



CONVERTED





THE FIRST EASTER DAWN

THE
FIRST EASTER DAWN

AN
INQUIRY INTO THE EVIDENCE FOR THE
RESURRECTION OF JESUS

BY
CHARLES TURNER GORHAM

“Far hence he lies
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.”

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INTRODUCTION

THE prominence which the subject of this work has assumed in recent years may be held to excuse the publication of a further attempt to bring it into clearer light. So far as I am aware, no tolerably complete examination of the evidence from the standpoint of modern Rationalism exists in this country. It is hoped that the present volume may supply a need which is felt by many inquirers.

The extensive sale of a certain work of fiction, the strange crudities of which might have been a source of innocent amusement had they not been gravely endorsed by some dignitaries of the Church, has stimulated my resolve to supply, to the best of my power, a counter-acting influence on behalf of sobriety and common sense. It is not to be expected that a work on the unpopular side will meet with equal assent or appreciation; but if it should enable even a few seekers after truth to obtain a firmer grasp of a great historical problem, my labour will not have been wasted.

Many will think this book too long. It is in reality too short. Some branches of the subject have had to be treated either very lightly or not at all. A careful investigation of the religious conditions of the ancient world is essential to a proper understanding of the belief in

the resurrection. For such a study I have not had the time, nor do I claim to possess the qualifications. Nevertheless, the reader may find in Part III. some fresh information of a kind not usually furnished by Christian advocates. Again, a complete examination of the whole question of miraculous phenomena would have led me too far astray from the main theme, and therefore could not be undertaken. A third important topic, the relation of Christian concepts to the mythology of other religions, has scarcely been alluded to, for similar reasons. The alleged divinity of Jesus, also, in spite of its manifest bearing on the subject, has been discussed in only a fragmentary way.

Objection may possibly be taken to the frequent use of the antitheses, natural—supernatural; material—spiritual; subjective—objective. It has not seemed worth while to attempt a minute philosophical analysis of these terms. They are here used in those approximately accurate senses in which they are generally understood, rather than with a scientific precision which is perhaps scarcely attainable. A writer in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1905, has objected to such distinctions as being “out of date,” and adds that “the *fact* of resurrection is nowhere in dispute among serious thinkers.” Is it not possible, then, to differentiate the consciousness of man from his environment? And in dealing with an alleged incident of history does not the argument turn on what we mean by “the fact”? If the resurrection was nothing more than a revival of ethical and psychological influence, no Rationalist would deny it, because he knows

that such a fact is a common feature of human experience. But when it is asserted that an organism which has undergone the process of physical death has returned to physical life, it must be insisted that nothing short of absolute proof can justify belief in such an exception to natural causation. The question is not whether all nature is divine, but whether a particular event is divine in a sense which does not apply to the rest of nature. The term "objective" correctly denotes all phenomena which are external to the individual; while the term "subjective" indicates the mental and emotional facts of his inner nature. To say that "the real historical evidences of the Resurrection lie in the lives" of those who know that "Christ lives in them" is to confuse two wholly different kinds of evidence, and to throw the question into obscurity. Everyone knows that there is a difference between external events and internal impressions which may or may not correctly represent them. That is sufficient for the purposes of critical investigation. If religion means anything, it surely means the purifying by moral and intellectual experience of man's primitive impulses; a slow transition from external forms to inward sentiments, from the material to the spiritual. Particular doctrines inevitably share in the general change, and so the resurrection of Jesus has for many religious minds become transformed from an impossible wonder to an ethical and spiritual relationship.

The truest evidence is to be found "in the life of the believer." What does this mean? Is it not clear that the claim implies essentially a spiritual affinity, a fact of

the religious consciousness for which an objective cause may or may not exist? And may not the belief have arisen by virtue of the same affinities that sustain it? Why should it be assumed that an unverifiable event alleged to have happened after the death of Jesus could alone have originated the resurrection belief? Was not the spiritual relation established rather by his life? The analogy of the spirit is with the things of the spirit, not with the facts of the material order alone.

To the advanced Rationalist this book may seem superfluous. Miracles, some may say, are impossible, because they would conflict with the universal law of causation. No evidence can prove a miracle. Why, then, trouble to examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? But many sound thinkers decline to assume the impossibility of the miraculous, while remaining convinced that a dead man's return to life must always be more unlikely than the falsity of testimony to that effect. And as the haziest notions on this subject are still prevalent it has seemed desirable to group into one volume some of the principal objections to the orthodox doctrine as well as some examination of the main arguments in its favour.

In doing this the theory that the books of the New Testament were written under the influence of divine inspiration has designedly been put on one side, as being both discredited and unnecessary. Even conceding the possibility that a man may be inspired, it must be difficult for him to know this with certainty, or to distinguish between the divine and the human sources of his

knowledge. And it must also be difficult to convince other persons of his inspiration. The credulous may at once accept his claims ; the critical will examine them. Inspiration cannot give to statements of fact any greater truth than belongs to their intrinsic reality. And as in the case of past events we have to arrive at this truth by the method of evidence, we must disregard the claim to special inspiration as alike irrelevant and illusory.

While some Christian apologists doggedly assert that the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is strong and ample, others of broader views candidly admit its weakness. To them the person of Jesus alone guarantees its practical sufficiency. Christ, they claim, was "God manifest in the flesh," a unique and perfect being, the "Prince of Life," who "must overcome death." The evidence is therefore approached in the light of a strong presupposition, and one which is very ill-supported by the writings on which such implicit reliance is placed. Considering that the Gospel writers unhesitatingly attribute spoken words to non-existent beings like angels and evil spirits, it is *primâ facie* probable that they would put into the mouth of Jesus also expressions which he did not utter ; and that they actually did so in several instances cannot fairly be denied. It is consequently impossible to be sure what the claims of Jesus really were, and even certainty on that point would not insure the accuracy of a particular interpretation of them. That educated Christians of our own time should insist on a literal acceptance of the figurative terms of a long past epoch of superstition and

ignorance is nothing less than surprising. For it seems clear to any impartial reader of the New Testament that, even if we make no allowance for Oriental hyperbole, Jesus did not regard himself, nor did his followers regard him, as other than essentially human, though still in some vague sense an embodiment and representative of the divine. Indications to this effect are numerous, and they imply a distinction between the person sending and the person sent which, if not real, is both gratuitous and misleading. It cannot be admitted that a string of doubtful propositions is made stronger by being forced into dogmatic relationship. In reality this is nothing more than the old process of bringing forward one miracle to prove another.

Finally, it should be said (though the remark ought to be superfluous) that the treatment in these chapters of portions of the Gospel narrative as if they were historically true does not imply that they really are so. True they may be; verifiable they are not. But investigation of the Christian records cannot be carried on without comparison of their parts, and if some are found more doubtful than others it does not follow that the less doubtful elements are therefore true. The present work is written without prejudice to the possibility that a far greater degree of myth, legend, and selective tradition may have gathered round the figure of Jesus than is commonly supposed.

C. T. G.

February, 1908.

PART I.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN
SCRIPTURES

CHAPTER I.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT
ACCOUNTS

THE Gospel narratives of the resurrection are so well known that it is not necessary to quote them *in extenso*. Nor is there any need to dwell in detail on their numerous discrepancies. Some of these are trifling, and nothing more than are to be expected in accounts given independently by persons who had not witnessed the events they relate. Such discrepancies have considerable weight as against a mechanical theory of inspiration, but they are not important enough to deprive the tradition of all value. On the other hand, we must beware of supposing that good faith on the part of a chronicler necessarily involves the truth of his account. Such a principle is no more valid in the case of the Gospels than in the case of the numerous miracles which, in later ages, were thought to have accompanied the diffusion of the Christian faith. One may admit the honesty of the Gospel writers, and yet fail to detect any close connection between the original

facts and accounts of them compiled forty or fifty years afterwards. In times of religious upheaval men do not observe, do not criticise, do not reason. They believe and obey. They see something which passes their comprehension, and misinterpret it. What they do see is beheld through a veil of preconceived notions, of mystical assumptions, of reverent ignorance. Their vague reports are handed down by an indiscriminating tradition which transforms its contents into still greater marvels.

In the case of the resurrection of Jesus, have we the evidence of eye-witnesses? The character of the accounts precludes that supposition. We shall point out many indications in the Gospels themselves that they cannot be the writings of first-hand informants. And this conclusion is confirmed by what we know of their origin. If forty or fifty years elapsed before the earliest existing accounts of the resurrection appeared, it is impossible to suppose that we have a record on the accuracy of which humanity should be asked to stake its salvation.

We proceed on the assumption that the earliest Gospel is that attributed to Mark. And, as the concluding verses of this Gospel are generally admitted to be of later origin, we shall disregard them. The priority of Mark is conceded by most modern scholars; and Dr. Abbott, in his famous article "Gospels," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, has furnished strong reasons for holding this view. It is certainly more probable that the Gospel tradition, like all other traditions, expanded indefinitely than that the original nucleus of truth should have been forgotten or designedly left unrecorded by the earliest chronicler. Thus, while Mark's Gospel relates a vague report, that of John narrates four distinct appearances

...evidence, whatever the source, which proves in
...of a contrary conviction is "depreciated"
THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS 3
Jesus was not God anyone who says he wa:
a person's written evidence, written!
of the risen Jesus, and the application of physical tests
of his identity.

We have to balance probabilities. Even good evidence generally has to be discounted. Evidence furnished by persons who do not understand the nature of evidence is never reliable. Throughout, the Gospel testimony is of the latter character. Modern Biblical criticism finds that the most credible passages relating to Jesus are those in which the tendency to glorify him is least conspicuous. As Professor Schmiedel has pointed out, expressions which contradict this tendency are not likely to have been deliberately invented. It does not follow, as Mr. J. M. Robertson has rejoined, that they are, for that reason, true, or that, even if true, they guarantee that any other part of the tradition is true. But they are more likely to be true than passages which are obviously the product of a particular bias. Now, the Gospel accounts bear unmistakable traces of the disposition to deify the traditional figure of Jesus; and, whether these are due to the Apostles or to their successors, the historical character of the records is at once depreciated. It is in the second Gospel that this tendency is least prominent, and it therefore seems the more likely to embody the primitive tradition. Applying this test to what is probably the earliest existing form of the resurrection tradition, we arrive at the startling result that Mark contains no account whatever of Jesus having risen from the dead. Nothing is said about it beyond a report that such an event had happened, this report being attributed to the mythical agency of an "angel." This is *prima facie* ground for concluding that the later accounts of the resurrection have been amplified from vague and unverified reports, such as are referred to in Mark's Gospel.

This is a piece of queer criticism!
Passages which deify Jesus - - - untrue

A further illustration of this tendency is afforded by Matthew's statement that, at the moment of the crucifixion, a great earthquake took place, and the still more singular addition that "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." A story so incoherent, and totally unsupported by evidence, is not worth the trouble of examination. It is one of the stock "difficulties" of the expositor, who, rather than admit that it is a sheer piece of superstition, attempts in vain to defend it, and darkens counsel by words without knowledge. Thus Farrar says the hypothetical earthquake "seemed to the imaginations of many to have disimprisoned the spirits of the dead, and to have filled the air with ghostly visitants, who, after Christ had risen, appeared to linger in the holy city"¹—a kind of explanation which applies to many other parts of the Gospels. As the authority for this story is also an authority for the resurrection, we do not see why the writer's obvious incapacity in the one case should be thought consistent with his entire trustworthiness in the other.

One discrepancy stands out from the rest, and constitutes a difficulty which no apologetic ingenuity has ever got over. According to Matthew, the disciples were directed to go into Galilee, and did so. Probably they had already gone there, for, when they fled on the arrest of Jesus, whither should they go but to their own homes? Luke, however, expressly states that they were commanded "not to depart from Jerusalem," and that they remained "continually in the temple, praising God." A liberal Christian justly considers this a surprising

¹ *Life of Christ*, 1-vol. ed., p. 708.

feature in accounts meant to be historical. "If any fact would seem to be matter of sober history, it is the fact that the Apostles did or did not continue in Jerusalem after their Master's death. Yet in regard to so simple a matter we have divergent accounts, and no objective certainty."¹ Unquestionably we have here two independent versions of a vague and fluctuating tradition. And, in spite of all the melancholy efforts to reconcile them, these versions remain mutually exclusive. Of what value would "profane" history be if it adopted the methods of the "sacred" and "inspired" record?

The implicit reliance of the Gospel writers upon Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection of Jesus must be considered as casting suspicion on their testimony. If the alleged prophecies were clear and distinctly applicable—if a necessary connection between prediction and event could be shown—the argument from prophecy would be a strong one. But that is where it breaks down. No actual predictions of the event are to be found in the Old Testament, and we think the frame of mind which led to a strong contrary impression would not be slow to manipulate facts in the light of preconceptions. This undue reliance on doubtful and obscure sayings in the Jewish scriptures is shown by the following quotations: "*Behoved it not* the Christ to suffer these things?" says Jesus (Luke xxiv. 26). "As yet they knew not the scripture, that he *must* rise again from the dead" (John xx. 9). "It was *needful* that the scripture should be fulfilled" (Acts i. 16). "All things *must needs* be fulfilled" (Luke xxiv. 44). "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: *because it was not possible* that he should be holden of it" (Acts ii. 24). "The scripture

¹ Dr. Percy Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 255.

cannot be broken” (John x. 35) is an expression attributed to Jesus himself. These and many other passages show an intensity of belief in the infallibility of the Hebrew scriptures, and a fixed conviction as to their fulfilment, which no educated man of to-day possesses.

Another strange feature of the Gospel narratives deserves notice. The accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, though they contain numerous discrepancies and improbabilities, are fairly minute and detailed. Immediately after that event the accounts become not merely vague and deficient in their information, but to a very remarkable degree in conflict with one another. We have reports, impressions, beliefs, supernatural marvels. The facts we cannot get at anyhow. It is an obvious deduction from this peculiarity that, while there may be some historical foundation for the accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Gospel writers were conscious that, when they described his rising again, the truth was not to them personally known.

The third Gospel contains a detailed but highly improbable story, which is greatly relied on by apologists as proof of the resurrection. One of the disciples named Cleopas and another person unnamed walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection. No motive for the journey is alleged; and if, as the story relates, they had heard the report that Jesus had risen, it is hard to conceive why they should have taken a walk which, with the return journey, involved a distance of fifteen miles, when natural curiosity and solicitude would surely have kept them in Jerusalem. They are accosted by Jesus, but do not recognise him, the reason being, according to the supernatural method of explanation adopted by the Gospel writers, that “their eyes were holden that they should not know him.” As

Jesus himself—with, it must be confessed, a certain lack of candour—appears to be in complete ignorance of what had happened that morning, they inform him of the strange events which they assume to have been known to every sojourner in the city. He then, somewhat sharply and apparently with little justice, reproves them for their slowness of belief, tells them it behoved “the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory,” and proceeds to expound the prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures relating to himself, “beginning from Moses and from all the prophets.” Although he must by this time have accompanied the two disciples for some miles, they still fail to recognise the Master from whom they had been parted only a very few days. Neither voice,¹ appearance, gesture, nor manner aroused even a suspicion of his identity. It would, indeed, require supernatural influence to cause this total paralysis of memory. On reaching Emmaus Jesus “made as though he would go further.” With what object was this dissimulation practised? At length, when taking a meal with him, they recognise their Master; but no sooner have they done so than he vanishes from their sight. Though the day was “far spent” before they began their meal, they at once take the long journey back to Jerusalem, find the eleven gathered together with others, and learn that the Lord had “appeared to Simon.” As this manifestation does not seem to have taken place before the two disciples began their journey, or they would certainly have mentioned it in their announcement to Jesus, it must have occurred while he was with them, and there-

¹ An apologetic writer states that Mary “could not mistake the voice when it spoke her name” (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 631). How was it, then, that the two disciples failed to recognise it during a long conversation?

fore he must have been in two places, miles apart, at or about the same time—a feature of the story which is explicable only by the assumption that the appearance to Peter was of a visionary character. Dr. Edersheim states that it was in the afternoon that the disciples left the city, and in the afternoon that Jesus appeared to Peter,¹ which would imply either that Jesus was in two places at once, or that the appearances were subjective. The Evangelist seems to have overlooked this difficulty; and it is one which is not removed, but only evaded, by the assumption that, as the resurrection was itself a miracle, we are justified in supposing that the phenomenon of a body being in two places at once presents no additional difficulty. Whether historical criticism, which necessarily rests upon the conviction of the continuity of the natural order, is justified in assuming at will breaches of that order which cannot possibly be proved to have taken place is a question which will be noticed hereafter. Strange to say, however, this appearance to Peter, although mentioned by Paul as the first that took place, is not recorded in the Gospels at all, except for the casual and self-contradictory reference by Luke. If Peter was in some sense the chief man among the Apostles, it would have been only appropriate that a manifestation should have been made specially to him, and that a distinct account of it should have been left. It is most surprising that, while we have accounts of appearances to much less important and responsible persons, we have no account of an appearance to Peter—except vague statements of *later* manifestations to all the disciples. These, however, cannot refer to an appearance to Peter alone, which took place while Cleopas and his

¹ *Life and Times of Jesus*, p. 633.

companion were either going to or returning from Emmaus. The doubtful character of the statement is heightened by the omission of Peter in his speech on the day of Pentecost to declare that any such manifestation had been made to him personally. Nor in the Epistles bearing his name is the occurrence related. This neglect to render explicit testimony to events of supreme importance is quite unaccountable on the assumption that they actually happened.

The statement that Jesus interpreted to the two disciples the "things concerning himself" in Moses and the prophets is also of a kind to cause astonishment to all who do not share the singular notions of the New Testament writers in reference to the Jewish scriptures. What are the "things concerning himself" is not stated, though it would have been of the utmost interest and importance to have had the authoritative views of Jesus on this subject. Evidently he accepted the current ideas as to the authorship of the Old Testament books, and it is probable, therefore, that he saw no reason to reject the popular methods of interpreting them. But the awkward fact remains that these methods were erroneous. It is true that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah appears to have a close application to many of the details of the last days of Jesus; but this and similar passages are considered by a large number of scholars to relate solely to a poetic personification of the Jewish people. Such a view seems to be borne out by the context, for it is an arbitrary proceeding to allege that "my servant Israel," referred to in the forty-second, forty-ninth, and fifty-second chapters of Isaiah, cannot be identical with the victim of the fifty-third chapter, when nothing is said to distinguish them. Some writers hold that the personage referred to in the latter passage was Jeremiah; others

that it was Zerubbabel; others that it is a prediction of Jesus; while the majority of modern critics regard it as relating to the ideal Israel. A passage thus confessedly obscure, a passage which may, for all we can tell, have had a known application to current events, cannot safely be regarded as a clear and definite prediction of anything then in the future. Nor can we be sure that incidents were not, when the Gospels came to be written down, made to correspond with passages in the Jewish scriptures. But the strange thing we have to notice is that this passage, often assumed to be unmistakably distinct in its terms, is never in the four Gospels quoted as applying to Jesus, either by himself or by the Evangelists. This is one of the inexplicable peculiarities of the Gospel writers. Not only do they fail to give a coherent account of some of the most important occurrences which it was their business to relate, but they neglect to apply to their avowed purpose the least irrelevant passage in the whole Jewish scriptures. It is in a high degree doubtful whether there is in these scriptures a single passage which beyond question applies, or was intended to apply, to Jesus. The texts adduced in this sense by orthodox writers are commonly interpreted in the most fanciful and unconvincing manner, sometimes in complete disregard of their obvious meaning. The supposed prophecies introduced by Matthew into the early chapters of his Gospel are among the most flagrant examples of misquotation in existence. Indeed, careful comparison will show that some of the Gospel misquotations are so worded that they must be considered intentional, though probably the writers were not conscious of any dishonesty.¹ Matthew's

¹ See *The Sling and the Stone*, by Rev. C. Voysey, for evidence (vol. vii., chap. 4).

handling of these prophecies, indeed, arouses the suspicion that some of the incidents related were in the first instance purely legendary, becoming afterwards, in virtue of a strong sub-conscious bias, accommodations to the supposed Old Testament predictions. Every prophecy of the Old Testament quoted in the New needs to be verified before it is assumed to be accurately applied, and in most cases no special knowledge is required to perceive how freely such passages are used in a sense different from that of the original.

