemning.' But as this writer, whilst claiming to be the disciple of Apostles, stands self-convicted of deception by his contempt for the Mosaic dispensation, his consequently undated epistle furnishes no clue to the era of Johannine authorship.

A more important coincidence occurs in Justin Martyr: 'Christ said, "Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."' ¹ But, as Justin sustains the identity of Jesus with the ideal Logos of Plato, in absolute independence of Johannine theosophy, he was obviously ignorant of the fourth Gospel in its present form; and the exceptional passage in question, therefore, simply indicates the currency of traditional sayings of Jesus, available for any Christian

¹ 1 Apol. lxi.

writer of the second century, or possibly, the existence of some other gospel, from which Pseudo-John selected materials for fusion with his ideal Gnosticism.

Orthodox theologians further say: 'The fourth Gospel was undoubtedly recognised, in the last quarter of the second century, as the work of John; if it is alleged that the author is not John, we demand an explanation of its existence and reception at that period as the work of the apostle.' We answer, the Book of Enoch was accepted in the second century as the work of Enoch; if, therefore, orthodox theologians of the nineteenth century reject its antediluvian origin, let them forthwith name the veritable author, and explain the success of this literary forgery. This line of argument is equally applicable to a wide range of pseudonymous literature, from the Wisdom of Solomon to the Apocalypse of John; but, passing to a later date, we merely add, do orthodox theologians believe in the Athanasian authorship of the anathematic Creed, and if not, can they explain its introduction into the faith of Christendom on apparently false pretences?

Notwithstanding the hopelessness of rationally assigning an apostolic date to the fourth Gospel, faith triumphs where reason fails, and modern piety accepts this evangelical fiction as the veritable autogram of the apostle John. Grant that faith is right and reason wrong, to what conclusions do we attain through a Johannine gospel? Its author had been the friend and companion of Jesus, witnessing a noble life which, in its simple submission to the will of the Deity, disclosed no trace of pretension to Divinity; but having settled at

Ephesus after the fall of Jerusalem, and mingled with the cosmopolitan crowd of philosophers who discussed conflicting systems as they sauntered in the Xystus, whither men came to barter merchandise or exchange ideas, this Galilean peasant, chosen by his Lord and Master for his simplicity and ignorance, made the startling discovery that the Hebrew Messiah is the Logos of Plato! and, accepting the revelation as divine, hastened to compose the evangelical fiction which depicts a Being, neither true to Humanity nor to Divinity. It is said that John wrote his Gospel in extreme old age; was his work, therefore, the product of senility, and do we accept an octogenarian version of phantasmal Divinity, in preference to the simple story of the Son of Man recorded in the pages of Matthew?

If, therefore, we see in John the author of the fourth Gospel, we also recognise in him the Heresiarch who corrupted the original teaching of Jesus with the philosophic Gnosticism more fully developed in the system of Valentinus, and who set the pernicious example of inspired innovations, which eventually transformed Christianity into the magical mirror, in which successive generations of imaginary followers of Jesus of Nazareth have seen the reflection of their own ideas, and imposed them on Humanity as divine.

We have thus seen that the deification of Jesus of Nazareth was the imaginative creation of credulous theologians, who, under the control of an illusory superstition, gave free scope to their inventive genius in constructing fanciful theories of relationship between the Son of Man and the Platonic phantoms of Alexan-

dine Gnosticism. And it, therefore, remains for all who have formed their ideal of Jesus through the Logia of Matthew, to acquit him of having ever claimed to be more than man, inspired by the Spirit of his Father in heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TRINITY.

HAVING thus traced the progressive deification of Jesus to the middle of the third century, our readers may reasonably inquire where, during this long lapse of time, was that mysterious Trinity which we have all been taught to reverence as an apostolic institution? We answer, waiting the evolution of the Third Person in a sufficiently definite form to complete the number of triune Divinity.

The minds of theologians had been previously too deeply absorbed in discussing the attributes of the Logos to give much attention to the Holy Spirit, whose personality therefore remained an open question long after the deification of Jesus.

Justin Martyr speaks of worshipping ‘God and the Son who proceeded from Him, the host of the other good Angels who accompany and resemble him, and the prophetic spirit.’¹

Irenæus says: ‘I have also shown that the Word, namely, the Son, was always with the Father, and that Wisdom also, which is the Spirit, was present with Him before all creation.’