One of the first things that strike a reader of the New Testament is that marvellous events are related quite as a matter of course, and without the least expression of wonder at their extraordinary character. Evidently the Gospel writers were so familiarised with the idea of miracle that a resurrection from the dead presented no such difficulty to them as it would present to us; and, not being aware that evidence of the truth of their statements was required, they took no trouble to obtain or furnish it. Intellectually they were children, and what Stevenson says about children applies to them and to the Apostles: "They are passionate after dreams and unconcerned about realities; speech is a difficult art not wholly learned; and there is nothing in their own tastes or purposes to teach them abstract truthfulness."¹

Evidence is the proving of certain facts which necessarily involve the truth of other facts of a character more or less similar. It is a display of the links of causation which unite them, and thus enables us to perceive their mutual relations. Evidence, therefore, which would be adequate to prove facts within the order of nature and human experience must obviously be inadequate to prove

¹ *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 164.

occurrences lying outside that order, their connection with which cannot be shown. But, without discussing the abstract question whether the known laws of nature can or cannot be superseded, we have to base our acceptance of any alleged event on the degree of evidence which can be adduced in its favour. The reasonable canon that the more unlikely an event the greater evidence it needs to support it is habitually ignored by writers who set out to prove the resurrection of Jesus. They tell us this is as well established as any other event in history. Supposing this to be so, how would it remove the objections to the credibility of the resurrection? That event, if it happened, was a supernatural event; the events with which it is compared are natural events, which require no evidence whatever to make them at least credible. A miracle is antecedently incredible because of the overwhelming presumption against it derived from a uniform experience of a different character. Any supernatural event, therefore, needs the support of evidence strong enough first to overcome the immense probability against it, and then to establish positive reasons for believing in its reality.

Can this be done by any human testimony? Probably not. The least evidence on which we ought to believe that a dead person returned to life is the evidence of our own senses. Even this would not be conclusive. There are thousands of instances in which persons' senses have deceived them, or in which they have reasoned erroneously with regard to what they have really seen. If a friend of known integrity informed us that he had seen a dead man come back to life, should we at once believe him? We should certainly not do so without careful inquiry. We should want to make sure that the man was beyond all question known to have died; that the

doctor had made no mistake (and it is certain that doctors have made such mistakes); that our informant was in sound health, of competent knowledge and understanding, and not subject to any illusion; and finally we should desire to see the resuscitated man ourselves, and hear his account of the matter. If these conditions could not be complied with, we should consider it more likely that our friend was mistaken than that an infraction of the universal law of death had taken place. All human testimony, being from a complex variety of causes liable to error, has to be discounted. And the testimony for past events is so commonly the outcome of inadequate knowledge that it can only be accepted subject to indefinite modifications.

It is said that the New Testament accounts furnish reasonably sufficient evidence of the reality of Christ's return to life. We are not sure that their statements can properly be termed evidence at all; but such evidence as they do give must at least be carefully examined before being accepted as proof of the event. The Gospels are compilations made by writers whose personalities, being unknown to us, afford no guarantee for the truth of their statements. They are characterised by numerous marks of carelessness and imperfect knowledge of the facts; they contain traces of mythical elements, and many indications that superstitious ideas actuated the minds of the writers. Such evidence would be insufficient to prove a natural fact which it was important that we should believe. To suppose, therefore, that it is sufficient to prove that Jesus returned to life after being put to death is out of the question.

What really happened on the first Easter dawn? Incredible as it may seem, no one knows, and, judging from the New Testament accounts, no one ever did know.

If anyone ever did know, the knowledge has not been handed down to later ages. For a long time, whether thirty, fifty, or a hundred years does not matter, it was left to oral tradition to pass on testimony of the most serious import. Can we be sure that in the process of transmission the original truth was in no way changed? In an age of almost universal ignorance and superstition, when the need and even the nature of evidence are unperceived, and literary standards do not exist, tradition simply means the memories of uneducated men, liable at every turn to exaggeration and error. Even when written records of the life of Jesus came into being very little trouble seems to have been taken to make them accurate and coherent; nor, indeed, did there exist in the first century a writer qualified to undertake such a task.

All four Gospels agree that Jesus rose from the dead. Here we have four independent witnesses to a statement of fact. The Apostle Paul, whose statements will be dealt with later, makes a fifth witness. If we include the rest of the Apostles, and also the women, we have about twenty persons who have, directly or indirectly, testified to the reality of the event.

Though at first greatly depressed by the untoward death of their Master, the ideas and feelings of the disciples underwent a rapid and complete transformation. Their beliefs, their characters, their aims, their whole lives, were changed. From gloom to joy, from despair to hope, from disappointment and sorrow to such buoyant confidence and zeal for the propagation of their new faith that they were ready to die and did die for it—what could have wrought this marvellous change but that which they believed and alleged: the veritable reappearance of their Master? Something wonderful

must have happened. What was that something? So fervent a belief must have had a solid basis, or it could not have arisen and endured. It is, we are told, for those who deny the resurrection to show what that basis was, if it was not a conviction, founded, as the Gospels state, on actual perception by the senses, that the disciples had seen Jesus alive after they had seen him put to death.

This looks like a fairly strong presumption, though it gives us little help in getting at the actual facts. Presumption, however, is not proof. And when we are told that a person rose from the dead it is proof, not presumption, that we require. The claim may be met by the counter and far stronger presumption derived from the uniform experience that all human beings die, and this can only be set aside by absolute proof that physically Jesus was not a human being. The Gospel writers have made one thing quite clear, and that is that they were satisfied with a very much weaker degree of proof than would convince persons living at the present time. Their belief must have had a basis, but it does not follow that their account of it is correct. That "something happened" by no means justifies the assumption that the "something" must have been a variation of the law of physical dissolution. It is true that the Gospels agree in asserting that Jesus was seen alive after his death. But a mere assertion cannot be accepted as proof. Did the fact come within the personal knowledge of the Gospel writers? If so, are they competent witnesses? It is not sufficient to say that, because they agree as to the event while differing in the manner of relating it, therefore the fact is established, and the conflicting details may be disregarded. If four known and trustworthy historians relate an incident, and differ only

in minor details, it is conceivable that the discrepancies may not seriously diminish the weight of their evidence; there would be a presumption that they were right in essentials, though wrong in accessories. But this principle cannot safely be applied to the Gospel records. We are not dealing with known and reliable historians. We are dealing with unknown writers, who, at unknown dates, in ages of ignorance and credulity, handed down to posterity traditions which originated we know not how or when, but which are undeniably saturated with belief in the miraculous. Independent evidence which might enable us to check the accuracy of these writers is almost wholly lacking. We know that their compilations are fragmentary and carelessly pieced together. We know that, in accordance with the custom of ancient times, words are sometimes put into the mouth of Jesus which he could not have uttered.¹ We know that, even if it were conceded that the accounts of the Evangelists are reliable in regard to natural events, this would not be the smallest proof of their accuracy in regard to supernatural events, for which stronger evidence is required. The narratives, for example, of the last supper of Jesus may be perfectly credible. But does this make credible the statement that 5,000 persons made a hearty meal on a quantity of food which would have formed a light lunch for a dozen of their number, and that after the banquet there was more food left than when it began?² We know, moreover, that several

¹ Matthew xi. 12, xviii. 17, xxiii. 35; John iii. 13. Probably the long discourses in the fourth Gospel should come under the same category. Writers who falsify their scriptures will from the same motive falsify facts. Paul, indeed, appears willing to lie for the glory of God (Romans iii. 7). Can we trust a man who thinks the cause of truth may be served by falsehood?

² Many modern critics hold that this narrative originated in a misapplication of a parable, the figurative language being afterwards understood

passages in which words are attributed to Jesus have been expunged from the Revised Version of the New Testament because they are not found in the oldest existing copies. If still earlier copies were found, can we be sure that no further excisions would be necessary? It is clear that the unknown compilers had not that regard for accuracy which is deemed necessary in the historical records of modern times. In view of these considerations, it is impossible to admit that the mere fact of the resurrection may be treated as proved and the doubtful details ignored. These doubtful details are part of the only evidence we have that the universal law of nature was set aside.

What was it, then, that changed the beliefs and lives of the followers of Jesus? Our imperfect records do not furnish us with a satisfactory explanation. But indications may be gathered which show that the conviction of the Messiahship of Jesus, strengthened by a fanciful interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, and probably combined with unexplained visionary experiences, led naturally to the belief that he had actually risen from the dead. It was this belief which was the proximate cause of their revived faith. But how came this belief to be so clear and strong? In attempting an examination of this question some digression will be advisable.

The fact of this remarkable revival of faith cannot be admitted without a certain degree of reserve. The only evidence we have that this revival took place is contained in the New Testament records, and these records leave

literally. If, as is implied in the fourth Gospel, bread was intended to typify spiritual truth which would not be exhausted by diffusion, the error may easily have arisen. Nor is the Old Testament without analogous suggestions, as in the story of the widow's "barrel of meal which wasted not" (1 Kings xvii. 16), and the passage in 2 Kings iv. 44, "And they did eat, and left thereof."

the facts in great obscurity. Our present Gospels are translated from copies of older documents, which may or may not have accurately embodied the early Christian tradition; we certainly cannot appeal to originals which do not exist, and the truth of which is pure matter of assumption. It is said that the truthfulness and good faith of the Gospel writers are amply testified by the documents as they have come down to us. Criticism may concede the sincerity of the Evangelists without admitting that it affords any proof of their competency as historians. On the contrary, the Gospels themselves furnish ample evidence that their compilers were ignorant and credulous men, whose statements of facts cannot be accepted without investigation. There are reasons for supposing that the spread of Christianity was not unusually rapid, and that the stories in the Book of Acts of wholesale conversions effected by the Apostles are not free from exaggeration.

The Gospel writers being totally unknown to us, except so far as the documents in question reveal their personalities, their sincerity can only be inferred from the accounts. This sincerity was obviously the outcome of their strong belief in the reality of their Master's reappearance, and we are at once thrown back on the grounds of their belief. As far as the writers themselves are concerned, these grounds are nowhere clearly stated. They do not claim to have been eye-witnesses; they do not write as eye-witnesses would naturally write. They simply put into writing—and that long after the event—the tradition which was commonly received among the first Christians. They would not dream of regarding miraculous occurrences as infractions of laws the mere existence of which was unsuspected. Thus their very good faith furnishes a presumption against

rather than in favour of their capacity as judicially-minded chroniclers. They would, without inquiry, accept mere reports as embodying actual facts, when greater intellectual enlightenment would have doubted or rejected such reports. Many incidents recorded in the Gospels, of which the alleged resurrection is the chief, clearly illustrate this tendency. The artless simplicity of unskilled writers is, indeed, very poor evidence of their competency as reporters. The narrative of the woman taken in adultery is related with the same air of good faith and circumstantial detail as the rest of the Gospel accounts; yet, as it is absent from the oldest manuscripts, its unhistorical character must be conceded. The same remark applies to the concluding verses of the second Gospel, and many other passages which have been rendered doubtful by critical investigation. If such passages are interpolations, how can we be sure that many more are not equally so?

The argument that the spread of Christianity was of such a character as to involve supernatural intervention is not well supported by the facts. The narratives to this effect in the Book of Acts have to be received with caution. For a considerable number of years the main body of Christ's followers were simply a reformed Jewish sect practising the rites and meeting in the synagogues of the Jewish Church. "Many thousands" of Jews who believed are referred to in Acts xxi. 20, but they were "*all zealous for the law.*" If they were zealous for the law, they clearly combined Christianity with Judaism. The process by which the new faith assumed a separate existence, and discarded the burden of the ceremonial law, appears to have gone on slowly, and, as it were, with reluctance. Peter, we are told, needed a heavenly vision to enable him to grasp the conception that persons

other than Jews would be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, although, according to the Gospels, he had been directed by Jesus to preach to "all nations." Twenty years after the crucifixion an agitation arose in the infant Church as to the terms of membership, though even then it appears to have related only to the admission of Gentile converts, the question whether Jewish Christians should conform to the Mosaic law not even being raised. It cannot, therefore, be denied that the conversion of "about 3,000 souls" on the Day of Pentecost was (if it took place) certainly not a conversion to Christianity as we understand it, but a conversion to Judaism, *plus* belief in the Messiahship and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, proselytes to Judaism were numerous about the close of the first century, and probably for many years previously. Graetz writes: "Jewish proselytes had to overcome immense difficulties.....Nevertheless, it is an extraordinary fact that during the half century after the destruction of the Jewish State there were everywhere conversions of heathens to Judaism, both in the East and in Asia Minor, but especially in Rome."¹ This writer states that the success of Christianity was in great part due to the facilities afforded by its parent faith. These facts do not at all correspond with the popular notion that an entirely new religion sprang into existence immediately after and in consequence of the assumed return of Jesus to life.

If the miracles which are said to have accompanied the first preaching of Christianity could be proved, its supernatural diffusion would have to be conceded. But to *assume* miracles, and then *assume* supernatural consequences from them, is not a legitimate method of

¹ *History of the Jews*, vol. ii., p. 387.

argument. It is merely using one miracle to prove another.¹ We must not bring in supernatural causes till we have exhausted natural causes, and, as knowledge of the facts of early Christianity has grown, it has been more clearly perceived that natural causes are sufficient to account for a progress which was not abnormally rapid. A variety of conditions favoured the diffusion of the new faith. There was the abandonment by the cultured few of the polytheistic conceptions of antiquity, combined with a moral reaction on the part of the masses dissatisfied with the practical results of those conceptions. There was a struggle for the mastery between many manifestations of the religious spirit, including the finer elements of paganism, the activity of the Mithraic religion, which long survived; the philosophic speculations of Plato, largely amalgamated with those of the Alexandrian school of Philo and others;² the ascetic practices of the Essenes, the ideas introduced into Western Asia by Buddhist missionaries, and the narrow zeal of the Jewish people. In its comparative purity and the simplicity and flexibility of its principles Christianity possessed a great advantage over its rivals, though there can be no doubt that it absorbed many of their peculiarities, combined them in a new religious synthesis, and so gave them fresh vitality. Nor must it be forgotten that the vast extension of the Roman Empire, the need of a universal religion which arose from the break-up of local faiths, and the dispersion into almost all its parts of the

¹ It is worth noting that the Evangelists did not regard miracles as peculiar to their own faith. Jesus is said to have recognised the power of others to perform them (Matt. xii. 27). Evidently they were a kind of public property.

² For fuller information on this subject see Professor Jowett's *On the Interpretation of Scripture*, and other essays, where the parallelisms between Philo and the New Testament are exhibited in detail.

people among whom the cult of Jesus originated, as well as the existence of communistic clubs and benefit societies, were also singularly favourable to the spread of Christianity. The Romans tolerated all religions as long as they were not considered inimical to the interests of the State, and, though this general tolerance was varied by outbreaks of persecution, these, while severe enough to stimulate, were not sufficient to destroy the new faith.

It is commonly taken for granted that the success of the Christian appeal was due exclusively to purity and rationality of doctrine. This was not the case. In times when the supernatural is believed in without the slightest question, imperfect moral conceptions are sure to be accepted upon its supposed authority. Even in the present day large numbers of persons, during popular "revivals" and in paroxysms of spiritual emotion, embrace religion out of dread of its threatenings rather than appreciation of its moral and intellectual truth. If, in times when the idea of endless punishment is practically abandoned as a superstition, it is still possible for conversion to originate in the dread of hell-fire, much more must this have been the case in times when the doctrine of hell was implicitly and fervently believed. Thus we find (and this is an idea which we wish to emphasise) that the impelling force of much religious earnestness is derived from a conception which, so far from being divinely true, is essentially false. Christianity took over and soon gave an appalling vividness and reality to the pagan doctrine of hell, and it seems undeniable that at least part of its early success was due to its dexterous incorporation of the elements of earlier faiths, and, that being so, its influence is less a proof of divine origin than of human adaptation. In addition it must be borne in mind that the idea of a

speedily approaching end of the world (an idea very prominent in the New Testament) appealed with irresistible force to the superstitions of the average believer.

With regard to the actual numbers of the primitive Christians nothing certain is known, and it is therefore impossible to form any reliable estimates. Even the express statements of ancient writers as to the growth of Christianity cannot be implicitly accepted. The following passage, quoted by Gibbon, will explain why. "There exists not," says Justin Martyr, "a people, whether Greek or barbarian, or any other race of men, by whatsoever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell under tents or wander about in covered waggons, among whom prayers are not offered up in the name of a crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things." "But," as Gibbon adds, "this splendid exaggeration, which even at present it would be extremely difficult to reconcile with the real state of mankind, can be considered only as the rash sally of a devout but careless writer, the measure of whose belief was regulated by that of his wishes."¹

In spite of the strenuous exertions of the Apostle Paul, without whom Christianity might never have been anything more than a reformed branch of Judaism, the Christians do not seem at any time prior to the reign of Constantine to have exceeded from three to five per cent. of the total population of the Roman Empire. "The most favourable calculation that can be deduced from the examples of Antioch and of Rome will not permit us to imagine that more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the Empire had enlisted themselves under the banner

¹ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. i., p. 376.

of the Cross before the important conversion of Constantine.”¹ The “conversion” of Constantine took place in c.e. 312, so that for almost the first three centuries of its career the new faith does not appear to have made such remarkable progress as to warrant the assumption that it was aided by any supernatural influence.

The Acts of the Apostles is popularly accepted as a faithful account of the beginnings of the Christian Church. Probably few competent scholars share this view, but its truth is assumed by the so-called Evangelical writers who still influence large numbers of impressionable minds.

An article by Professor Schmiedel in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* states that the Acts of the Apostles appeared during the early years of the second century, probably between the years 105 and 130 c.e. If a period of seventy or eighty years intervened between the events related and the written account, it would be very remarkable if the book were free from error. Detailed examination of its contents would here be out of place; we can but call attention to two or three points which militate against its historical accuracy.

Theologians almost unanimously admit that the reference in the fifth chapter to the revolt of Theudas involves a chronological error of about ten years. The speech in which it is said to have occurred “before these days” was delivered (if delivered at all) in the year 34. The revolt took place in the year 44. “Before these days” may well mean before the writer compiled his book; it cannot mean before a speech delivered ten years earlier than the insurrection. Does not the slip betray the

¹ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. 377.

later hand? Is not the speech "put into the mouth" of the speaker?