Tertullian, who speaks of Unitarian Christians as simpletons because they could not understand his

¹ 1 Apol. vi.

Trinitarian economy, discloses his own confusion of thought by confounding the Spirit with the Logos. Referring to the invisible Being who overshadowed the Virgin Mary, he says : ‘ It is that Spirit which we call the Word, for the Spirit is the substance of the Word, and the Word the operation of the Spirit, and these two are one.’¹

Origen informs us that ‘ the Holy Spirit is associated in honour and dignity with the Father and the Son ; but, as it is doubtful whether he is born or innate, or is a Son of God, all these questions require careful investigation through the Scriptures.’²

It is, therefore, obvious that a consubstantial Trinity had no existence in the third century, and from this period until the Council of Nicæa (A.D. 325), the relationship of Father and Son remained the absorbing topic of theological controversy.

At the close of the third century, the theory of the Divinity of Jesus had made important progress among communities already familiar with the system of Plato. But whilst Piety rejoiced in the exaltation of Jesus, Reason still lingered over acceptance of two or three persons in one God ; and conflicting theologians, in search of some compromise with the impossible, drifted into a confused theosophy, depicting Jesus in varying forms of finite and infinite Divinity.

With the fourth century, the time had come for defining what was really meant by the Divinity of the Son of Man. Arius, the celebrated presbyter of Alexandria, declared the Son as a created being, to be inferior to, and neither co-eternal nor consubstantial with

¹ *Against Praxeas*, xxvi.

² *De Principiis*, Preface.

the Father, for if he possessed the infinite attributes of the Supreme Deity, there would be two Gods instead of one God. This thesis confirms the theology of the Ante-Nicene Fathers; but further progress had been made in the exaltation of the Logos, and Arius, behind the spirit of his age, was condemned, deposed, and excommunicated by his Bishop, whilst the famous theologian, Athanasius, came to the front, not as the apostle of Trinitarianism, in its modern sense, but as the zealous advocate of a modified form of Ditheism, which assigned to the Logos a higher grade in Divinity than was admissible in the creed of Arius.

Tertullian had affirmed that the Logos was possessed of substance, not because he knew anything on the subject, but because he had adopted the Valentinian theory of emanations, and thence inferred that that which proceeded from the Father must, of necessity, be substantial. Athanasius made still further progress in this logical theosophy by inferring that procession from the Father involves identity of substance (Homoousia), and consequent equality and co-eternity of the Father and the Son, who combine, through community of essence, duality of person with unity of Divinity; and on this Gnostic fiction rests the imaginative Infinity of the Hebrew Messiah.

At this momentous crisis in the history of Christianity, the Emperor Constantine became a convert to the faith, and learned with surprise and disappointment that the ecclesiastical organisation, which appeared to be so desirable an ally for imperial power, concealed the internal disunion of hostile factions fiercely quarrelling over the substance of their God. He, therefore, tried

to appease the furious contests of rival theologians by counselling imitation of the tolerant spirit in which heathen philosophers dispassionately criticised the conflicting theories of divergent schools. But this prudent advice failed to influence men convinced that misapprehension of divinity involves perdition; and Constantine, therefore, summoned a General Council of bishops to determine and enforce the Creed of Christendom.

Three hundred and eighteen bishops assembled at Nicæa in Bithynia (A.D. 325), in response to the imperial summons; and the successors of Galilean apostles, oblivious of the Son of Man, discussed, with angry re-erimination, in the presence of a Roman Emperor, the Æonic substance of the phantom Logos, as the supreme question for the salvation of mankind.

The majority of the bishops, holding rather hazy views on a subject clear to demonstration in the eyes of an Arius or Athanasius, would have gladly accepted some form of compromise admitting diversity of opinion within the Christian Church; but Constantine, influenced by the enemies of Arius, and desirous of combining spiritual with imperial despotism through a Catholic hierarchy subservient to his will, adopted the doctrine of Homoousia, and demanded its episcopal ratification under the penalty of his serious displeasure.

Seventeen Arian bishops at first resisted the will of Constantine; but all eventually yielded to the pressure of the temporal power, except Theonas of Lybia and Secundus of Ptolemais, who were deposed and banished, in company with Arius, whose books were committed to the flames, and their possession denounced under the penalty of death. The Consu-

stantialists therefore triumphed, and voted the Homoousia in the following formula :—

‘ We believe in one only God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

‘ And in one only Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten of the Father (Monogenes), that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, True God of True God, Begotten and not created ; consubstantial (*ὁμοούσιος*) with the Father ; by whom all things are, as well in heaven as on earth ; who came down for us men and for our salvation, who was incarnate and became man, who suffered, who was raised the third day, and ascended into heaven ; who will come again to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

‘ As to those who say, “ There was a time when he was not ; and before he was begotten he was not ; and he was made out of nothing ; ” or who pretend that the Son of God is of another essence or substance, that he is created, or mutable, or alterable, the Catholic Apostolic Church anathematises them.’

According to this Creed, the lineal descendant of Gnosticism, the Council of Nicæa knew nothing of the incomprehensible Trinity of future generations. Its members simply affirmed the existence of one Supreme God, identified Jesus with the Æonic Monogenes, as the secondary Deity through whom all things came into being, voted him the attribute of eternity through Homoousia, and finally gave official recognition to the existence of the Holy Spirit, without attempting to define his origin, status, or relationship with the Father and the Son. The final evolution of a consubstantial Trinity, even in

the age of Athanasius, was, therefore, still a problem of the future, and the immediate test of orthodoxy lay in the Shibboleth of Homoousia.

The Creed of Nicæa, unknown to Jesus and his apostles, necessarily made them, as heretics, the objects of episcopal imprecation. From this famous Council, therefore, dates the era of separation between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Creed of the Empire; let us, therefore, henceforth give to the Faith of Galilee the name of Jesuism, and abandon the sullied title of Christianity to sacerdotal systems, which have forsaken the simplicity of Nazareth.

Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicæa earned the gratitude of posterity by protesting against the official anathema, and preferring deposition and exile to complicity with spiritual and imperial despotism. The historian, Eusebius of Cæsarea, subscribed the Nicene creed with the mental reservation that Homoousia may be read Homoiousia, expressing, not identity, but similarity of substance admitting of degrees in the essence of Divinity. How profound must have been the amazement of heathen contemporaries, on learning from rival missionaries, that the true Faith had become a question of acceptance or rejection of a single letter in the alphabet!

The extant works of Eusebius, in harmony with the theosophy of Tertullian and Origen, reproduce the fiction that the Being, who appeared in human form to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua, was the pre-existent Logos, because being called God and Lord, he could not have been a subordinate angel, and it is irrational to suppose that the uncreated and unchangeable essence of

the Almighty God could be changed into the form of a man, to deceive spectators with the phantom of a created substance. Eusebius furthermore speaks of the Son as the Prince and Leader of the Host of heaven, the Angel of the mighty Council, the Agent of the Father's secret will, the Second Cause of the universe, who has received power, honour, and even divinity from the Father.¹ When we consider that this is the language of an eminent Bishop of the fourth century, who subscribed the creed of Nicæa, how marvellous the modern credulity which accepts the so-called creed of Athanasius as the veritable faith of primitive Christians.

It is important to observe, in justice to the Church of Rome, that spiritual despotism was not initiated at Nicæa by the Bishop, but by the Emperor of Rome; and future Popes simply inherited the pontifical throne of the Cæsars.

The creed of Nicæa failed to establish Catholicism, and during the long interval of chaotic theology which preceded the uniformity of ignorance and superstition controlled by a spiritual despotism, ecclesiastical history is but the record of conflicting doctrines, contending factions, and violent interventions of the temporal power, at the call of a fierce fanaticism, which interpreted Christianity through maledictions, persecutions, and massacre.

In the course of their controversies with the Arians, Consubstantialists eventually recognised the necessity of being more explicit respecting the Holy Spirit, and at the Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381, they accordingly interpolated the creed of Nicæa with the following clause :—

¹ *Eccles. Hist.* Book I. 1.

‘ We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord who gives life ; who proceeds from the Father ; who must be worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son ; who spoke by the prophets.’

This change in the status of the Holy Spirit, accepted by modern piety as a divine mystery, was effected through the arbitrary conclusions of men quite as ignorant on the subject as ourselves ; and discloses the strange confusion into which they had fallen respecting the original fiction of divine emanations. The Paraclete is declared to be a direct emanation from the Father, and therefore the Æonic brother of the Logos, who ceases to be Monogenes, the only-begotten, the title assigned to him in the opening words of the creed ! The Paraclete also becomes the giver of life, although this divine office is specially assigned to the Logos by Pseudo-John. The lapse of fifty years had obviously left the Council of Constantinople but a hazy impression of Nicene theosophy, and yet their self-destructive formula is accepted by modern Christians as veritable gospel.