In the eleventh chapter of Genesis we have a legendary account of the confusion of tongues at Babel. In the second chapter of Acts we find an analogous incident, which suggests the possibility of having been derived from the ancient tradition. In the one case a common language is under supernatural influence forgotten, while new languages appear to be instantaneously formed. In the other case, men are said to have been under the same influence endowed in a moment with the power of speaking in a number of languages with which they had previously not been acquainted. Is there no trace of doctrinal prepossession in the later narrative? The account exhibits many improbabilities, which, in the entire absence of evidence, certainly do not command, or even justify, a ready assent. We need not insist on the obvious inaccuracy that men from "every nation under heaven" were then present in Jerusalem; but it is surely unreasonable to suppose that the whole number (especially as it is said that most of them were Jews) were unfamiliar with the language then spoken in the city. If they were not, for what purpose was the supposed miracle wrought?

It is not possible to rely upon the literal accuracy of the speeches attributed to Peter. Verbatim reporting was unknown at the time, and, as the book was compiled many years afterwards, we are warranted in maintaining that the speeches are simply those free renderings of what was thought to have been uttered in which the historians of antiquity indulged. The account given by Peter of the death of Judas is very different from the account in the first Gospel. The Apostle states that the traitor's end was foretold by the Holy Ghost, by the

mouth of David. Persons who believe without examination would naturally assume that this reference is accurate, whereas there is not in the whole of the Old Testament a single prophecy to this effect.

Another incident may be mentioned which involves supernatural intervention, and that of a character so extraordinary that one can but marvel at its immoral implication being totally unperceived by the writer. We allude to the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the fifth chapter of the Book of Acts. Let the reader bear in mind that this account is given with the same simple good faith and circumstantial air common to the New Testament narratives in general, and then assert, if he can, that the absence of literary artifice affords the smallest proof of accuracy in statement. Ananias had presumably (though it is not so stated) agreed to make over the whole of his property for the benefit of the community of which he was a member, but he had a perfect right to retain (as he is said to have done) a portion for his own use, and this right is expressly recognised by the Apostle Peter. In depriving himself of even part of his possessions for the good of others, Ananias was to that extent benefiting his fellow-men and performing a virtuous action. His guilt lay solely in his deceitful violation of an honourable understanding. Yet for this offence—an offence so comparatively trivial that no civilised court of justice would take cognisance of it—his meritorious action is ruthlessly ignored, and Ananias is said to have been instantly put to death by divine judgment. No trial was vouchsafed, no opportunity given of defending himself. He was simply murdered, without warning or remonstrance, or the chance of repentance and reformation being afforded. It would be useless to reply that Ananias

probably suffered violent agitation, and died from failure of the heart, for the implication that his death was due to the anger of God is unmistakably clear. If this is divine justice, we can only be thankful that our own human justice is infinitely milder. The story goes on to relate that the wife of Ananias, on being, about three hours later, questioned on the subject, and being in ignorance of what had happened, declares falsely that nothing had been retained. She, too, immediately falls dead in the same sudden and mysterious manner. Her self-constituted judge is not satisfied with one death, but is so confident of the issue that he even threatens her *in advance* with the tragic fate of her husband. Not a trace of sorrow or commiseration on Peter's part for the wretched offenders appears in this callously immoral story. Christian commentators have so little perceived its objectionable features as to accept it as an undoubted example of God's dealings with mankind, and have with lavish sophistry defended the accuracy of the account. But the question, Is it true? cannot be evaded. Surely it is far more honest and far more religious to reject than to believe it.

“Great fear came upon the whole Church, and upon all that heard these things” (Acts v. 11). This is not to be wondered at. If people believed in a God ready at any moment to punish moral delinquencies with immediate death, it would be surprising if something like a “reign of terror” did not set in. It has been already remarked that a superstitious dread of divine judgments was an important factor in the growth of Christianity. Other passages in the Book of Acts confirm this view: “Fear came upon every soul” (chap. ii. 43); “Great fear came upon all that heard” of the death of Ananias (chap. v. 5). When Peter charged the people with being

particeps criminis in the crucifixion of Jesus, "they were pricked in the heart," and inquired what they should do, though the responsibility of these particular persons is not shown. His exhortations were the means of adding to the community "that day about 3,000 souls," a number which may fairly be deemed exaggerated when we read in the fifth chapter the following strange contradiction: "And by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. *But of the rest durst no man join himself to them*: howbeit the people magnified them; and believers *were the more added* to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."

In view of the above incidents it is impossible to treat the Acts of the Apostles as sober and reliable history. Doubtless it embodies valuable traditions; but its apologetic tendencies, its contradictions and exaggerations, its reliance on supposed prophecies, its occasionally imperfect moral conceptions, and its excessive supernaturalism, prevent us from accepting it as an inspired, or even an accurate, account of the events with which it deals.

CHAPTER II.

THE STATEMENTS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

PAUL THE APOSTLE was converted to the Christian faith shortly after the death of Jesus, and if he really wrote the Epistles bearing his name his testimony is important. What is the nature and worth of that testimony?

We shall assume the genuineness of the well-known passage about the resurrection of Jesus in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, merely remarking that this is not certain, but doubtful. At least one critic has contended that the passage is an "obvious forgery";¹ and, while this may be considered an extreme view, the admission by many Christian advocates that Paul's Epistles have been interpolated precludes acceptance of their statements as final.

The first point to notice in Paul's declaration is the statement that he "received" his knowledge of the resurrection. From whom, by what means, on what authority, or at what time and place he received it, is not clear, though he does elsewhere state that it was given to him by "revelation" from God direct.² This is a claim which it is impossible to verify, and we are not prepared to admit that a dead person can communicate with a living one. Paul emphatically declares

¹ Mr. J. M. Robertson, *Studies in Religious Fallacy*, pp. 150, 172, 173. Professor Schmidt states that this view is also held by Straatman, a German critic (*The Prophet of Nazareth*, p. 395). Professor Stech, of Berne, and the Dutch theologians Pierson, Meyboom, Loman, Matthes, etc., also oppose the traditional view as to the authorship of the Epistles.

² Galatians i. 15, 16.

that the other Apostles "imparted nothing" to him (Galatians ii. 6), another statement to which it is not easy to give implicit credence, in view of his claim that a knowledge of the last supper was also given to him by revelation, when he must have derived it from the current belief. We may add that, as Paul is admitted to be no authority for the life of Jesus, he can hardly be a good authority for his supposed return to life.

Judging from Paul's writings, we cannot suppose that he was a man who either would or could distinguish carefully between the operations of his own consciousness and experiences believed to have been supernaturally originated. On this point Dr. Percy Gardner says: "It is easy to prove from the acknowledged writings of St. Paul that he had no sufficient perception of the distinction between that which is within and that which is without, between the ethical and the physical" (*Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 10). It was then, and is still,¹ a characteristic of the Hebrew mind to attribute to an immediate action of divine power that for which we should at once assume the sufficiency of natural causes. This vagueness of statement common to all the New Testament writers, who had little idea that they were writing for distant ages, is a regrettable feature in an author who desires his assertions to be accepted, and claims divine authority for his communications. We cannot verify Paul's statements, but it seems evident that his knowledge was based partly on the Christian tradition then current, and partly on psychological experiences peculiar to himself.

¹ The following nineteenth-century incident is mentioned in Dr. Abbot's *Through Nature to Christ*. Some Jews of an Eastern village where an accidental fire had occurred appealed for aid to Sir Moses Montefiore, telling him that "fire had come down from heaven" and destroyed their homes.

Paul specifies at least the nature of the communication he had received. This was, firstly, that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures"—*i.e.*, the Old Testament writings. The reference is to passages in the Psalms, and the books of Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah. These passages do not contain a single clear and unmistakable prediction of the death or resurrection of Jesus, such as Paul evidently assumes. Modern criticism has thrown so much light on the meaning of the Jewish sacred writings that the once popular methods of interpretation which saw prophetic references to Christ in almost every page have become no longer tenable. Such methods satisfied the early Christians, but they are felt by many modern scholars to be misleading. These inconclusive "prophecies" are adduced in scores of places in the New Testament, and a large number of them, those in the first Gospel especially, embody interpretations which are not merely fanciful, but erroneous. The expression "Christ died for our sins" is a deduction of Paul rather than part of the authentic teaching of Jesus—a deduction, moreover, which it certainly needed no "revelation" to enable Paul to make. And it implies a theological doctrine foreign to the simple ethics of the founder of Christianity. If any theory of the Atonement is true, it is unaccountable that the only real authority on the subject should have omitted to proclaim it in his own public preaching to those whom it concerned.

Paul next states that Christ "hath been raised on the third day," again "according to the scriptures," an assertion the erroneous character of which will appear by comparison with the passages on which he seems to rely, though he does not quote them.

The Apostle, however, seems to have an idea that some evidence of the resurrection is needed. Here is the

evidence. Christ “appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the Apostles; and, last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also.”

This passage, which Paul seems to regard as conclusive, implies that the first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection was to Peter alone. Do the Gospels bear this out? By no means. Two of them relate that the first appearance was to the women, the third relates that the first appearance was to Cleopas and his companion, while the remaining Gospel relates, in its genuine part, no appearance at all. It is true that Luke incidentally remarks on an appearance to Peter having taken place; but as this would seem to have been while Jesus was in another place, it tells distinctly in favour of its visionary character.

Then Jesus “appeared to the twelve.” The Gospels nowhere state that he appeared to the twelve. That number included Judas Iscariot, and he did not remain among the faithful disciples. Matthias was, of course, not yet chosen. John records two appearances to the disciples, the first when ten were present, the second when eleven were present.

Paul’s next statement is that Jesus “appeared to above five hundred brethren at once.” This incident also is unconfirmed by the Gospels. Many apologists have considered that it relates to the appearance of Jesus “on a mountain” in Galilee, recorded in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew. As this account distinctly states that the appearance was to the eleven, without mentioning any other persons, the supposition is purely arbitrary, and illustrates the straits to which apologetic writers are reduced in their efforts towards impossible

reconciliations. One serious objection to Paul's statement arises from the difficulty of believing that there were so soon after the death of Jesus as many as 500 disciples in existence, since the total number gathered together in Jerusalem some weeks later is given as about 120. The possibility, at least, of 500 Galilean disciples being known to exist within a few days of the crucifixion may be admitted, though it is far from easy to suppose that out of the poor and ignorant multitudes who followed Jesus for the sake (largely) of material benefits so considerable a number actuated by a common faith could at that time have been found, or that they would have been termed "brethren," or that they could have been got together, apparently without previous notice, in the short time that had elapsed, or that they would have had the privilege of beholding a supernatural manifestation, or that, if they did, they should have rendered no testimony to it. It must, we think, be admitted that the occurrence intimated by Paul cannot be identified with that described by Matthew, and, if that be so, we cannot find the slightest confirmation of it in the Gospel records.¹ Nothing could be more perplexing and unsatisfactory than these vague references of the New Testament writers to events of transcendent importance. We are told by Matthew of "a mountain," without knowing where it was. Mark leaves us before an empty sepulchre. Luke virtually excludes the forty days which he elsewhere alleges. John gives us appearances of which no other writer knows anything. And the statements of Paul, the earliest witness, are entirely

¹ The incident is, by some writers, identified with the ascension, but on grounds which appear to us insufficient. Others think it may have been confused with the Pentecost narrative. Possibly it is merely Paul's figurative way of expressing the apprehension by the whole body of believers of what was to them a revelation from heaven.

uncorroborated by the writers who purport to give a formal record of the facts. Paul refers in the most casual manner to 500 witnesses, of whom more than half were living when he wrote; yet he does not state who they were, how and where they could be found, what it was they saw, the nature of their testimony, or whether it was rendered to others—in fact, he relates nothing of the slightest service to later times. All details of time, place, circumstances are ignored. Such laxity in the relation of events alleged to be supernatural, and therefore specially needing attestation, is surely unparalleled in history.

Paul goes on to say that Jesus then appeared to James. Again we have no record in the Gospels of this appearance. Nor does Paul specify which James he refers to. There were three men of this name in the Church—the brother of Jesus, the brother of John (whom Herod put to death), and the son of Alphaeus. If the James referred to by Paul was he who presided over the meeting at Jerusalem, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, and if he wrote the Epistle of James, his omission to mention the appearance to himself is quite unintelligible. If such an appearance took place, it was the most important affirmation James could make. Yet he says not a word about it. Is it suggested that the fact was so well known that it was not necessary for him to declare it? Why, then, did Paul repeatedly declare the resurrection when he never saw Jesus at all, except in a doubtful vision? We may admit that the resurrection was readily, and without evidence, believed in; but no proof of it as a fact has come down to us. The suggestion is nothing more than a wholly unwarranted inference. That a person may be assumed to possess knowledge which he never claims is a novel method of proving a supernatural

occurrence to future ages. James's negative testimony has greater weight than that of another person given on his behalf and without a word of confirmation.

The appearance to "all the Apostles" does not require detailed notice. It cannot be clearly identified with any manifestation recorded in the Gospels, unless it be that in John xx. 26-29, and appears to imply a distinction between "all the Apostles" and "the twelve," which is rather perplexing. Who were "all the Apostles"?

The last appearance mentioned by Paul is that to himself, and this is said to have been "as unto one born out of due time." As the marginal reading of this obscure expression is "an abortive," it implies that the perception was of an abnormal kind. The mystical tendency which in the New Testament writers leads to such extraordinary vagueness of statement is here very marked. Precisely where rigid accuracy and perfect clearness are requisite, Paul's words are most obscure. As there is no record of his having met Jesus prior to the alleged resurrection, the reference is generally admitted to be to one of those "visions" which are so common in the Christian records, and which were apparently in those times considered as perfectly satisfactory evidence of matters of fact. Paul gives no further account of this experience, unless the passage in 2 Cor. xii. relates to it, though this is denied by many theologians: "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago (whether in the body I know not; or whether out of the body I know not: God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or apart from the body I know not: God knoweth), how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for

a man to utter." None but a mind of a peculiarly superstitious bent can regard this strange passage as affording the smallest approach to evidence of an actual appearance of Jesus. To any other, Paul's inability to tell whether he was "in the body" or not deprives it of all evidential value, while his expression, "On behalf of such a one will I glory; but on mine own behalf I will not glory," marks a distinction between himself and the visionary which renders it doubtful whether he was referring to an experience of his own.

It will be noticed that Paul merely catalogues certain appearances, his knowledge of which must have been derived from tradition, and that in a form which differed materially from the several traditions embodied in the Gospels. In the opinion of Weizsäcker, "the events at the grave itself form the central point on which everything else turns."¹ He adds, referring to Paul's knowledge of the resurrection, "the circumstance that he passes over the events at the grave is striking, if only because he has just mentioned the burial, but chiefly because they would have served his purpose best. In the proof which he undertakes so earnestly and carries out with such precision the absence of the first and most important link is in the highest degree suspicious. The only possible explanation is that the Apostle was ignorant of its existence. And this is important. For Paul's knowledge of these things must have come from the heads of the primitive Church. Therefore it is the primitive Church itself that was ignorant of any such tradition. And, still further, this tradition is directly negated by the fact that, among the Christophanies recorded by Paul, that of Peter is absolutely the first. If

¹ *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, vol. i., p. 5.

the series of appearances which prove the resurrection began with Peter's experience, those at the grave which exclude Peter cannot have preceded it."¹

It should be added that the sense in which Paul uses the word "appeared" is nowhere defined by him,² though, as the same term covers his own experience and that of others, it implies their similarity. And the subjective element in the former is very pronounced.

To make up for the remarkable omission of any data by which Paul's own accounts can be tested, we have, in the Book of Acts, no less than three narratives of Paul's conversion. These narratives were written or compiled, not by Paul himself, but by someone else. Two of them purport to be reports of speeches by Paul, though we have no guarantee, or even presumption, that they are accurate. The details of these accounts are, of course, contradictory, though not sufficiently so to enable us to say that there is no basis of truth in them. But what that basis was is a matter on which the utmost variety of opinion prevails among Christian scholars—a clear enough proof that nothing like certainty exists. In one account³ we are told that the people with Paul heard the voice which addressed him. If they did, no sworn testimony of the fact appears to have been furnished to the governor of Damascus or anybody else. We do not know who these people were, nor whether they had any testimony to give. When, on reading the second account,⁴ we find Paul stating that his companions did *not* hear the voice, our perplexity is increased. The third account,⁵ also in a speech of Paul, makes neither of these statements.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Professor G. H. Gilbert states that the Greek word translated "appeared" is only used of spiritual appearances (*Student's Life of Paul*, p. 29-30).

³ Acts ix. 7.

⁴ Acts xxii. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

The point is not altogether trifling ; for, if articulate words were heard by other persons besides Paul, they could have borne witness to them. If they heard no words, the probability of the account having originated in purely subjective experiences is greatly heightened.¹ If the passage in 2 Cor. xii. relates to this incident, we have the admission that Paul himself could not tell whether it was real or imaginary. It is manifest that such a mind, passing through a vivid emotional experience, would be certain to look upon it as supernatural where we should regard it as a natural and inevitable result of prior conditions. And a writer like the author of the Acts would be equally certain to increase rather than diminish the supernatural element in the tradition with which he was dealing.

There is a further discrepancy. The first of Paul's speeches introduces Ananias, who instructs and directs him. The second speech omits all reference to Ananias, and puts into the mouth of Jesus a speech which is absent from the other discourse, though the substance of it is attributed to Jesus in a later manifestation or vision at Jerusalem. In all three of these narratives in Acts the words said to have been uttered by Jesus are different. No two of the accounts agree. Nor in Paul's own epistle is this mysterious Ananias so much as mentioned—a thing surely incredible if he rendered to Paul the important services related in Acts. Indeed, the Apostle's language in Gal. i. 16 expressly repudiates the historical account, for he says : “Immediately, *I conferred not with flesh and blood*: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me.” Compare this with the statement in the ninth chapter of Acts, where it is said

¹ Cp. John xii. 29, where a similar uncertainty exists among the bystanders.

that, after preaching at Damascus for "many days" (a term which cannot easily be expanded into the "three years" which, according to Gal. i. 18, elapsed before he went to Jerusalem), Paul repaired to the latter city and "assayed to join himself to the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles;and he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem." More than this: Paul not only declares that, on the visit in question, he did not associate with the Apostles as a body, and that he was after that visit still "unknown by face to the churches" of Judea, but that it was fourteen years later before he again went to Jerusalem. So that the friendly association related in Acts must be postponed for seventeen (or fourteen) years after Paul's conversion. Is it possible that the Jerusalem Christians should have doubted that Paul was a disciple of the new faith, after he had been preaching it successfully for seventeen or fourteen or even three years? Paul's mission, in fact, seems to have been almost entirely independent of that of the original Apostles. While they conformed to the Mosaic law, he went about subverting it. How did Paul arrive at this very different conception? Perhaps Philo and the book of Enoch supply the answer. If these accounts are not contradictory, we may as well say that contradictions do not exist. The writer of Acts says that Paul remained many days at Damascus preaching immediately after his conversion, and so successfully that the Jews sought to kill him, and he was forced to escape to Jerusalem under cover of night. Paul's own solemn declaration "before God" is that immediately after his conversion he went into Arabia, returned to Damascus, and did not go to Jerusalem at all for three years. If the writer of Acts is correct in saying that the

Jews were seeking to kill Paul, it was madness for him to return to Damascus; but as, on every ground, his own narrative is likely to be the more accurate, the details in Acts may be regarded as the product of pious imagination.