This slovenly work of Byzantine creed-makers, in due time evoked new controversies on the procession of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a fresh addition to the Nicene creed, in the famous formula ‘ *filioque*,’ which transformed the Paraclete into an Emanation from both the Father and the Son, without any perceptible alleviation of theological embarrassment. For if the Father and the Logos are one, the Paraclete becomes Monogenes the only-begotten ; and if they are two, the Æonic birth of Paracletus involves the prodigy of dual paternity. This Æonic innovation was never accepted

by Eastern theologians, and eventually caused the final separation of the Greek and Roman churches, with mutual imprecations.

The Creed of Nicæa, even in its fullest development, failed to unravel the tangled skein of Christian theosophy; and rival theologians propounded so many conflicting theories in the course of centuries preceding the ages of intellectual darkness, that the Gnostic origin of the Trinity was forgotten, its anomalies pronounced an incomprehensible mystery, and its impossibilities mistaken for the inscrutable wisdom of God. This was the opportunity of some unknown genius of the eighth century, who composed, with all the audacity of ignorance, the famous formula of the so-called Catholic Faith which, in the borrowed name of Athanasius, consigned untold millions to perdition for discrediting the impossible.

This Confession of Faith ¹ no doubt expressed the religious tendencies of an age in which the Trinitarian myth had become an ecclesiastical mystery; but when we affirm that Christendom adopted the arbitrary formula of an unknown theologian, or credulously accepted his damnatory conclusions as the doctrines of Athanasius, we seem rather to reproduce the malignant satire of some vindictive enemy of the Church, than an attested fact of ecclesiastical history.

In thus recording the evolution of the Trinity, we simply tell what all may read in the triple creeds of ecclesiastical Christianity. The so-called Apostles' Creed

¹ The author of this Creed was apparently unconscious that, in granting eternal life as the reward of virtue at the final judgment, he destroyed the theory of salvation contingent on orthodox belief.

affirms the supernatural birth of Jesus, and the personality of the Spirit—doctrines unknown in the School of Galilee. The Confession of Nicæa confers on both an Æonic Divinity alien to the more primitive creed. And Pseudo-Athanasius proclaims an incomprehensible Trinity, which would have filled the Council of Nicæa with amazement.

How clearly may we not, therefore, trace the lineal descent of modern Christian theology? The ancient Hebrews believed in Jehovah as their national God. Contact with Aryan Monotheists transformed the Semitic Deity into the Supreme Ruler of the universe, worshipped in the age of Jesus as our Heavenly Father.¹ Hellenistic Hebrews saw, in this Infinite Being, the great First Cause of Platonic philosophy, and in the Logos, their own Jehovah invested with subordinate divinity. Gentile Christians adopted the same theology with the startling innovation that Jehovah, Jesus, and the Logos are one. As time passed on, the Hebrew Deity, together with the Nazarene Church, disappeared out of the theological arena: Jesus became the sole Logos of Christianity; the Spirit was invested with Divinity; and Monotheistic Christendom, confronted with three Deities, escaped the embarrassing charge of polytheism by announcing, on ecclesiastical authority, that infinite Beings, superior to merely human numbers, may count as three, and yet be only one.

What, therefore, are our conclusions? That the tribal Jehovah was a Semitic myth; that Jesus, claim-

¹ Protestantism having accepted the infinity of Jehovah, its theologians are ever confronted by the hopeless task of reconciling the policy of a tribal Deity with the Providence of God.

ing to be nothing more than man, worshipped an Aryan ideal of paternal Divinity; that his posthumous deification, in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, was an Æonic fiction; that the Trinity was a compromise between Monotheism and Æonism; and that, finally, our modern ideal of Supreme Divinity is the product of the ages, evolved, in absolute independence of the supernatural, through the spiritual conceptions of the highest minds of all time, dwelling on the momentous problem of man's relationship with the Infinite.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ATONEMENT.

IN view of the conclusions already attained, it may appear superfluous to consider the dogma of the Atonement; but, as it is the cardinal doctrine of Protestantism, let us briefly test the claims of vicarious expiation on the reason and faith of mankind.