During his short visit to Jerusalem Paul stayed with Peter fifteen days, during which time he also saw "James, the Lord's brother." Of what passed at their interviews Paul gives no particulars whatever. Their substantial agreement in regard to the resurrection may fairly be inferred from the absence of any statement to the contrary. But beyond inference we cannot go. If Peter had seen the risen Jesus in bodily form, while Paul had only beheld him in a vision, their agreement could hardly have been complete. It is more likely to have been complete if Peter's experience also had been of a visionary character, and this is what many scholars now hold to have been the case. But it is a feasible supposition that neither Apostle defined the sense in which he understood the resurrection, or even broached a matter the truth of which each took for granted. In those days no one was likely to become a disciple at all unless he believed that Jesus rose from the dead, and Peter was not likely to question an assurance by Paul that he had some years before "seen" Jesus. An assurance of a divine revelation, a mysterious vision, or, best of all, a prophecy,¹ was quite sufficient to convince Peter, just as his account of his vision at Joppa is said to have at once convinced his fellow Apostles that new views of truth had been revealed to him. To such men a scientific explanation would have been more fantastic than the account of a trance or a dream. Quite probably

¹ Cp. 2 Peter i. 19, which (though in a doubtful epistle) makes prediction better evidence than the physical senses.

Paul related his experiences, but quite as probably the subject was not further discussed. The relation of Paul's conception of the Gospel to the Mosaic law was more likely to have been the chief topic of conversation. The general and purely inferential agreement of the Apostles, however, is twisted by some writers into "direct evidence" of the specific doctrine of the resurrection. "We cannot err," says the Rev. C. A. Row, "in asserting that we have here the direct testimony of these two men (Peter and James) that they had seen the risen Jesus. It follows, therefore, that the belief in the Resurrection was that on which the Church was reconstructed immediately after the crucifixion."¹ Now, because records which are exceedingly sketchy, and almost invariably fail to supply just the particulars that are most needed, do not say that Peter and James disagreed with Paul, we are hardly entitled to assume that their views must have coincided with his on every subject they discussed, and even upon a subject which they may not have discussed at all. We can only assume that they agreed because Paul does not say they differed. Assumptions are often useful, but it is possible to have an overdose of them. And the student of apologetics usually gets it.

In this matter Mr. Row seems to be under a misapprehension. Testimony consists of a solemn declaration or affirmation by a known witness for the purpose of proving a fact. If the affirmation is made to ourselves, it is direct testimony. If it is made to others and by them reported to us, it is indirect testimony. If the affirmation has been made by a person long since dead, it may be treated as direct testimony if placed on record by

¹ *Popular Objections to Revealed Truth*, p. 242.

the person himself, and that circumstance attested by others then present, the date, place, and means of identification being furnished, and the record handed down in its integrity to later times. In such a case, as in the case of a will, the attestation becomes important. If these details are not supplied, our acceptance of the testimony is necessarily dependent on the accuracy of those who transmit it. And if these persons are themselves unknown to history, if their authorship of the records ascribed to them is likewise doubtful, it is quite impossible to be sure that we possess the evidence of the original witness. In every respect the New Testament accounts fail to comply with these conditions, the necessary attestation in particular being wholly lacking. The original witnesses are not known. Their testimony, if there ever was any, appears never to have been formally recorded, and we do not know of what it consisted. Even its reporters are not known. Nor can we tell when, where, and under what circumstances the existing accounts were first put into writing, because their original sources are lost. The plain man can see that in such a case as this the possibilities of error are almost without limit. Critically regarded, the whole of the New Testament statements concerning the resurrection afford but a low degree of indirect evidence. Even to those of Paul the remark applies, since we cannot prove the genuineness of every sentence contained in his writings.

This indirect testimony contains references to other persons who, it is inferred, agreed with the writers, but who left no statements of their own. And this still feebler degree of indirect evidence is termed by a cultured apologist "direct testimony." So exaggerated a claim can but be emphatically repudiated. Testimony

cannot possibly be direct when it comes through a medium other than that of the original witness, the medium being uncertain, and the substance of the testimony itself unknown.

Not only do Paul's own words imply that he did not begin to preach immediately after his conversion, but he relates a singular incident which adds greatly to the suspicion he casts upon the account in Acts. Seventeen years after his conversion he went again to Jerusalem. What was his object? He went there in order to make sure that, after all that lapse of time, he had not been preaching an erroneous version of the Gospel! This would be simply incredible if we had not the Apostle's own assurance that it was so. On his previous visit, three years after his conversion, he had stayed fifteen days with Peter, seeing no one else but James. Fifteen days would seem to have been ample time in which to obtain all the necessary facts from Peter and James, yet fourteen years later Paul seems to have thought his divinely revealed information might have been inadequate. "I went up by revelation; and I laid before them the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately before them who were of repute, *lest by any means I should be running or had run in vain.*"¹ Here we have not merely a significant admission that doubts had arisen in Paul's mind concerning the nature of his mission, but the still more extraordinary fact that Paul consulted the other Apostles "*by revelation*" in order to get the accuracy of his previous revelation confirmed. He emphatically asserts that he did not receive "from man" the Gospel which he preached, but that "it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ";² and that, having received

¹ Gal. ii. 2. Christian apologists very seldom quote this passage.

² Gal. i. 12.

it, he "conferred not with flesh and blood."¹ Why, then, did he think it advisable to "confer with flesh and blood" many years later, and why should a second revelation cast doubt upon the sufficiency of the first? This passage makes it clear that with Paul and minds of similar bent "a revelation" means what we should term a "change of mind," the climax of a normal process of reflection.

It should be noted that, according to the narrative in Acts, Ananias received his instructions regarding Paul in a manner similar to that in which the Apostle received his "revelations." "The Lord said unto him *in a vision*: Ananias."² Then follows a dialogue which can only be pronounced an absurdity. Ananias, in the precise style of several of the dialogues between God and man recorded in the Old Testament, actually ventures to argue with the Lord about the express command given to him, and it is only after a fuller explanation of his duty that he agrees to fulfil it. This is strong indirect evidence that such visions were purely subjective. No religious man, conscious of receiving a divine command, would at that moment be so self-willed as to dispute it. But any man conscious of a fresh impression arising in his mind would adopt it slowly and reluctantly if it were opposed to his previous convictions. The supernatural element in these impressions of Paul, Ananias, and others, is simply the mode in which the Jewish mind at that time conceived such experiences to originate.

A perplexing feature about Ananias is that, while in the ninth chapter of Acts he is described as a "disciple," Paul refers to him in the twenty-second chapter as "a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all

¹ Gal. i. 16.

² Acts ix. 10.

the Jews" of Damascus. We cannot tell whether he was a Christian or a Jew, or a compound of both. If a Christian, able to instruct the new convert, and divinely selected for the purpose, it is strange that he should have been in favour with persons who in a few days were so furiously angry with another convert as to seek to kill him. And if Ananias conformed to the Jewish law, he was not a Christian of Paul's type. It may further be asked what was the object of Ananias being chosen to give Paul directions as to his preaching when Paul himself declares that his directions came from Jesus himself? Why was the intervention of "flesh and blood" made necessary to Paul's receiving his sight and becoming "filled with the Holy Ghost"? If Paul was miraculously converted, why was he deprived of sight for three days? Shall we be told that these things are mysteries, on which we have not been vouchsafed complete enlightenment? Surely no reasonable person can deny that the probability of legend is enormously greater than the probability that these superfluous miracles actually occurred. Paul's omission to say in his epistles anything about Ananias strengthens the presumption that whatever truth there may be in the account has become distorted by legendary influences. Such a presumption is increased by the peculiarity that although, in the first and second accounts of Paul's conversion as recorded in Acts, he is directed to go into Damascus and there receive instructions, these instructions are, according to the third account, given him on the spot by Jesus himself. What is one to make of such hopelessly incoherent stories? The most sophisticated ingenuity cannot convert them into sound evidence of a supernatural occurrence. They are merely the *à priori* traditional explanation of Paul's extraordinary change.

A further point regarding the twenty-second chapter remains to be noticed. Paul has a "trance" in the Temple at Jerusalem, in which he "saw" Jesus, who directs him to leave the city speedily, because the people will not receive his testimony. If his testimony had no better foundation than trances and visions, the reluctance of the inhabitants can be readily understood. This, however, makes it the less easy to account for the remarkable success of Peter's preaching a year or two earlier. If the Jews were inflexibly hostile to Paul, how did Peter, if his Christianity was the same as Paul's, manage to convert 3,000 persons in one day? And these persons were for the most part not inhabitants of Jerusalem, but persons living among Gentile communities, and, therefore, precisely the kind of people to whom Paul was likely to be a more successful missionary than Peter. No doubt the latter's converts did not remain permanently in the capital, but, as it usually contained large numbers of strangers, it is highly perplexing to read that Paul was ordered to leave the city on the ground that his mission there would meet with nothing but failure. The probability that this account of Paul's trance is legendary becomes greater when we notice that the instructions alleged to have been given him are nothing more than a repetition of those which, according to the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts, he had already received at the moment of his conversion. Christian apologists say very little about this trance; but it seems to throw some light on the whole subject. Here we have a record of Jesus appearing and speaking to Paul, and of Paul's reply—something of a remonstrance, of course. Clearly the writer sees no improbability in the incident being real, though at the same time taking place only in a "trance." Probably

the subjective and the objective are similarly mixed in the resurrection stories, in spite of the term "trance" not being applied to them. It is impossible to see in this narrative anything more than the record of a conviction formed by Paul that his version of the Gospel (which did not in all respects harmonise with that of the original Apostles) was likely to meet with greater success among the Gentiles than in the centre of Jewish orthodoxy. The precise value of these accounts in Acts may be difficult to ascertain, but it is obvious that their truth is rendered additionally doubtful by the subject of them having omitted to mention the circumstances they relate. That some reasons must have existed for the change which converted a bitter opponent of the new faith into its most active and successful missionary is certain, unless we are to regard Paul as a mythical figure altogether. The difficulty is to determine what those reasons were. The accounts are so strangely imperfect and contradictory that we have not the material from which an entirely satisfactory conclusion can be formed. An attempt, however, to account for the phenomenon of Paul's conversion as a natural event, resulting from the inevitable conditions of his environment and personality, will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

PAUL'S CONVERSION

MANY difficulties present themselves when we try to ascertain the actual facts of Paul's conversion. Not only are the records extremely scanty and very unreliable, but the mental tendencies prevalent in those remote times were in some respects quite alien to those which form the necessary conditions of modern thought. In the first century of the Christian era the world was very small. Its spherical form was unsuspected; its true position as one of many planets revolving round a central sun was unknown. Heaven was believed to be a little way above the clouds; hell was a locality lying under the surface of the earth. The conception of an inflexible natural order had not been formulated; all things were supposed to be under the immediate supervision of unseen agencies. God was assumed to hold familiar intercourse with man, whose mental operations he frequently directed. The air was peopled with spirits, good and evil; to the Jews the most elementary ideas of modern science were unknown. No distinction between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural, spiritual and material, was known to exist; nor any idea that it could exist. Clear conceptions of personality had not been formed. Disease, instead of being traced to neglect of the laws of health, was regarded as due to the agency of demons, who could be driven out only by exorcisms, prayer, and fasting.¹ Prayer, indeed, was a power by

¹ Matt. xvii. 21.

means of which mighty results could be brought about, not only in mind and character, but in the phenomena of the material world.¹ The idea prevailed that moral purity carried with it command over evil spirits. Unhesitating credence was given to the dreams and visions in which God was supposed to reveal his designs. Legend was accepted as history; evidence of a fact was seldom considered necessary; religious truth was arrived at less by individual thought than on authoritative assertion. Faith was the supreme factor, Reason an almost unknown quantity.

Between such mental conditions and those of our own time the dissimilarity is so great as to render it difficult for the later age to understand the earlier. Precisely the reverse is very commonly assumed. There is no reason to suppose that the mind of Paul did not share the imperfect knowledge and the superstitious tendencies of his epoch. While his writings show that he sometimes rose beyond them, and reveal a remarkable intensity and purity of religious faith, combined with unusual powers of intellect, they also make it clear that he was unable to shake off the influence of current conceptions. Great as he was, his reason was dominated by an imperious faith, which put theories in the place of facts, and absorbed the material in the spiritual aspects of life. Had his personality been different, his influence would have been less. His enthusiastic devotion to the cause of Christianity might never have existed had he been able to sift evidence with scientific impartiality. Clearly temperament had much to do with his religious faith. "If St. Paul had not been a very zealous Pharisee, he would have been a colder Christian."²

¹ Matt. xvii. 20.

² Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 57.

The account of Paul's miraculous conversion is contained in a book which, as we have seen, is not a trustworthy record of facts. This book is not known to have existed until the first quarter of the second century; consequently there is a gap of nearly a hundred years between the event in question and the record of it. To expect us to believe that no legendary elements were during all that time added to the original tradition is to ask the modern world to revert to mediæval credulity. So far from the account being confirmed by Paul himself, the Apostle's own writings make no mention of the occurrence, but merely refer to visions, which the later writer appears to have expanded into a quasi-historical relation. The three accounts contained in the ninth, twenty-second, and twenty-sixth chapters of Acts need not be reproduced in full; but for the purposes of argument we will for the moment assume the truth of their main features.

Paul, while actively persecuting the followers of Jesus,¹ is suddenly and completely turned from his purpose by an audible manifestation of the risen Messiah. A great light shone from heaven; he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He was directed to go into the city of Damascus, where he should be told what he was to do. Blinded by the heavenly radiance, he was led into the city, and was visited by Ananias, of whom nothing else is known. Not one of the accounts states that Paul saw Jesus, while Paul himself emphatically declares that he did so—though not necessarily on this occasion.

Perplexing as are the contradictions of these stories, one

¹ It seems unlikely that such a persecution would have been permitted by the Roman authorities.

of the most important being that in two of the accounts Paul's instructions come afterwards from Ananias, while the third alleges they came at the time from Jesus himself,¹ it is yet conceivable that they enshrine a germ of truth. What is that truth? We will attempt to outline, necessarily in an imperfect way from want of materials, what many scholars now consider to have been the natural and most intelligible process of Paul's conversion. In doing so we will avail ourselves of the very able and judicious *Natural History of the Christian Religion*, by Mr. W. Mackintosh, in which a detailed examination of the subject is contained.

Shortly before his conversion Paul had been present at the stoning of Stephen, the earliest martyr of the infant Church, and in a sense the predecessor of the Apostle in breaking with orthodox Judaism. This event (doubtless the first of the kind Paul had witnessed) must have made a profound impression on his sensitive and conscientious nature²—a nature, be it remembered, already deeply religious from the Pharisaic standpoint, and evidently disposed to adopt a spiritual rather than a legal view of righteousness, and to trace in all events the working of divine influences. Not for long would such a mind attribute to sheer delusion the steadfast

¹ Another anomaly is that Paul's companions saw "no man," nor did Paul himself see anything but a flash of light. If, as some apologists say, the appearance was a bodily reality, it must have been visible to all of them. Again, it is related that Paul was not at first blinded by the light, but that "when his eyes were opened he saw no man." Only after that did he become blind. It is remarkable that Paul's Epistles do not relate this occurrence.

² An American theologian admits that "the shining face of the martyr haunted Paul like a ghost, warning him to stop his mad career." (Dr. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. i., p. 300.) We presume, however, that the luminosity was visible only to friends, not to the enemies of Stephen, and was therefore subjective, just as the opening heaven must have been to him.

faith, the divinely forgiving spirit of the martyr. Was not such a faith the truest fulfilling of the law? Was it not higher than the law? Did it not so transform the nature of the believer as to do away with the necessity for external restraint, formality, ceremonial—for the painful effort to comply with a vast number of burdensome legalities? Did not this faith bring the soul into immediate relation with the Divine Father? Was it possible that it was all a delusion? These men who declared they had seen Jesus after he had been crucified, could they be wholly in error? What if he, Paul, were to be found fighting against God? Was it right that he should follow in the footsteps of the cruel priests who had nailed their victim to the cross? Was it right that he should persecute the inoffensive men and women who sought not rebellion against the “powers that be,” but proclaimed a religion more pure, more simple, more spiritual, than his own traditional faith?

It is almost impossible, and certainly unreasonable, to suppose that such thoughts did not enter the mind of Paul. “The glimpse he derived from the disciples of the higher form of righteousness disturbed his Pharisaic complacency, and introduced torturing doubts into his mind.”¹ To allay these doubts he persecuted, but he could not altogether suppress them. The more he learnt of the new faith, the keener became his dread that he might be seeking to destroy a divinely originated movement. His mind oscillated between antipathy to the new sect and sympathy with its purpose of destroying sin by renewing the sinful nature after the pattern of one who, it was claimed, knew no sin. Irritated and jealous at the unaccountable progress of the reformed

¹ Mackintosh, *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 350.

Judaism preached by the followers of an obscure Galilean prophet, the Pharisaic instincts of Paul were in sharp conflict with a growing perception of that prophet's divine mission. Gradually there dawned on Paul the idea that this new faith offered a means, far more potent than the Jewish law, by which all men might be brought to God. His mind realised that the grand conception of the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men, was the one essential element of a universal religion, the one doctrine by which the hearts of the Gentiles were to be reached. Philo, the sage, had shadowed forth the idea of converting the world to the knowledge of God; the Roman moralists had proclaimed the brotherhood of humanity; and a heathen poet, as the Apostle long afterwards recalled at Athens, had said: "We are also his offspring." Homer, Plato, Seneca, and others, had written of God as the father of men. Nor was this conception unknown to the Hebrew prophets, though it was Jesus who, with the authoritative accents of personal conviction, brought it home to the hearts of men by whom it was not fully realised. Had not the Psalmist declared, "A father of the fatherless is God";¹ and that, "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"?² Paul remembered the reproach of the Prophet: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?"³ Jesus the son of Sirach had expressed the same idea; it was found in *The Wisdom of Solomon*, *The Psalms of Solomon*, and in the writings of the rabbis. From the latter we learn that "at the time of Jesus the expressions 'heavenly father,' 'our father in heaven,' had

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 5.

² Psalm ciii. 13.

³ Malachi ii. 10.

become a popular substitute for the old name of God, which had fallen into disuse."¹ It is not fanciful to suppose that Paul's mind was able to see that this conception of the divine fatherhood was the highest attainment of faith, the secret of religious power, the only influence that could abolish the barriers which an exclusive tradition had set up between the Jew and the Gentile. "The grandeur of the thought of the equality of men in the sight of God was one of the determining causes of Paul's conversion. No greater thought than this has ever inspired the soul of man."² Possessed by this idea, Paul's mind could not fail to perceive, though at first dimly, its inevitable outcome in a religious faith suitable to the needs of all mankind. His conversion was "the result of the impression made upon his mind by what he had learned of the doctrine, life, and death of Jesus from common report, or from the victims of his persecuting zeal."³ A conquering Messiah was a dream of national pride; a suffering Messiah divinely sent, unjustly slain, could touch the hearts of all men with pity and with love.

How would a writer of the first century represent these ideas? Not, assuredly, as a connected and self-conscious process of reasoning. On the contrary, he would represent them as due to a direct and sudden manifestation of divine power. He would assume a miracle where we should assume a normal operation of the thinking faculties. The one would be as natural to him as the other would be to us. This is what happened in the case of the Apostle Paul. "The instantaneousness with

¹ Pfeiderer, *Christian Origins*, p. 97.

² *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 352.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 360. The conversion of his friend Barnabas also probably influenced Paul.

which the scattered hints arranged themselves into one connected view of the religious relation, and brought a sense of deliverance to his mind, could hardly but present itself to his imagination as a supernatural experience."¹

Such a view does not imply that Paul was either deceived or a deceiver—an unwarrantable alternative which strenuous apologists insist upon forcing on those who seek to find some basis of natural truth in accounts of supernatural incidents. When Paul had formed the conception that Jesus was a man sent from God it was inevitable that he should think it impossible for him to be "holden of death," impossible that a divine saviour should not conquer death as he had conquered sin. He would thus be disposed to accept the current traditions of the appearance of Jesus after his death, and would regard his own vision as conclusive proof of its reality. "A sudden, merely spiritual, revelation of Christ was a common, not to say universal, experience of the early converts, and something of the kind is a frequent experience even to this day."² In the present day even the person who has the vision does not usually claim it to be an appearance of the physical body of Jesus. Why should we assume that Paul's visions were of a different character? And the visions of to-day invariably take place where ignorance and superstition create predisposing causes which account for them. What clear distinction can we draw between the appearance to Paul and the appearance of the Virgin Mary to a peasant girl on a remote Pyrenean hillside?³

The words of Paul in 2 Cor. xii. "seem to indicate that he thought it possible that the spirit of a man might

¹ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 360.

² *Ibid*, p. 363.

³ See Zola's *Lourdes* for a remarkable account of some modern phenomena of this kind.

separate itself from his body, and have a vision for itself apart from his bodily senses. According to the same notion, he might think it possible that Jesus could present himself to the spiritual perception or to the senses of the disciples without the intervention of an actual body. For aught the Apostle could tell or know, Jesus might have risen again, and have manifested himself without being in the body. That is to say, the manifestation might have a reality to the spirit which it had not for the bodily sense; and it almost seems as if the Apostle was himself doubtful as to the nature of these manifestations, and as to whether they were in any sense objective. No doubt it is the intention of the Synoptists and the writer of the Acts to represent them as objective, but it by no means follows that Paul himself was confident of this.”¹ It is not at all probable that any clear distinction between the objective and the subjective existed in the mind of Paul. Even if it may be presumed that he, being a man of exceptional mental power, was able to grasp such an essentially modern idea, it is almost certain that it was not formed by the writers of the Gospels and the book of Acts. It is clear from many passages in those books that even a purely spiritual conception would in time assume a material garb. Unlearned men would be unable to express themselves so as to preclude the possibility of misinterpretation by less imaginative compilers or copyists. “The language which the earlier disciples made use of to explain the process or phenomenon by which they had recovered their faith in Christ, to make it intelligible to the popular mind, was necessarily figurative, but was understood literally by those whom they

¹ Mackintosh, p. 362.

addressed, and by frequent repetition may have lost its figurative character even for themselves ; or, if it could never have altogether lost its figurative character for them, yet, being firmly persuaded of the substantial truth and prime importance of that which they sought to communicate, they might feel it to be inopportune and ill-advised to betray hesitation as to the mode of expressing it, lest to others doubts might be suggested as to its reality.”¹ The experience of the disciples “would be reported to Paul in its figurative and sensuous clothing, and, acting upon his excited state, would be likely to conjure up an apparition similar to that which was believed to have been seen by the original followers of Jesus.”² There is no suggestion that anything happened to dispel this idea ; on the contrary, we may consider it certain that an apparently trifling incident happening at a moment of poignant doubt and agitation would be regarded probably by Paul himself, certainly by a later chronicler, as an immediate supernatural manifestation, when it merely accompanied the climax of a natural psychological process. And the later experience of Paul would naturally be held to confirm the earlier experience of the first disciples, and enable further inquiry to be dispensed with. The fact that Paul believed he had a vision, “by disposing him to receive without inquiry the reports concerning the visions of the earlier disciples, might impair the value of his testimony to the truth of those reports.”³

It seems evident that *inner experience* was the real ground of the original belief in the resurrection. This may be inferred even from the Gospel accounts, in spite of the materialistic additions which they have received

¹ Mackintosh, p. 364.

² *Ibid.*, p. 364.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

in the course of the long period when the belief was nothing but a tradition floating in the minds of uncultured men. It is certainly involved in Paul's own statements. The expression in Gal. i. 15, 16, "When it was the good pleasure of God.....to reveal his Son *in* me," cannot fairly be interpreted except as relating to a subjective experience, a normal awakening to a fresh idea. That the expression in the same Epistle, "I went up by revelation," denotes a similar experience is equally certain. These two passages, therefore, afford a very strong confirmation of the idea that when Paul declares that he saw Jesus he was simply describing in the language of his time the vivid mental impression made upon him by the disciples' faith that their crucified Master could not be "holden of death," because he was a human embodiment of the divine nature. That idea, having once taken possession of Paul's powerful and impetuous mind, would inevitably issue in an all-engrossing conviction which would neither seek for, nor even have the patience to scrutinise, the prosaic details of formal evidence.

To minds inclined to a ready acceptance of the supernatural these considerations will appear insufficient to account for the fervour and persistency of Paul's faith in the resurrection. It may be said that the accounts in Acts of Paul's conversion imply more than a subjective experience. So far as the writer of these accounts is concerned, this is probably true. They do, no doubt, purport to describe an objective reality. But it must not be forgotten that writers to whom the figurative style common to Orientals was the most natural mode of expression are not the persons to whom we can look for accurate descriptions of a particular occurrence, whether physical or mental. Even these accounts, however, by

implying that the incident partook of a visionary character, furnish grounds for interpreting it as a subjective experience which subsequently received materialistic additions. Further, these accounts are not by Paul himself, and must, therefore, yield in authority to his own statements. And Paul's own statements clearly imply that, however strongly he may have been convinced that his conversion originated from an external stimulus, its true causes must be traced to the action of his own mind upon the favouring circumstances of his environment.

Paul is the earliest and most direct witness to the resurrection.

The testimony of this earliest and most direct witness undeniably favours the view that the belief in the resurrection arose out of vivid impressions formed by the combined operation of various causes in the minds of the original disciples, which impressions were, without investigation, accepted by Paul as valid.

In view of the prevalent and unquestioning acceptance of the supernatural which then existed, and of the tendency of the time to interpret symbolic language and spiritual expressions in materialistic senses,¹ it was inevitable that in time the mental impressions of the first disciples should be represented as due to real external appearances of the risen Jesus. We know from the Christian Scriptures themselves that this unspiritual and superstitious tendency animated men's minds then, as it does now, and that it was combined with a method of Old Testament exegesis which modern criticism pronounces fallacious. We know that at the dates when the written records appeared there had been ample time

¹ The Gospels furnish many examples of this tendency. See Luke viii. 9; John vi. 52; John xvi. 17, 18; Matt. xvi. 11, etc.

for these tendencies to affect seriously the original tradition. How, then, can we suppose that the tradition remained pure and unsullied? The details have the air of afterthoughts.

But, it may be said, it is absurd to suppose that Paul would credulously accept beliefs which he was doing all he could to extirpate. His conversion must have had a cause adequate to produce the remarkable effects which followed it. Is not a supernatural manifestation of the risen Jesus, such as Paul himself believed to have occurred, the simplest and most adequate cause that can be alleged?

Certainly Paul's conversion must have had an adequate cause. We are trying to find out what that cause was. Our view is that in the peculiar intellectual and religious conditions of the time, and in the personality of Paul himself, we find a sufficient explanation of his complete change of attitude. That any entirely satisfactory explanation can be given it is hardly reasonable to expect, since the writers of the New Testament do not supply the necessary information. The perplexing circumstances in the accounts are not, however, removed by dragging in a supernatural agency which involves still greater difficulties. It is seldom easy to account fully for a bitter opponent of a particular creed afterwards becoming one of its most enthusiastic adherents; but it is a phenomenon that has frequently occurred in human history, and there can be no doubt that when all the facts are known they prove to be susceptible of natural explanations. Imperfect as the New Testament accounts are, we can glean from them enough to make us reasonably sure that the case of Paul affords no exception to the laws of natural causation.

Explanations of a supernatural story labour under the

disadvantage of assuming the truth of some of its details, while one is compelled to doubt the historicity of the account as a whole. A flash of lightning from a passing thundercloud may have seemed to the persecutor the radiance of the divine that smote his presumptuous head and left his eyes in darkness.¹ And in the rolling thunder he may have heard the reproachful voice of Jesus. Many writers think that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was epilepsy. Was it an epileptic convulsion that seized him and cast him to the ground? Or a cardiac heat-stroke that caused the temporary paralysis of his faculties and left him blind for three days?² Any one of these things is possible; we do not know; truth and legend are too closely entwined. We may be sure that, if we had been furnished with all the facts, a natural explanation for them would present itself. "What we do know with certainty is that Paul *thought* he had a vision of the risen Jesus. Beyond this all is uncertain, as anyone must admit who has looked into the subject and compared the various accounts of his conversion. The result of such a comparison is to convince us of the impossibility of determining from these accounts what actually took place."³ Perhaps we may find in the words "Why *persecutest* thou me?" a clue to the character of the incident. Still more clearly is a subjective experience implied by the words: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (or pricks). This expression occurs only in the last of the three

¹ Ellicott concedes that the idea of a sudden thunderstorm may be "entertained legitimately" (*New Testament Commentary*, vol. ii., p. 57). If the "great light" was real, why were Paul's companions not blinded? And if, as some apologists contend, the appearance of Jesus was physically real, how is it that neither Paul nor any of the others beheld it?

² These are frequent symptoms of this form of sunstroke (*Chambers' Encyclopædia*, art. "Sunstroke").

³ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 347.

accounts, and may therefore be a later addition ; but it is difficult to assign to it any other meaning than that Paul's conscience was in revolt against his bigotry and cruelty. To him this inward monitor was a voice from heaven. But we are compelled to see in it the peremptory dictate of a mind aroused to a perception of its former error. He had resisted as long as he could the promptings of his higher nature ; a time came when it could no longer be silenced, when he had to choose between the traditions of his people and Jesus Christ, "and him crucified." In this great, honest soul we have "the strange but not uncommon phenomenon of a man yielding unconsciously and in spite of himself to the encroachments of ideas which he endeavours and seems violently to resist."¹ It was the moral beauty of the doctrine of Jesus that converted him. According to this doctrine, "forgiveness stands in no relation to expiation of any kind, in which sense it is wholly unconditional. And it was by catching a sight of this doctrine, which involved an entirely new view of the religious relation, that Paul was converted, though he did not clearly apprehend that it was so."² This idea furnished the framework of the later doctrinal teaching of Paul that the sacrifices of the law were once for all abolished by the supreme sacrifice of the one mediator, Jesus Christ. Certainly the Apostle regarded his conversion as supernatural in character. "But we are obliged to take quite a different view of that great turning-point in his history, were it for no other reason than to preserve the continuity of his spiritual life."³ A natural explanation is to be preferred to a supernatural one. "To regard the vision of Christ in glory, in what-

¹ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 347.

² *Ibid*, p. 346.

³ *Ibid*, p. 343.

ever sense, as anything more than an accompaniment or by-product of the real conversion, and to trace to it the development of the Apostle's dogmatic and ethical views, is to throw the whole history into confusion."¹

Before leaving these accounts of Paul's conversion, the reader is asked to compare the following passage from the Book of Daniel (written in the second century B.C.) with the three narratives given by the writer of Acts. He will then see from what source the latter author may have drawn at least part of his materials:—

And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.²

A further peculiarity in Paul's testimony must be mentioned. In saying that Jesus was "seen" by him he uses the same verb as that by which he designates the appearances to the other disciples. Does he thereby imply that these were of the same visionary character as his own experience? That he may not have intended to convey this implication is possible, but his language undoubtedly puts them all on a similar footing, and supports the view that the original belief was not necessarily in an objectively real vision, but sprang out of a revived faith in the spiritual beauty of the teaching and personality of Jesus. As already pointed out, this presumption is rendered feasible by several passages in the Gospel accounts, while others with which it does not

¹ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 346.

² Dan. x. 7-9.

harmonise appear to be due to the known tendency of the first century to add materialistic features to spiritual conceptions, and to accept visions, real or imaginary, as perfectly good evidence of physical events. Paul himself furnishes no details by which the character of any of these appearances can be determined. And we are compelled to set aside the details given by the later compiler of Acts as being unworthy of credence, on the twofold ground that they contain serious internal discrepancies and are unconfirmed by the principal person concerned. To dismiss wholly these accounts on either ground might be scarcely judicial; but the junction of two lines of evidence, each imperfect, cannot prove a supernatural incident. We cannot believe that Paul thought this incident important enough to be twice related when he was in personal danger, yet that, when he was solemnly declaring in writing the circumstances of his change of faith, he should make no allusion to it, but refer only to an inward revelation. If the statements in Acts are really true, Paul was not likely to withhold them merely because they implied a supernatural manifestation. He believed fervently in the supernatural; he believed that his conversion was due to a direct divine interposition. Yet he is silent as to the occurrences recorded by the Evangelist. All he says is that he "saw" Jesus, and he implies that this was by inward revelation, not by bodily sense. It is probable that from this vague expression the account which appeared about fifty years after his death has been elaborated.¹ "Revelations" of this character simply describe in the language of Paul's time the process by which new views of truth became

¹ Dr. Gardner considers that the Synoptic account of the Last Supper was derived from Paul's reference to it in Corinthians (*Origin of the Lord's Supper*).

credible to his mind. But unless we are to hold that such a process, in all its hopeless obscurity, is binding on all other minds, the reality of Paul's belief cannot, in the nature of things, constitute evidence of the resurrection to later ages. We in the twentieth century are asked to believe that Jesus returned to physical life because a religious enthusiast who died in the first century believed that Jesus appeared to him in a vision. Christian apologists are not complimentary to human intelligence.

The author of *Supernatural Religion* asks: "Does Paul himself ascribe his conversion to Christianity to the fact of his having seen Jesus? Most certainly not. That is a notion derived solely from the statements in Acts. The sudden and miraculous conversion of Paul is a product of the same pen which produced the story of the sudden conversion of the thief on the cross—an episode equally unknown to other writers. Paul neither says when nor where he saw Jesus. The revelation of God's son in him not being an allusion to this vision of Jesus, but merely a reference to the light which dawned upon Paul's mind as to the character and mission of Jesus, there is no ground whatever, from the writings of the Apostle himself, to connect the appearance of Jesus with his conversion."¹ As the same critic points out, the whole of Paul's evidence for the resurrection "consists in the bare statement that he did see Jesus. Now, can the fact that any man merely affirms, without even stating the circumstances, that a person once actually dead and buried has risen from the dead and been seen by him, be seriously considered satisfactory evidence for so astounding a

¹ *Supernatural Religion* (1 vol. ed.), p. 865.

miracle? Is it possible for anyone of sober mind, acquainted with the nature of the proposition on the one hand, and with the innumerable possibilities of error on the other, to regard such an affirmation even as evidence of much importance in such a matter?"¹

An idea seems to have been held by the first disciples that to have seen the risen Jesus was an essential qualification for being an Apostle. The first chapter of Acts relates that, after the defection and death of Judas the traitor, another witness of the resurrection was chosen (by lots) in the person of Matthias, although, curiously enough, it is nowhere stated that Matthias had actually seen Jesus after his death. It seems possible to trace a dogmatic prepossession of a similar kind in the accounts of Paul's conversion. It is clear that he himself confidently puts forward his vision as equivalent in spiritual value to the experiences of the earlier Apostles. "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"² "There can be no doubt," says the author of *Supernatural Religion*, "that the claims of Paul to the Apostolate were, during his life, constantly denied, and his authority rejected. There is no evidence that his Apostleship was ever recognised by the elder Apostles, nor that his claim was ever submitted to them. Even in the second century the *Clementine Homilies* deny him the honour, and make light of his visions and revelations. All the evidence we possess shows that Paul's vision of Jesus did not secure for him much consideration in his own time—a circumstance which certainly does not tend to establish its reality."³

"The whole of the testimony before us, then, simply amounts to this: Paul believed that he had seen Jesus

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, p. 863.

² 1 Cor. ix. 1.

³ *Supernatural Religion*, p. 867.

some years after his death; there is no evidence that he ever saw him during his life. He states that he had 'received' that he was seen by various other persons, but he does not give the slightest information as to who told him, or what reasons he had for believing the statements to be correct; and still less does he narrate the particulars of the alleged appearances, or even of his own vision. Although we have no detailed statements of these extraordinary phenomena, we may assume that, as Paul himself believed that he had seen Jesus, certain other people of the circle of his disciples likewise believed that they had seen the risen Master. The whole of the evidence for the Resurrection reduces itself to an undefined belief on the part of a few persons, in a notoriously superstitious age, that, after Jesus had died and been buried, they had seen him alive. These visions, it is admitted, occurred at a time of the most intense religious excitement, and under circumstances of wholly exceptional mental agitation and distress. The wildest alternations of fear, doubt, hope, and indefinite expectation added their effects to oriental imaginations already excited by indignation at the fate of their Master, and sorrow or despair at such a dissipation of their Messianic dreams. There was present every element of intellectual and moral disturbance. Now, must we seriously ask again whether this bare and wholly unjustified belief can be accepted as satisfactory evidence for so astounding a miracle as the Resurrection? Can the belief of such men in such an age establish the reality of a phenomenon which contradicts universal experience? It comes to us in the form of bare belief from the age of miracles, unsupported by facts, uncorroborated by evidence, unaccompanied by proof of investigation, and unprovided with material for

examination. What is such belief worth? We have no hesitation in saying that it is absolutely worth nothing."¹ Yet Christian advocates can declare that the resurrection is the best-attested fact in all history!²

In regard to the claim that Paul is a good witness to a miracle which he never beheld, a few illustrations of his ambiguous use of language may here be introduced. His Epistles afford various indications which, read in the light of modern knowledge, imply that the appearance to him of Jesus was a subjective impression in the mind of the Apostle, and which further imply that his mental and psychical tendency was such that any real distinction between subjective states and objective realities was to him impossible. Some of these passages we shall proceed to examine. We shall find from most of them that Paul habitually uses words in special and metaphorical senses which he leaves undefined, and which usually have a highly mystical and even theological significance.

Rom. vi. 4-9.—We were *buried* therefore with him through baptism into death: that *like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.* For if we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that *hath died* is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him.

Language of this description cannot be brought within

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, p. 873.

² Rev. C. A. Row, *The Supernatural in Christianity*, p. 472.

the scope of logic. It is the language of the mystic, which awakens a sympathetic response only in minds similarly constituted. It voices the aspirations of the soul, not the conclusions of the intellect. To the sceptic the phrases, "baptism into death," "likeness of death," and "likeness of resurrection," convey no definite meaning. The general drift of the passage may be apprehended, while the coherence of its terms may not be apparent. But when we perceive that the word "crucified" implies the replacement of certain human faculties by an assumed divine influence, and that the resurrection of Jesus is made analogous to the renewed life of the believer, we get an indication of the tendency of Paul's mind. We see how probable it is that in such a mind an objective fact should be of much less consequence than the spiritual experiences of which it is supposed to be the occasion.

2 Cor. i. 9, 10.—We ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead: who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver.

Here the word "death" is used not to describe a physical dissolution, nor a state of sin, but as signifying the sufferings and trials which Paul experienced in preaching the Gospel. For delivery from this state he trusts in God "which raiseth the dead," an expression which, being in the present tense, implies a continuous process, and therefore harmonises with the idea of spiritual revival rather than with the idea of corporeal resuscitation.