Notwithstanding that Moses engrafted on Judaism an elaborate ritualism of blood, the Hebrew Scriptures generally affirm that man's repentance wins divine forgiveness. In Exodus xxxiv. we read of Jehovah as a merciful, gracious, long-suffering Deity, ever ready to forgive the sins and transgressions of his people; and Isaiah, having emphatically denounced ceremonies and sacrifice as revolting to Divinity,¹ proclaims unconditional pardon for all who forsake their sins and return to their God.²

John the Baptist exhorted all men to repent, in absolute unconsciousness of the divine demand for atonement; sacrifice was a word unheard in the kingdom of heaven; and the Son of Man, in depicting the final Judgment, awarded salvation, not to vicarious, but to individual merit. How, in fact, could the Preacher of the Mount have invited his disciples to imitate Divinity by freely forgiving all injuries, if he knew that

¹ Isaiah i.

² Isaiah lv. 7.

his Father in heaven was an inexorable Judge, inflexible in the demand for a victim before listening to the plea of repentance?

The Evangelists who profess to record the discourses of Jesus after his Resurrection, attribute to him no final revelation of a Gospel of blood. The compiler of the Acts of the Apostles puts into the mouths of Peter, Stephen, and Paul, speeches which disclose absolute ignorance of the doctrine of the Atonement. And the author of the Epistle of James, which stands next to the Logia of Matthew as a reliable record of the teaching of Jesus, knew of no sacrificial element in the Gospel of the kingdom.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, composed with the obvious design of reconciling Judaism and Christianity through the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, is the original source of that theological fiction which accepts the death of Jesus as the antitype of Mosaic sacrifice; but can we permit an anonymous theologian to corrupt the teaching of the Son of Man, through an imaginary relationship between the barbarous rite of sacrifice and the appalling tragedy of Calvary? This epistle was identified with the Pauline school; and we, therefore, find the works, more reasonably assignable to the pen of the great apostle, interpolated in the same spirit of allegorical theosophy. Thus in 1 Corinthians v. 7, we read, 'For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.' And in Ephesians ii. Jesus is depicted as abolishing in his flesh the law contained in ordinances, and including Gentiles in the covenant through his blood.

The author of the first Epistle of Peter speaks of

redemption through the precious blood of Jesus, but as he also depicts the Father judging all men, without respect of persons, according to their works, he cannot be called a preacher of the Atonement.

The first Epistle of John refers to the death of Jesus as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world ;¹ but when the author adds, ‘ Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,’² we detect how divergent are his views from the modern theory of expiation.

When and by whomsoever the fiction of Messianic sacrifice was introduced into primitive Christian literature, we possess the indestructible fact that, according to the personal teaching of the Son of Man, he died, not as a voluntary offering for sin, but as the reluctant victim of a prophetic destiny, which he would have joyfully escaped, but that he interpreted the imaginary decrees of Hebrew bards as the will of his Father in heaven.³

Turning towards the earliest records of the second century, the creed put into the hands of modern believers as apostolic contains no reference to the Atonement. Clement of Rome speaks of the blood of Christ shed for our salvation, but he also affirms that God has, in every age, accepted man’s repentance, and that charity will save all those who turn towards Him in purity and holiness. Barnabas emphatically condemns a ritualism of blood as a misapprehension of what is pleasing to the Deity, and concurs with Isaiah

¹ 1 John ii. 2.

² 1 John iii. 16.

³ The passages in Matt. xx. 28 and xxvi. 28, referring to the death of Jesus as a ransom for many, are obviously ecclesiastical interpolations, irreconcilable with his teaching.

in commending virtue as the only true sacrifice. The Shepherd of Hermas, once read in Christian congregations as inspired Scripture, is silent respecting the Atonement, but sees in divine forgiveness the necessary sequel of human repentance, and declares that the sins of all who have suffered for the name of Jesus shall be freely blotted out.

The theory of sacrificial expiation finds no place in the writings of Justin, Irenæus, Athenagoras, Clement, or Tertullian; and both Cyprian and Lactantius attribute salvation to good works. Origen, interpreting the language of Paul—‘for ye were bought with a price’—affirms that the human race was in the power of the Devil, who demanded and obtained the blood of Christ as the price of our redemption. But, on the other hand, Athanasius assumes that Jesus died to bestow on all men the resurrection from the dead—a divergence of opinion which discloses the mental confusion of theologians in the third and fourth centuries, when considering the death of Jesus, not in the light of his own statements, but through their own ideal conceptions.