2 Cor. iv. 10-12.—Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of

Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

Paul's style is sometimes highly paradoxical. This passage cannot be understood unless we recognise his free use of metaphor and his rapid transitions of meaning. "Bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus" is an expression eminently obscure to anyone who holds that the life, rather than the death, of Jesus is the more valuable example for human imitation. For the life of Jesus, however, there is little room in Paul's theology, and his omission to dilate upon any of its incidents becomes the more remarkable when we remember that the Gospels were not in existence when he wrote, and that he could not have known they would be compiled. Nor is the last sentence of this quotation readily intelligible. Why should Paul say that death worked in himself, but life in his disciples? In both intellectual power and spiritual attainments they must have been greatly below him. He doubtless meant that the trials he endured were a "death" to him, but that through such "death" spiritual life was conveyed to his converts. This, however, again involves a non-natural use of familiar words.

Gal. ii. 20.—I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me.

In this passage the term "crucified" does not mean that Paul had been nailed to a cross, but that his human nature had been superseded or suppressed by the indwelling of the spirit of Jesus. This interpretation is borne out by the 14th verse of the 6th chapter: "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Only in a purely

metaphorical sense can it be admitted either that Paul's original nature had been done away with, or that the world, so far as he was concerned, had ceased to exist.

Eph. ii. 1.—And you did he quicken, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins.

This, again, clearly relates not to natural dissolution, but to the new life, or rather new set of ideas, arising in the believer as the result of his conversion. But the metaphor is carried to a bewildering pitch a few verses later:—

God.....when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places.

Here the phrase "raised us up" is used in the past tense, clearly showing that the term "resurrection" sometimes designates *merely the renewed spiritual life of the individual, while his physical life subsists*. It is even said that the "raising up" is followed by the believer being seated "in heavenly places" along with Christ, a form of mysticism which confuses the material and spiritual aspects of life, and detracts from the value of Paul's testimony. It is almost the same expression as the phrase "seated at the right hand of God," so often applied to Jesus. Clearly it relates to the life of the spirit, not to the life of the flesh.

1 Tim. iii. 16.—He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

A whole theological system is involved in this passage. Only two clauses need be noticed. The expression "justified in the spirit," placed in a kind of antithesis to "manifested in the flesh," seems to refer to the post-resurrection life of Jesus, especially as it precedes the

phrase "received up in glory." If it has this relation, it is significant that it gives no countenance to the theory of a bodily resurrection, but confirms the idea so often expressed by Paul, that "resurrection" meant, primarily, a vivid renewal of spiritual life.

The curious expression "seen of angels" implies that these imaginary beings were the only ones by whom Jesus was seen after his death.

In 2 Cor. v. 2 Paul refers to the resurrection body as "our habitation which is from heaven," and in the eighth verse to being "absent from the body" and "at home with the Lord." This is language which harmonises not with the idea of bodily resurrection, but with that of a survival of the spirit, which was then believed to be an entity separable from the body. Mysticism of this kind is hardly within the region of historical proof. It should be mentioned that in more than one passage Paul appears to identify the risen Jesus with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. xv. 45; 2 Cor. iii. 17).

The paradoxical phrase in Colossians i. 15, "the image of the invisible God," as applied to Jesus, seems to imply that to Paul Jesus may have been a purely ideal figure formed by an arbitrary identification of him with the heavenly Messiah who was the object of the pious Jews' hope. Hausrath contends that the expressions "in Christ" and "in the spirit" are identical terms, and that in Paul's view the second Adam Christ put off at death the vesture of flesh and at his resurrection put on the vesture of the spirit. The whole Epistle is a plea for the spirit in distinction to the flesh.

2 Tim. ii. 18.—Hymenæus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already.

Evidently doubts as to the resurrection had begun to be felt even in the times of the Apostles who preached it so confidently. This passage does not appear to relate to the resurrection of Jesus, but to the general resurrection of believers. But how could these very interesting heretics have held that this resurrection was "past already"? Obviously only because they did not believe in a bodily resurrection, but in the release of the soul at death and its immediate ascension to a life of the spirit.¹ Paul, on the other hand, held that the resurrection of human beings would take place at the Lord's second coming. It is on this point, *not on the nature of the resurrection itself*, that he considered Hymenæus and Philetus to have been in error. It is clear that these men believed in what we may term a spiritual resurrection; and if they erred on that point, how is it that Paul does not rebuke them on that specific ground? The Apostle's own words, in almost every case, imply that he agreed with Hymenæus and Philetus in regard to the *nature* of the resurrection, while differing from them as to the *time* of its occurrence. If he could show that the actual body of Jesus left the tomb, he had an effective answer to any doubts on that score. Yet he made no use of it, contenting himself with such pious futilities as "The Lord knoweth them that are his" and "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." The existence of any doubts or differences of opinion on the subject long before our present Gospels appeared is proof of considerable uncertainty as to the facts on which the primitive belief was based.

¹ This view is confirmed by Dean Mansel (*Gnostic Heresies*, p. 59), and also by Professor Swete (*The Apostles Creed*, p. 91) and Bishop Ellicott (*Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, p. 134).

It is not our purpose to show that Paul was a bad logician, but simply that he was prone in an eminent degree to that unquestioning acceptance of Jewish tradition, that misapplication of scriptural texts, and that tendency to spiritualise ordinary language which were common features of the religion of his time. It cannot be admitted that men of this type are trustworthy witnesses regarding matters of historic fact. Assuming that the Epistles of Paul were written by him—an assumption which has of late years been seriously challenged by Professor Van Manen and others—we find in them good evidence of an early belief in the resurrection. But the grounds of this belief we discover, on examination, to be vague and contradictory in an extraordinary and unaccountable degree. It is necessarily the *reasons* for the belief, not its mere existence, with which the modern inquirer is concerned.

A passage in the first Epistle attributed to Peter is too relevant to the present argument to be passed by without notice. The writer refers to Christ “being put to death in the flesh, but *quicken*ed in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.”¹ Probably no other passage in the New Testament indicates with equal clearness that the resurrection was thought to be, not a return to physical life, but a resuscitation of the spirit. If Jesus was thought to have preached in the spirit to other spirits, he also must have been a spirit. Commentators have, with their accustomed ingenuity, explained these words in a sense which does not conflict with the idea of a physical resurrection; but their natural and obvious meaning is more consistent with the view that the resurrection was simply a revival

¹ 1 Peter iii. 18.

of the spiritual influence of Jesus in the minds of his immediate followers. Whether this revival was brought about by the actual reappearance of the same physical organism that had suffered death, or by a real objective apparition of Jesus in a spiritual form no longer subject to the laws of gravity, or by a psychological process dependent on emotional exaltation and fostered by an unconscious misapplication of Old Testament references, cannot be determined with absolute precision. It can hardly be disputed that the evidence of the earliest witness, Paul, though very far from being definite, at least favours the last presumption. And we now perceive that Peter also confirms it by an expression which cannot fairly be otherwise interpreted. If Peter, the chief of the original Apostles, knew that Jesus had reappeared in a physical or semi-physical form, it is scarcely possible to understand why he did not plainly say so in his Epistles. And the silence on this point of the second Gospel, which the Christian tradition asserts (on no evidence) to have been derived from his teaching, is equally significant. The writer of Acts undoubtedly represents Peter as styling himself and others "witnesses" of the resurrection. But it is well known that the term was then used in the sense of "testifiers," and did not necessarily mean eye-witnesses. The meaning of Peter's language is best seen by comparison with the passage just quoted, which seems tolerably clear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THEORY OF SUBJECTIVE IMPRESSIONS

WE have now arrived at the strange result that, of the six appearances of Jesus after his death which are mentioned by the earliest witness to the resurrection, not a single one is clearly related in the historical accounts of the origin of Christianity. Apologists who assure us that the evidence for the resurrection is not weakened by these variations in the accounts should explain what does constitute imperfect evidence. If testimony is not weakened by internal contradiction, credulity on the part of the witnesses, and absence of corroboration, by what is it weakened? If these defects do not diminish its force, the presumption is that their opposites do not increase it. Testimony which is consistent, rational, and amply confirmed becomes, on that supposition, of no more value than testimony which in every respect violates these essential requirements. To act on such a principle is to disregard the rules of all critical investigation while pretending to observe them. Who would so act in the affairs of ordinary life? Suppose a Christian apologist were negotiating for the purchase of a hundred acres of land in Kent. Would he accept without hesitation a statement by the vendor that the property was his to sell, and that the title was without flaw or incumbrance? He would be a foolish person if he did not put the matter into the hands of a solicitor, in order to have the title investigated and any doubtful points cleared up.

No one denies that all human testimony is fallible. That is simply the strongest reason for making testimony in all important matters as little fallible as we can. The logical result of some apologetic argument is that the more fallible the testimony the more likely it is to be true. Historic doubts of the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte may cast a useful light on the imperfection of all human testimony, but the device of comparing the normal with the abnormal, of assuming that the evidence for the supernatural must be precisely similar to that for the natural, is a transparent evasion of the difficulty. And it is untrue that the evidence for the resurrection is as good as the evidence for any event in history. The Battle of Waterloo is proved by the testimony of a large number of eye-witnesses. Not a single eye-witness vouches for the resurrection. The despairing expedient of proving all testimony to be worthless is indeed a singular method of proving some testimony to be true; for, if all human evidence is bad, the evidence for the resurrection is bad also. No testimony can establish such a miracle, because the probability that the universal law of death operated in a particular instance must always remain infinitely greater than the probability of any exception to it having occurred.¹ The object of written testimony is to perpetuate the truth of verbal testimony—that is, to put other persons, as far as possible, in the position of the original recipients of the testimony. We ought, therefore, to be absolutely sure, when we are asked to examine the evidence for a miracle, that it shall comprise the statements of known and credible eye-witnesses.

As long as the resurrection is claimed to have been,

¹ See Hume's essay on *Miracles*, and *Supernatural Religion*, ch. iii.

not the result of subjective impressions, but an actual resuscitation and reappearance of a physical body, its truth can be tested only by the recognised rules of evidence. "History is only possible upon the basis of that principle of continuity which is irreconcilable with miracles; if miracles are possible history is impossible; and *historical* evidence for miracles is nothing short of a contradiction in terms."¹ Historical criticism cannot be applied to a supernatural event without negating it. For this reason the apologist usually contends that the Bible should not be read as any other book would be read, but by the aid of inspiration, and in the light of that theory.²

Though we have not the direct testimony of the original Apostles, their belief in the resurrection need not be disputed. But, "in the light of experience, it must remain more probable that they were in error than that such an event took place."³ When we examine their state of mind and the characteristics of their age, we find the *belief* in the resurrection to be a natural product, but not due to the objective reality of the alleged fact. Though we can place little reliance on the accuracy of the records, it appears probable that Jesus, during his life, used language which, "when recalled and interpreted in the light of his Resurrection, looked like a prophecy of the event, and thus, in the minds of the Apostles, confirmed at once the fact of the Resurrection and the Messiahship of their Master."⁴ The idea of the resurrection of the dead was part of the consciousness of the time. The death of Jesus seemed to destroy

¹ *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, by R. W. Macan, M.A., p. 116 (note).

² See Liddon's *University Sermons* (1-vol. ed.), p. 212.

³ Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 108.

the cherished pre-convictions of his followers. They felt that they must either modify these pre-convictions or give up their belief in and love for their Master, which they could not possibly do. The conviction that he had risen from the grave restored harmony to their minds. That they should interpret the appearances as objective was pre-determined by the doctrinal lines of their faith, and the mental and moral excitement to which the occasion gave rise. Their belief furnished the indispensable condition of Paul's conversion, though they never grasped the significance of a doctrine which involved the abolition of the Mosaic law. They could await the speedy return of Jesus in power and glory to finally establish his kingdom.¹

People in the twentieth century cannot be expected to place themselves at the mental standpoint of the first century. The Apostolic view of the universe can no longer be held. Science has disproved it. And doctrines flowing from a general view which is now obsolete can be no more than precarious survivals. The New Testament writers have made it clear that to them visions and supposed prophecies were good evidence of the resurrection. That being so, it cannot be conceded that the bodily presence of Jesus after his death was essential to the formation of the Christian Church. The faith of the disciples was a vivid realisation that their Master was spiritually present with them, and that it was their duty to carry on his spiritual mission. It is this conviction which takes a materialised form in the Pentecost narrative. This spiritual presence of Jesus with his disciples is said to have been repeatedly promised, and the Church holds that the promise was literally fulfilled.

¹ Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 109-110.

Let the reader turn to the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of the Fourth Gospel, and he will see that, while Jesus speaks of his approaching departure as if it were to be the consequence of his impending death, he throughout implies that his return is to be understood in a spiritual sense only.¹ One passage appears to throw a ray of light on the formation of the belief in the resurrection: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you."² The unbeliever may well doubt on critical grounds that these words really proceeded from Jesus. But the apologist is not at liberty to repudiate them; he is bound to maintain that they were uttered by Jesus before his crucifixion. What do they imply? They clearly imply that after his death a substitute for his bodily presence would be provided; that it was necessary he should no longer be with his followers in the flesh, in order that he might be with them in the spirit; that the earthly intercourse should be superseded by a relationship even more intimate. Whether these words are prophetic or retrospective, they lend support, not to the idea of a bodily resurrection, but to that idea of an enlarged spiritual communion which was the secret of the Apostolic zeal, the idea from which the narratives afterwards arose.

The expectation that Jesus would return to earth shows how the illusion of the first disciples was perpetuated. It is difficult to understand how this expectation could have been so early formed, and could have persisted for so long, unless it was considered in some sense a compensation for the disappointment caused by his

¹ John xiv. 16, 26; xv. 26.

² *Ibid*, xvi. 7.

untimely death. If Jesus really rose from the dead, if he remained on earth for forty days, teaching his disciples "the things concerning the kingdom of God," how did they come to form an idea so erroneous as that of his speedy return? There seems room for the conjecture that the original faith of the disciples was similar to what many hold now—viz., that Jesus *would* return, not that he *had* returned, and that in the future hope lay the germ of the traditional experience. "Trust in the promise of *return* soon changed into belief in his *resurrection*, which to the consciousness of the early Christians was the first condition of his return."¹ The idea of this return is so prominent in the Apostolic writings that, as Mackay says, "Christ's second coming was to the Christian what Messiah's advent had been to the Jew."² In neither case was the aspiration purely spiritual. The "power and glory" in which Jesus was expected to return meant to his disciples for a long time the setting up of a kingdom of righteousness on earth. That this faith was not during the lifetime of the Apostles realised was with them no reason for abandoning it, but it was a reason for the later faith that Jesus had risen. Nearly twenty centuries have rolled away, and many people still believe that Jesus will return. The type of mind which, in spite of natural law, in spite of the certainty that miracles do not happen, hopes from age to age to behold a great supernatural manifestation, was common among the early followers of Jesus. Their hope was illusory, but in that illusion they found a strength and support which they thought divine. Paul had a fervent and unquestioning assurance that he would live to see the return of his Master in glory. Yet he was mistaken. The strength

¹ Hausrath, *A History of New Testament Times*, vol. ii., p. 110.

² R. W. Mackay, *The Progress of the Intellect*, vol. ii., p. 354.

of the subjective element in his faith is shown by the fact that, though he never knew Jesus in the flesh, it is the Christ within him which is the highest and deepest truth.¹ It was by the power of this internal conviction that Paul's labours were crowned with a great measure of success. Yet we may be sure that in his case the conviction was not produced by a physical manifestation of Jesus. Why should we assume such a physical manifestation to have been a necessity for the earlier Apostles? "Whatever may have been the fact, the *faith* in the fact, if it did not lay the foundation of the Christian religion, did certainly give stability and distinctness to religious convictions which would otherwise have remained vague and fluctuating."²

We have throughout maintained that the writers of the New Testament cannot be regarded as trustworthy witnesses to the resurrection—first, because they were not eye-witnesses; second, because they were the slaves of a bewildering Old Testament exegesis and numberless current superstitions; and third, because they had little or no conception of any distinction between objective fact and subjective impression. The evidence for the resurrection resolves itself into accounts in the current pictorial manner of mental and emotional phases, combined with a series of visions alleged to have been seen, first by certain immediate followers of Jesus, and afterwards by Paul.

It cannot be admitted that these visions had any real objective cause. They appear to have resulted from the conviction formed by the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, who fulfilled in a profounder sense the supposed predictions contained in the Jewish scriptures, who had

¹ These remarks are slightly adapted from Mr. Macan's work.

² Mackintosh, *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 604.

gone into heaven, and would soon return to establish his kingdom. That it was no slight spiritual impression which could produce such a result may be admitted ; but it was reinforced by a proneness to illusions on the part of the disciples which is natural when we remember that the Jews of that time were filled with the most sanguine expectations. These Christian illusions were concentrated on Jesus as the ideal being, sometimes on a fanciful and apparent rather than a real and solid basis. That these feelings sprang from intense devotion to a loved but ill-understood teacher is undeniable, assuming some historical character behind the Gospel tradition. As M. Réville has remarked : “ Strong and deeply-rooted sentiments may, by force of circumstances, be for a time eclipsed ; but they remain, they persist, and take in the mind a tenfold energy, as if to make up for their temporary disappearance.”¹

Professor Schmiedel, in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, says : “ In contradistinction from the so-called objective vision the image that is seen in the subjective vision is a product of the mental condition of the seer. The pre-supposition is accordingly that he is not only in a high degree of psychical excitement, which is capable of producing in him the belief that he is seeing something which in point of fact has no objective existence, but also that all the elements which are requisite for the formation of a visionary image, whether it be views or ideas, are previously present in his mind, and have engaged its activities. That, in this instance, the seer should behold an image for which there is no corresponding reality can be spoken of as something abnormal only in so far as the occurrence is on the whole a rare one ;

¹ *Jésus de Nazareth*, vol. ii., p. 464.

as soon as a high degree of mental excitement is given, the existence of visions is by the laws of psychology just as intelligible and natural as, in a lower degree of mental excitement, is the occurrence of minor disturbances of sense-perceptions, such as the hearing of noises and the like. The view that a subjective vision could never have led the disciples to the belief that Jesus was alive, because they were able to distinguish a vision from a real experience, is quite a mistake.”¹ Suppose it were conceded that they could make this distinction. It still would not follow “that they held the thing seen in vision to be unreal, and only what they saw when in their ordinary condition to be real. It pertains precisely to the subjective vision that the seer, if he is not a person thoroughly instructed in psychology and the natural sciences, is compelled to hold what he sees in his vision to be real as long as it does not bring before him something which to his conception is impossible..... The visionaries of the Bible had more extended powers than modern visionaries have for taking a visionary image as an objective reality; for if they were unable to attribute to the image they saw any ordinary mundane reality because it was contrary to their ideas of mundane things, they could always attribute to it a heavenly reality, and it was only if it was contrary to their conception of things heavenly that they came to recognise it as a product of their own fantasy.”²

“What sort of appearances of a person risen from the dead were regarded by the disciples as possible? Not incorporeal appearances, for the idea of the immortality of the soul was utterly strange to them.....What is alone authenticated is the appearance of Jesus in heavenly

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Resurrection,” secs. 3, 34.

² *Ibid.*

corporeality," and that "corresponded with the conceptions of Paul and likewise with those of the original Apostles.....The resultant conclusion, then, must be that, when the disciples experienced an appearance of Jesus in heavenly corporeality, they were under compulsion to regard it as objectively real, and therefore to believe that Jesus was risen because they had actually seen him. Consequently this belief of theirs does not prove that what they saw was objectively real; it can equally well have been merely an image begotten of their own mental condition."¹

In this article Professor Schmiedel admits that "the followers of Jesus really had the impression of having seen him. To hold that the alleged appearances were due merely to legend or invention is to deny not only the genuineness of Paul's Epistles, but the historicity of Jesus altogether."²

But in what sense did the disciples believe they had seen Jesus? A comparatively modern incident throws a useful light on this subject. When Joan of Arc was asked at her trial how she knew the Archangel Michael before he had made himself known to her, she replied: "Because I saw him with my bodily eyes."³ Her visions were accompanied by words; an ignorant peasant girl conversed with angels, and distinguished their voices. There is better evidence for her visions than there is for those recorded in the New Testament. Joan was of strong and sober understanding, and carried out directions which she believed to be from heaven in a way which, humanly speaking, was a series of strokes of

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Resurrection," sec. 3. These extracts deserve particular notice.

² *Ibid.*, sec. 17.

³ Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 130.

genius. The beauty of her character, and the mighty work she accomplished, must always command the admiration of mankind. But we do not believe in the external reality of her visions for all that. On what ground are we justified in assuming that the visions of the disciples had any more objective character? It is probable that, if the Apostles had been rigidly cross-examined, the true character of their experiences would have been ascertained.

The Jews of the Apostolic age were familiar with miracles, signs, heavenly warnings, and communications, demons, dreams, apparitions. We are familiar with the perfectly opposite ideas of law, cause, order, science. This mode of thought finds no place for miracles in its system, but it finds a place for the belief in miracles.¹ And we know that the belief in miracles never arises except where the absence of knowledge furnishes a predisposing condition. "Philosophic criticism undertakes the attempt, not to explain a Christophany, but to explain how what it regards as a vision could be taken for a Christophany—nay, more, must have been so taken. For those ignorant of the possible origin of their visions the illusion has all the force of reality, and there is indeed no subjective criterion by which to distinguish sensations which in themselves are essentially alike, and only differ in the source whence they arise in the centre of sensibility."² In the case of Paul it was not possible that he should ascribe his sensation to the conscious activity of his own mind, or to unconscious cerebral processes, or to any cause within himself. While hostile to the new faith, he would look upon the tragedy of Calvary as a divine

¹ Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 70.

² *Ibid*, p. 70.

judgment upon a daring reformer. When the mental change had reached its culmination he would, probably without inquiry, adopt the belief of the disciples in the resurrection, and would then regard it as a cancelment of the judgment on Jesus, and a divine ratification of the claims and promises made in his name.

Regarding the conversion of Paul, John Stuart Mill remarks: "Of all the miracles in the New Testament this is the one which admits of the easiest explanation from natural causes."¹ The adequacy of these natural causes is practically admitted by Bishop Westcott, when he writes: "For us the appearance to St. Paul would certainly in itself fail to satisfy in some respects the conditions of historic reality—it might have been an internal revelation—but for him it was essentially objective and outward."² This merely shows how inevitably the two spheres were confused by even the best minds of the Apostolic age. How can we rely upon the evidence of persons who were unable to distinguish between them? Ought we to put implicit faith in witnesses who allege divine inspiration as the immediate source of their ideas? Paul's vision rests upon the previous visions of persons less cultured than himself, and, if the account of the execution of Stephen may be trusted, it did not take place until the idea of the risen Jesus had become fully established in the community of which Paul became an adherent.

The incident of the transfiguration recorded in the Synoptic Gospels appears to have an indirect bearing on the subject of the resurrection. Apologists assure us that the physical organism of Jesus after his death was not identical with his physical organism before death ;

¹ *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 239 (note).

² *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 109.

that it was not a natural body, but a glorified or spiritual body. They are unable to tell us what a glorified or spiritual body is, and beyond the vague and contradictory statements in the Gospels, and the unverifiable speculations of Paul, they have no warrant whatever for their positive assertions. Evidently doctrinal presuppositions lie behind this ingenious theory. The Gospel writers, however, relate with their usual simplicity and good faith that *before* the death of Jesus his body became "transfigured." Whatever be the meaning and nature of this incident, it is clear that the companions of Jesus formed no such conception of a "spiritual body" as later commentators have evolved. Death was not needed in order that the body of Jesus might be "glorified"; the process might, and, as the disciples (or at any rate the Evangelists) thought, did, take place while the natural body was in existence. Does this indicate no confusion of thought? Does it render more credible the statement that after his death the body of Jesus became a "spiritual body"? Luke relates that the disciples had fallen asleep, and that, when they awoke, they saw Moses and Elias talking with Jesus. Had the disciples then really seen these prophets, or was it all a dream? Is there no dogmatic tendency in thus introducing Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, whose face shone when he came down from the mountain, as being raised from the dead to converse with the mediator of a new covenant, whose "face did shine as the sun," and whose very raiment became "white and glistening"? The statements that Christ's death and resurrection were the subject of this conversation, and that Jesus charged his disciples to say nothing about it till he had risen from the dead, plainly show the hand of the editor. Peter and his companions are said to have been perplexed by this

rising from the dead, though they had just seen and heard men conversing who had been dead for many hundreds of years! The whole story is, of course, without value as history. Like the story of the temptation, it is a legend written long afterwards, designed to represent by anticipation the coming heavenly glory of Jesus, and therefore a variation of the tradition which honestly believed that after death he was exalted to the right hand of God. Such actual ground of fact as the story may possess admits "very easily of being regarded as having taken place in the inner consciousness of Jesus."¹ M. Albert Réville says: "Sufficient attention has not been paid to the close analogy which exists between the scene of the transfiguration and the visions of the resuscitated body."² Such an analogy would not by itself prove that the resurrection was nothing more than a vision; but it shows, at least, that the Gospel writers were not capable of distinguishing internal visions from objective realities, and therefore that it is useless to look to them for accurate accounts of facts. If an internal consciousness of Jesus, or Peter, or anyone else, has somehow become represented as an external event, it does beyond question increase the probability that the resurrection stories have undergone a similar transformation.

The story of the transfiguration is an awkward thing for the apologists. Professor Sanday, for instance, after admitting that the account of the temptation is symbolical, states that the transfiguration reminds us of that incident, and adds: "Once again the Apostles hear words which seem to come from heaven." He concedes that the account of the baptism "underwent various

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Simon Peter," sec. 8.

² *Histoire du Dogme de la Divinité de Jésus-Christ*, p. 19.

apocryphal modifications and adornments.”¹ Is it likely that the resurrection stories did not go through a similar process?

Weizsäcker evidently considers the account of the transfiguration not merely a legend, but a legend with a purpose. It is “exclusively designed to show Jesus transformed at this particular moment even in his earthly life into a heavenly form of light. The only possible inference is that Jesus, when he should appear after death, would do so in such a form.” And it is “an important feature of the narrative that he who had been rebuked because he could not reconcile himself to the thought of Jesus’s sufferings was here also reproved for at first interpreting the appearance as material.”² Those who believe that Jesus rose from the dead must, on the same authority, believe that Moses and Elijah also returned temporarily to a kind of life which enabled them to use the physical organs of speech.

That a strong presumption exists in favour of the visionary character of the manifestations of Jesus (granting their actuality) is the verdict of the most advanced Christian scholarship.

“With reference to the Resurrection of Jesus, the most credible statement in the Synoptics is that of Matthew and Mark—that the first appearances were in Galilee. The appearance in Jerusalem to the two women (Matt. xxviii. 9) is almost universally given up, not only because of the silence of all the other accounts, but also because in it Jesus only repeats the direction which the women had already received through the angel. If the disciples had seen Jesus in Jerusalem, as Luke states, it is absolutely incomprehensible how Mark and Matthew

¹ *Hastings' Dictionary*, art. “Jesus Christ.”

² *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, vol. i., pp. 15, 16.

came to require them to repair to Galilee before they could receive a manifestation of Jesus. The converse, on the other hand, is very easy to understand; Luke found it inconceivable that the disciples, who, according to him, were still in Jerusalem, should have been unable to see Jesus until they went to Galilee. In actual fact, the disciples had dispersed at Gethsemane. This Luke very significantly omits. Even Peter, after he had perceived, when he denied his Master, the dangers he incurred, will hardly have exposed himself to these gratuitously any longer. At the cross only women, not disciples, were present. Whither these last had betaken themselves we are not told. But it is not difficult to conjecture that they had gone to their native Galilee. The angelic command, therefore, that they should make this their rendezvous may reasonably be taken as a veiled indication that they had already gone thither. The presupposition made both by Mark and by Matthew that they were still in Jerusalem on the day of the Resurrection is accordingly erroneous. It was this error of theirs that led Luke to his still more erroneous inversion of the actual state of the facts.

“The second element in the Synoptics that may be accepted with confidence is the statement that it was Peter who received the first manifestation of his risen Master. All the more surprising is it that it is only Luke who tells us so, and that only in passing (xxiv. 34). It is the chief point in the statement of Paul (1 Cor. xv. 1-11). This passage must be regarded as the earliest account of the appearance of the risen Jesus; unquestionably it goes back to the communications made by Peter during the fifteen days' visit of Paul, three years after the conversion of the latter (Gal. i. 18).

“Not only is it a mark of inadequacy in the Gospels

that they have nothing to say about the greater number of the manifestations here recorded; it also becomes necessary to withhold belief from what they actually do relate in addition. Paul would certainly not have left it out had he known it; the duty of bringing forward all the available evidence in support of the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus, as against the Corinthian doubters, was of the most stringent kind.

“Thus, the statement that Jesus was touched, and that he ate (Luke xxiv. 39-43), are seen to be incredible. But these are precisely the statements which make it possible to understand why the Evangelists should pass over the mere appearing of Jesus to which the statements of Paul are confined, inasmuch as they believed they could offer proofs of a more palpable character.”¹

These “incredible” statements are also precisely those on which orthodox apologists rely as establishing the bodily resurrection of Jesus. It is a strange way of dealing with evidence to bring forward details which are totally unverifiable, and probably untrue, as proof of an occurrence itself absolutely unprovable. If it is true that the disciples had left Jerusalem, the accounts of Luke and John are almost wholly fictitious.

Looking at them as a whole, the New Testament recitals of miraculous events “show only too clearly with what lack of concern for historical precision the Evangelists write. The conclusion is inevitable that even the one Evangelist whose story in any particular case involves less of the supernatural than that of the others is still very far from being entitled on that account to claim implicit acceptance of his narrative. Just in the same degree in which those who came after

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Gospels,” sec. 138.

him have gone beyond him, it is easily conceivable that he himself may have gone beyond those who went before him."¹

Whether or not the earliest manifestation or vision of the risen Jesus was an experience of Peter, it is impossible to say positively. He was, in a sense, the chief man in the first Christian, or rather Judeo-Christian, community, and any assertion by him of such an experience would be implicitly accepted. He must have been in a state of intense agitation. Bitter sorrow and depression at the apparent failure of the movement mingled with vague stirrings of hope that the God of Israel would yet somehow establish its triumph. Remorse for his cowardice kept the face of Jesus ever before him. If it is true that he visited the tomb, what could he have thought on finding it empty? What explanation could present itself but that the Lord had risen? Were not these circumstances enough to cause a pious, ignorant Jew of those times to see visions? Jesus appeared to Peter as God of old appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Could he deem those visions unreal? With perfect sincerity he could declare that he had seen Jesus—that Jesus had risen from the dead. Would not other visions follow? And would not a writer thirty or fifty years later make the accounts more definite? The narrative in Acts x. 9–17 clearly reveals in Peter a visionary tendency. According to this story, he actually “*saw* heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him,” and *heard* “a voice” directing him to “kill and eat.” Of course, he at first refused, although expressly recognising the divine nature of the command; this argumentative perversity was

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Gospels,” sec. 138.

invariably shown, or rather related. The significance of the incident, however, lies in the statement that the senses of sight and hearing were both impressed. Yet the incident was merely a vision, and makes no claim to be anything more. Peter was "very hungry," and "fell into a trance," a condition which frequently accompanies fasting.¹ His convert Cornelius was also about the same time praying and fasting, and likewise had a vision of a "man in bright clothing," who addressed him in spoken language. People subject to these trances and visions are just the sort of persons who would relate their experiences as if they were physical facts. The whole story is preposterous and incredible. But it stands on the same footing as the accounts of the resurrection. No vision whatever was needed to incite Peter to make Gentile converts. According to Matthew xxviii. 19, he had been expressly told to do so by Jesus himself. Of these two stories one must be wrong. We may safely say that both are wrong. They are pious legends, nothing more.

A few words with regard to the ascension may fitly conclude this chapter. Was that also a vision? Or is it a pure myth? It is in the highest degree strange that so little is said in the New Testament about the ascension, and that little unsupported by a single vestige of evidence. It is true that the event is said to have been seen by eye-witnesses; but as these eye-witnesses were not the writers of the Gospels, and nowhere furnish any personal testimony, it is impossible to tell what basis of truth there is in the tradition. Even the two Evangelists who, according to Luke, were present omit all reference to the event. If the Apostles passed on to

¹ It is well known that fasting causes abnormal excitement of the nerve-centres of the brain.

the later Evangelists any account, either express or implied, of this incident, that simply shows the worthless character of their testimony. They related something which never happened, and could not have happened. In opposition to those who assert the ascension, we are fully warranted in denying it; because the grounds for the denial are immensely stronger than those for the affirmation. In the light of modern knowledge it is impossible that any living organism, whether wholly or partially material, ever did, or ever could, set aside the law of gravitation, mount into the clouds, and disappear in the airless space by which the earth is surrounded. Let us not be met by quibbles about a "spiritual body," the nature of which cannot be defined. If the body of Jesus was sufficiently material to be capable of walking, uttering words which could only have proceeded from a physical vocal apparatus, and of eating material food, that body could not have floated away into the sky as is represented by Luke. The alleged ascension is the strongest evidence we can have that the risen Jesus was a phantom, or, to speak more accurately, an imaginative creation resulting from a strong subjective impression made on superstitious minds. It is Luke alone who relates this phenomenon, and his casual reference shows that he knew nothing about it. Perhaps the most astounding event in the world's history—an event which reason and science pronounce a sheer impossibility—is related by one writer only out of all the New Testament authors, that writer not an eye-witness, his work anonymous and undated, and the original lost! Are we not justified in rejecting the account? Probably few Christians really believe it, and these only at the cost of stifling their reasoning faculties. If they are credulous enough to believe it, they accept a miracle without a

particle of evidence. That is essentially superstition, and with such believers it is hopeless to reason.

Most apologists ignore the ascension in a way which is very significant of a weak case. But is it not a necessary corollary of the resurrection? Some writers have given a direct affirmative to this question, alleging (with justice) that the two events must stand or fall together. Thus Neander says that the ascension "would rest on firm grounds even apart from the particular form in which it is represented in Luke; nay, even if there were not a word about it either in his Gospel or in Acts." He maintains also that it was a supernatural event, which is "as certain as the resurrection; both must stand or fall together."¹ Moreover, the ascension is to be believed because it "was necessary for the conviction of the Apostles"²—a view which the Apostles themselves no doubt shared. This means that we are justified in accepting miracles without any evidence whatever. Before such an exhibition of critical fatuity sober reason stands aghast. Neander frankly avows his bias. He claims that "it is necessary to believe that the whole manifestation of Christ is supernatural before we can believe in his resurrection."³ Virtually this gives up the case, for on close examination the theory of the supernatural breaks down at every point with striking completeness. If Neander's contention is correct, the matter is practically settled; for the reasoning which forces us to negative such an unfounded miracle as the ascension involves denial of the resurrection also. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. Can we even be sure that the resurrection and ascension are anything more than two aspects of

¹ Neander, *Life of Christ*, p. 485.

² *Ibid.*, p. 486.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

one psychological experience? That there is something in this theory Luke's Gospel seems to indicate by placing the ascension on the same day as the resurrection, or rather, as we may believe, late in the night following, when all was dark. And if, as we presume, no intelligent believer can hold to the literal truth of the ascension story, the difficulty of accounting for the disappearance of Christ's body lies as heavily on those who assert as on those who deny his resurrection.¹ Yet against the latter this difficulty is constantly made a stock argument. It is extraordinary that apologists should fail to see that, unless they are prepared to admit an unusual degree of credulity, they are confronted by the same perplexity as are those who endeavour to seek a natural explanation of the belief in the resurrection. "Are we here on the trace of a primitive Christian consciousness which did not rigidly separate the Resurrection and Ascension from one another? Paul puts the appearance to himself *after* the Ascension in the same class as the appearances *before* the Ascension to others, and it is very remarkable that he omits all mention of it just where we should expect it."² If, as Dr. Sanday states, the ascension, not the resurrection, was the true goal of Christ's mission, how came Paul to miss the goal? Bearing in

¹ It is clear to us that the ascension is related simply because it appeared to the early Church the most probable explanation of the disappearance of the body. Professor Gardner quotes the following from Harnack: "In some of the oldest accounts the Resurrection and the sitting at the right hand of God are taken as parts of the same act without mention of any Ascension" (*Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 260). The same writer confirms our surmise that an ascension was needed and was therefore supplied. "Some account of an Ascension became a necessity as soon as the corporeal resurrection from the dead was accepted" (*Ibid*). Keim also has remarked that the ascension is defended simply because, if it did not occur, "the Resurrection would be without significance" (*Jesus of Nazara*, vol. vi., p. 382).

² Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 52.

mind the peculiarities of Paul's theology, in which the glorified Christ was the central figure, it seems unaccountable that, if he knew the ascension to be a fact, he should have said nothing about it. Equally strange is it that Matthew, Mark,¹ and John should have done the same,² especially if two of them were eye-witnesses, while concerning themselves to relate events of far less importance. It cannot, however, be admitted that they were eye-witnesses. Had they seen the event they would certainly have related it. And at the time when Luke says they were in Jerusalem Matthew implies that they were in Galilee.

Mr. Macan suggests that the story of the ascension may have been intended to embody not historic but religious truth, poetically apprehended. In accordance with the mental predilections of the Apostles, they concluded that Jesus had ascended to heaven because, as the spiritual and suffering Messiah, he should, after death, have been glorified, and must have been exalted to the "right hand of God." If they attached any

¹ Mark xvi. 19 casually refers to the ascension, but as the passage is spurious it raises the suspicion that Luke xxiv. 51 may be spurious also. Dr. Davidson candidly admits that it is (*Introduction to New Testament*, vol ii., p. 368).

² John, however, though he says nothing of the disappearance into the clouds (beyond the expression to Mary Magdalene, "I am not yet ascended"), makes a reference to the popular idea of ascensions into heaven which "gives away" the orthodox case in a startling manner. At the beginning of his public ministry Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus, in which no one has ever yet discovered where the words of Jesus end and those of the Evangelist begin. "No man," it is said, "*hath ascended* into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man, which is *in* heaven" (John iii. 13). So that, apart from the contradiction of the Old Testament narratives of Enoch and Elias, Jesus had already ascended to and was in heaven at the time of the interview. If this is not a practical confession that the visit of Nicodemus is an invention of the Gospel writer, criticism may as well be given up altogether. It is impossible to regard as a historian a writer who attributes to Jesus words which he could not have uttered, and makes him speak of a future event as if it were past—and that event one which never happened.

definite meaning to this expression, it is more than we are able to do. The early heretics (who were not always in the wrong),¹ such as the Manichæans and the Phantasiastæ, thought that Christ's heavenly body was phantasmal or fictitious, not physically real. Others thought he ascended to heaven as pure spirit. The Originistæ taught that his body, as it ascended, went on attenuating till it reached the Father, when none was left.² These curious speculations have no other value than that of showing the ignorance which existed in the early Christian communities as to the real nature of the body and person of their founder.