The creed-makers of Nicæa knew nothing of that form of vicarious expiation which demands the blood of Jesus to satisfy the justice of God. They tell us that Christ came down from heaven for our salvation, and thus affirm, not the modern doctrine of the Atonement, but the visionary dream of Gnosticism, depicting Monogenes descending from the Pleroma as the Saviour of Humanity. Pseudo-Athanasius was somewhat in advance of the Confession of Nicæa, when he affirmed that Jesus ‘suffered for our salvation,’ but so indefinite a reference to the central doctrine of modern Christianity fails to

establish that believers of his generation concurred with the orthodox views of the Atonement held in the nineteenth century.

The doctrine of the Atonement, oscillating between a ransom due to Satan and a sacrifice demanded by God, existed in so mythical a form for nearly a thousand years that its invention or discovery may be justly assigned to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, who flourished towards the close of the eleventh century, and founded that school of ecclesiastical metaphysicians who accepted their own fallacious conclusions as the spiritual insight of divine mysteries. Anselm affirmed that, although other means of salvation were at the disposal of Omnipotence, God chose the death of Christ to manifest his love towards man ; and that, as Christ died without sin, a reward was due to him which he transferred to mankind in the form of pardon for sin. He, however, added that human nature could not be restored unless a penalty were paid to God impossible to humanity, and therefore paid by Christ as God. These conclusions, as fanciful as the theosophic dreams of Egypt, Persia, or Greece, were not, however, sufficiently definite for the final evolution of the Atonement ; and the speculative question of expiation was practically solved, in a barbarous age, through the Eucharistic miracle of recurrent sacrifice.

The public sale of Indulgences in the sixteenth century was the immediate cause of the Reformation ; and as this abuse of Papal authority involved the existence of human merit, its negation, through the doctrine of the Atonement, became the favourite study of Protestant theologians ; and reformed Synods, apparently as

infallible as Roman Councils, determined the limits of Infinity by affirming that the justice of God demands the temporal and eternal punishment of man, and can only be satisfied by the sufferings and death of Christ. How marvellous that men, who appealed to Reason against Rome, should thus dogmatically determine the Creed of Posterity!

To the Reformers came the priceless opportunity of restoring the simplicity of Galilee; but, fascinated by Pauline mysticism, they evolved from the doctrines of Election, Predestination, and Justification by Faith, that chaotic theosophy which Anglican Christians may now freely study in the Articles of their Church.

Turning towards those ecclesiastical fossils, we learn that the virtuous actions of uninspired men are sinful and displeasing to God;¹ that Confucius, Socrates, Buddha, and Aurelius cannot, according to the Scriptures, escape perdition;² and that Election is full of 'sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons,'³ in whom we inevitably recognise the lineal descendants of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was so much better than his neighbours.⁴

What, therefore, is the orthodox theory of the Atonement? That God created man in simplicity and ignorance, placed at his disposal the means of his Fall, left him defenceless against the wiles of Satan, condemned the innocent by cursing posterity, denied forgiveness to the penitent, unless appeased by blood, consecrated the heathen rite of human sacrifice by the crucifixion of his Only Son, limited the boon of expia-

¹ Art. xiii.

² Art. xviii.

³ Art. xvii.

⁴ Luke xviii. 9-14.

tion to a chosen few, and finally effaced all that is noblest in Humanity by teaching men to seek His favour, not by righteousness, but through the vicarious sufferings of an innocent man, judicially murdered to satisfy divine justice !

Happily for mankind the results of modern research fully vindicate the Deity from these injurious imputations, and release all Christians from the obligation of belief in a Gospel of blood, unknown to Jesus of Nazareth. The facts of Science, more authentic than the voice of Prophets, now tell us that man has inhabited the earth throughout countless generations of progression from lower to higher conditions of Humanity ; his Fall is therefore a myth, and the Atonement, erected on this foundation of sand, the pious fiction of an age unconscious of the buried secrets reserved by Nature as a future revelation to mankind.

As our inquiries, therefore, result in absolute conviction that both Judaism and Christianity are of merely human origin, we are necessarily confronted by the unsolved problem of Man's true relationship with the Infinite ; but, before discussing this momentous question, we for the present say to our readers—*au revoir*.

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