Many traces exist that both the resurrection and the ascension were in the first instance conceptions formed solely by the spiritual activities of the first Christian believers. Professor Schmiedel says: "The original conception of the Ascension has been preserved in this, that the appearances of the risen Jesus occur after he has been received up into heaven; the Resurrection and Ascension are a single act; Jesus is taken up directly from the grave, or from the underworld, into heaven." It was believed that "Jesus made his appearances from heaven, and that after each appearance he returned to heaven." "The risen Jesus never ate or was touched. Flesh and bones Jesus assuredly had not. He really made his appearances, although it is expressly denied in Luke xxiv. 39, as spirit, in the sense in which angels are spirits. On this point the Jewish Christians most certainly agreed with Paul."³

¹ See Réville's *Histoire du Dogme de la Divinité de Jésus-Christ*, ch. 4.

² Macan, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 54.

³ Dr. Schaff holds that the appearance to Paul was an objective manifestation "of the ascended Saviour coming down from heaven" (*History of the Christian Church*, vol i., p. 313).

Again: "There is to be drawn from the various accounts one deduction which goes very deep—no words were heard from the risen Jesus. Paul heard none; in his Epistles there is not the slightest countenance for the belief that Paul heard words, although he had the strongest motives for referring to them had he been in a position to do so." ¹

Evidently the resurrection was not in the first century the indubitable physical event which to later ages seemed beyond question. That a Professor of New Testament exegesis should feel compelled, by examination of the accounts themselves, to arrive at the above conclusions is a fact of the deepest significance.

According to the same critic, Clemens Romanus, Hermas, Polycarp, and Ignatius make no mention of the ascension; while the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, a work of the second century, does not refer to the resurrection. Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian appear to regard both events as two parts of one act. The *Apology of Aristides* states that after three days Jesus rose again, and was taken up into heaven. The *Codex Bobbiensis* has an account of angels coming down from heaven and rising again with Jesus, after darkness had come on during the day. This is interpolated in the sixteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel, between the third and fourth verses, and its obvious purport is to make the resurrection and ascension one act. The ancient Gospel of Peter is, we believe, the only work of the kind which describes the actual resurrection, and this is so exaggerated as to be obviously legendary. But this document again implies that the ascension followed immediately upon the exit of Jesus

¹ Above quotations from *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Resurrection," sec. 18.

from the tomb, and adds the definite statement that the disciples went home to Galilee, and resumed their fishing, though it differs from the fourth Gospel as to who these disciples were.¹

We may add that the Jewish traditions of the disappearance of Moses and Elijah may conceivably have aided in the formation of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus, a prophet whose mission transcended theirs in spirit and power, and who could not therefore be deemed less worthy of heavenly glory. Woolston implies that Augustine, Origen, St. John of Jerusalem, St. Hilary, and St. Jerome looked upon the story of the resurrection "as emblematical of a spiritual resurrection."²

It would ill become us to regard the traditional conceptions just noticed as alone conclusive against the truth of the resurrection. What they unquestionably indicate is the extraordinary uncertainty in which the whole subject was involved in the early ages of Christianity, and the confused mingling of superstition, fact, and conjecture which then formed the basis of its doctrinal system. All was floating, vague, intangible, and illogical. And from these traditional conceptions our present Gospel records were in course of time constructed.

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Resurrection," sec. 5.

² *Discourse on the Miracles*, p. 48.

PART II.

CHRISTIAN DEFENCES EXAMINED

CHAPTER I.

THE LATE BISHOP OF DURHAM

IN the preceding section a detailed examination of the discrepancies in the Gospel accounts has been dispensed with, partly because the task has been many times performed, and partly because the principal points will arise in considering the defences of the resurrection belief. The following chapters deal with a few of the more prominent apologists, who may be taken as sufficiently representing the attitude of the Christian believer—Dr. Westcott, Dr. Milligan, and Mr. Latham standing for the modern type of orthodoxy, and Dr. Kennedy for the rigidly supernaturalist view. Their arguments comprise the principal reasons for holding that the resurrection was a physical and historical event.

The vast majority of modern apologists who, with singular diversities of view, attempt to establish the truth of the Gospel accounts we are compelled to leave unnoticed. The reasonings of orthodox writers¹ rest for the most part upon a series of theological assumptions,

¹ Of whom Gilbert West, Chalmers, Paley, Candlish, Edersheim, Neander, Pressensé, Row, Macpherson, Fairbairn, Lange, Salmond, and Farrar may be cited as examples.

the conclusions drawn from which are almost invariably implied in the premises. Their understanding of historical evidence suggests that the vaguest and most undefined reports of a miracle are proof of its actual occurrence. The more open-minded apologists are able to arrive at only very half-hearted and inconclusive results. Thus Professor Sanday, while struggling to keep within the orthodox fold, is compelled to admit that, though the belief in the resurrection arose immediately and suddenly, "when we come to details it would seem that from the first there was a certain amount of confusion which was never wholly cleared up"¹—an admission with which vanishes the positive value of his affirmations. "Whichever way we turn, difficulties meet us which the documents to which we have access do not enable us to remove." In spite of this, he holds that "no difficulty of weaving the separate incidents into an orderly, well-compacted narrative can impugn the unanimous belief of the Church which lies behind them, that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples."² To us it is a truism that no sober reasoner can or ought to believe a miracle on evidence which he perceives to be imperfect and conflicting. Nor is it by any means a fact that the belief of the early Christians was "unanimous." The circumstance that there is an "ascending scale" in the alleged appearances is regarded by Professor Sanday as evidence of their reality. Is it not more consistent with the idea of legendary growth?

In reference to the Vision Theory, we may briefly note Professor Sanday's conclusion. "This is the least that must be asserted: A belief that has had such

¹ *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Jesus Christ."

² *Ibid.*

incalculably momentous results must have had an adequate cause. No apparition, no mere hallucination of the senses, ever yet moved the world. But we may doubt whether the theory, even as Keim presents it, is adequate or really conclusive. It belongs to the process of so trimming down the element that we call supernatural in the Gospel narratives as to bring them within the limits of everyday experiences. But that process we must needs think has failed. The facts are too obstinate, the evidence for them is too strong; and the measures which we apply are too narrow and bounded. It is better to keep substantially the form which a sound tradition has handed down to us, even though its contents in some degree pass our comprehension."¹

Truly a "most lame and impotent conclusion." The Vision Theory may not be "really conclusive," but it is far more nearly so than a tradition the soundness of which has to be assumed. Unless Professor Sanday can show that religious enthusiasts in the credulous first century could reason as we do in the twentieth, and that they had the materials for reasoning which we possess, he can hardly ask us to accept the soundness of *all* their traditions. If any should be accepted, reason must determine which. For every human belief an adequate cause exists in its prior conditions. There, if at all, the cause is to be discovered. If it cannot be found, we still have no logical right to invoke the supernatural because our knowledge of the conditions is imperfect. And one may ask whether the "incalculably momentous" results of Buddhism and Mohammedanism do not justify a substantially similar plea. The resurrection-belief we regard as a convincing proof that an "hallucination of

¹ *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Jesus Christ."

the senses" *has* moved the world—or at least a part of it—but only, of course, in conjunction with other forces, which the apologist prudently leaves out of account. The "trimming down" of supernatural relations originating in ancient times needs not to be excused; it is a necessity for mental progress. The facts are not "obstinate," for no one can state with certainty what they were. The evidence for the resurrection is not "strong," but weak, exhibiting almost every defect which it is possible for evidence to possess. Finally, a mere tradition of past miraculous events which we can neither verify nor comprehend is an absolutely unsafe support for an alleged variation of natural law.

The tendency of Professor Sanday's thought is shown by his acceptance in some vague sense of the legend of the ascension, for which, as we maintain, no evidence whatever exists. "The overarching sky is a standing symbol for the abode of God, and the return of the Son to the Father was naturally represented as a retreat within its blue recesses, the ethereal home of light and glory. It is sometimes necessary that a symbol should be acted as well as written or spoken. The disciples were aware of a vanishing, and they knew that their Lord must be where his Father was." If the goal of the mission of Jesus was not his resurrection, but, as Professor Sanday states, his return to the Father in triumph, it is unaccountable that the fact was not made a little more clear. We are content to say that if the ascension was, as this extract implies, purely spiritual, as much a symbol as the sky to which Jesus rose, we are willing to interpret the New Testament account in that sense. Must we not, then, so interpret the resurrection?

All this limping apologetic proceeds on the assumption that a particular book must be entirely true or entirely

false; in other words, that the critic is not entitled to discriminate between its parts, or to accept its credible elements unless he swallows its incredible elements also. A method so absurd would never be applied to any other book than the Bible. If it is wonderful that the Bible has withstood the assaults of its "enemies," it is still more wonderful that it has survived the defences of its friends.

Bishop Westcott makes the astonishing statement that "the existence of a Christian society is the first and (if rightly viewed) the final proof of the historic truth of the miracle on which it was founded."¹ This is an argument which may obviously be held to justify the divine origin of every faith under the sun, good, bad, or indifferent, from the monotheism of the Jew to the cosmogony of the Fiji Islander.

Evidently the Bishop does not mean that *all* belief proves the facts on which it rests, for that would imply that belief is equivalent to knowledge, and that the knowledge of many persons can be contradictory, yet at the same time true. His exorbitant claim is judiciously confined to his own faith. He must mean that the particular belief in the resurrection is of such a character that it could not have come into existence unless the resurrection had been a fact. But to arrive at this result we must discriminate between beliefs. We must know why and how the belief in the resurrection arose. And if we discriminate between beliefs, we are committed to a strict investigation of their origin, in the course of which differences of opinion inevitably arise.

Dr. Westcott, however, presently adds a qualification

¹ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 104.

which renders his dictum a little less eccentric. "Unless it can be shown that the origin of the Apostolic belief in the Resurrection, with due regard to the fulness of its characteristic form and the breadth and rapidity of its propagation, can be satisfactorily explained on other grounds, the belief itself is a sufficient proof of the fact."¹ This at once carries us from the belief to the grounds of the belief, from the province of faith to the province of reason. It is impossible to determine the rightness of any belief without knowledge of the whole of the facts on which it purports to be founded. But the whole of the facts relating to the resurrection are not known to anyone. Are we, then, to shut our eyes to all possibilities of explanation, to leave out of sight the conditions under which the belief arose, and accept its supernatural origin without even attempting to find a natural basis for it? Such a course may be congenial to the believer. But the reasoner speedily finds that, though he does not know all the facts, he *can* sufficiently explain the "origin of the Apostolic belief" without resort to the precarious supposition of miracle. Of the miracle itself Dr. Westcott offers no "proof" whatever.

Referring to the objection that the Christian Church was founded, not on the *fact* that Jesus rose from the dead, but on the *belief* that he did so, Bishop Westcott observes: "Belief expressed in action is, for the most part, the strongest evidence which we can have of any historic event."² What is meant by the phrase, "for the most part"? If there are exceptions to the rule, how do we know that the belief in the resurrection is not one of them? We need to be convinced that "belief

¹ *Gospel of the Resurrection.*

² *Ibid.*

expressed in action" is always infallible before we can accept it as guaranteeing a supernatural event. Belief, when strongly held, always does express itself in action. Does that prove it to be true? Then the visions of Joan of Arc prove that St. Michael and St. Catherine actually appeared to her; Mohammed's journey to Jerusalem on the winged horse Borak was not a flight of imagination, but a physical reality; the visions of innumerable saints and martyrs are true because these persons expressed their various beliefs in action by dying for them. And the tenaciously held beliefs of Anabaptists, Muggletonians, Southcottians, Shakers, Agapemonites, Zionists, Jezreelites, the thousand and one opposing sects of the Middle Ages, to say nothing of those of the numerous non-Christian faiths—all these are true likewise!

It is not necessarily the fact, however, that "belief expressed in action" is "the strongest evidence which we can have of any historic event." Nothing is more likely to warp and perturb the sobriety of the untutored judgment than a belief which, by its very fervour, translates itself into practical activity. And in no other sphere is this so common as in that of religion, where the perversion of judgment by emotion is so common that it passes unnoticed. Innumerable are the instances in which the strength of a conviction depends, not on conscious and rational antecedents, but on psychological characteristics which are not consciously present to the mind. The grim theology which believed in predestination and everlasting hell is now discredited by the diffusion of wider conceptions. Yet for hundreds of years it was so dominant that none but the boldest minds were even disposed to question its conclusions. Who would now bring forward the belief in hell as proof

that hell is a reality? And who will deny that with thousands of good men that belief has been a strong incentive to action?

The belief in the resurrection rests on a similar footing. It is still held with tenacity, but is being shifted from a physical to a spiritual objective. The weakness of the evidence is practically admitted by the present tendency of Christian thought to lay the stress of belief, not on a past occurrence, but on a present manifestation of the life of Jesus in the soul of the believer. It is, in fact, the emotional vividness of a belief rather than its intellectual cogency which leads to its being "expressed in action." This diminishes the probability of the belief being the result of any such process of reasoning as would guarantee its accuracy. Fervent faith scorns the prosaic operations of inductive reasoning; strong emotion almost always perturbs the intellectual balance. A "revivalist" preacher, holding a firm conviction of the reality of hell, will, in proportion to the intensity of his faith, be stimulated to the most earnest efforts towards saving other persons from perdition.¹ Yet, in spite of his belief being "expressed in action," it is a revolting falsity. At the best, belief in hell is now carried to a "suspense account."² It seems, then, that the belief which most readily issues in practical activity is, in religion, as likely as not to be erroneous belief. All history shows that complete religious sincerity may co-exist with intellectual error, and often, indeed, promotes error by disdaining the aid of mental cultivation. Think of the long series of Christian dogmas which have grown

¹ The well-known revivalist Mr. Moody once said: "If I did not believe in hell for ever, would I come here to preach night after night?" (*Moody's Sermons*).

² E. Clodd, *Huxley*, p. 183.

up not only in disdain of reason, but with little or no support in the very writings which are thought to sanction them. The doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, the personality of the Holy Ghost; the immaculate conception of Mary, her perpetual virginity, her "motherhood of God"; Papal infallibility; the strict observance of the Sabbath—all these are the result of dogmatic prepossessions scarcely distinguishable from those to which the defenders of a physical resurrection are logically committed.

What, then, is "the strongest evidence we can have of any historic event"? Our reply must take into account both the character of the event and the character of the evidence available. A consistent and natural account of any occurrence, confirmed by independent testimony which does not violate logic and probability, is the best evidence to later times of the truth of any event in history. This may not be "belief expressed in action"; it is something more reliable—it is the effort of intellectually qualified persons to relate the truth as completely as it is known to them. The religious enthusiast may be sober and reliable in other respects, and a valuable member of society; but he is seldom capable of that intellectual breadth of view, that judicial balancing of opposite conclusions, which are so essential to the historian.

With regard to the nature of the event, we need scarcely repeat the truism that an occurrence which is in conformity with experience is necessarily of a different order from an occurrence which is in conflict with experience. The one, if not actually proved, is susceptible of proof; the other lies always beyond the scope of proof. If we are told that a sick man, who had been given up by his physician, has afterwards recovered, we

have no difficulty in believing it, partly because his death was not a certainty, but an inference, and partly because similar recoveries are by no means infrequent. But if we were told that the patient had actually died and been buried, and afterwards returned to life, we should at once assume an error rather than a miracle. The resurrection cannot be proved by the evidence which proves the death of Julius Cæsar. It is not a very uncommon thing for a ruler to be assassinated. But if it were claimed that he returned to life, no one could rationally believe it without vastly greater evidence than that which sufficiently attests his death. Yet, in the case of Jesus, instead of having this greater evidence, we have less evidence for his resurrection than we have for his death; we have not even testimony which fulfils the elementary requirements of agreement, completeness, and probability.

“No one probably,” says Bishop Westcott, “will deny that the Resurrection was announced as a fact immediately after the Passion. Nothing else will explain the origin of the Christian Church.”¹ Here we have a specimen of the manner in which the apologist endeavours to squeeze concessions out of his opponents. The Bishop must have been well aware that, if the evidence does not justify the denial in question, it equally fails to justify his assertion. We do not know that the accounts transmitted are those of eye-witnesses. Even if they are, the evidence of eye-witnesses belonging to that particular age must be received with the greatest caution. In point of fact, the gravest doubt exists whether the resurrection *was* “announced as a fact immediately after the passion.” The earliest Gospel gives no account of it. It gives

¹ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 110.

merely a statement attributed to an "angel"; and, as we cannot put the angel into the witness-box, the statement cannot be received as evidence of any value whatever. The Gospel next in date gives an obviously legendary account of an appearance which it is impossible to verify, or even to connect with any other incident in the records. The third Gospel contains numerous entirely fresh details, which indicate that the appearances may have been of a visionary character. The fourth relates a further set of incidents of which the other three make no mention. It is clear that the story has grown in the telling—that the later details have been added by pious tradition. The chroniclers related not what did happen, but what they thought ought to have happened. And the earliest of their accounts appeared more than a generation after the time of the supposed events. The question of the competence of the Evangelists as historians—the question whether they did or did not share the superstitions, the ignorance, and the strange interpretations of the Jewish scriptures common to their age—becomes of the greatest importance. In examining their narratives we are not dealing with facts probable in themselves and universally acknowledged; we are dealing with an extremely vague tradition of facts which have from the first been disputed.

That nothing but the "fact" of the resurrection "will explain the origin of the Christian Church" is surely a rash statement for even a Christian advocate to put forward. *Primâ facie*, a miracle is not necessary to the establishment of a great religious system—especially one which makes many appeals to human credulity and weakness, as well as to the human desire for goodness, happiness, and the craving for immortal life. Other great systems have been successfully established without

a similar miracle. Why should we believe the truth of the resurrection story essential to the Christian religion? Because, it is said, the first Christians believed it. It is therefore the *belief* in the resurrection which really explains the origin of the Christian Church. But that the belief proves the fact cannot for a moment be admitted. Ample reasons have already been adduced to show that the first Christians, in spite of the instructions said to have been given them by Jesus, were undoubtedly mistaken on several important questions. They may have formed erroneous conceptions with regard to the resurrection also. And it must be remembered that we are in reality ignorant of the true nature of their original belief. Probability favours the modern critical view that this belief was based, not on the actual reappearance of the resuscitated body of Jesus, but on strong preconceptions and supposed visionary appearances from heaven—a view which finds some support in the narratives of the third and fourth Gospels. It is to Bishop Westcott incredible that the disciples should have been deceived; the empty tomb¹ and the widely extended manifestations of Jesus being treated as historic certainties. Moreover, “Christ was with his disciples for forty days.”² We should say that the disciples were precisely the kind of persons to be deceived in a matter appealing so strongly to their religious sympathies, and that they would be likely to receive without close examination reports which appeared to confirm their interpretations of the alleged prophecies of the Old Testament writers. Whether or

¹ “The empty tomb is beyond question” (Professor James Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*, p. 514). “The empty tomb on the third day can by no means be regarded as a historical incident” (Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. i., p. 85). †

² *Gospel of the Resurrection*, pp. 111–12.

not this was so, it is an extreme claim to urge on behalf of any body of men, especially of men living in a remote and credulous age, that they were incapable of being deceived. Would Dr. Westcott admit the argument if used in support of a faith alien to his own? A precisely similar claim has been urged, and with a more direct cogency, on behalf of Mormonism. As a matter of fact, however, we have not the testimony of the original disciples themselves, and do not know what they thought, believed, or preached. We have merely statements attributed to them by later writers, whose accuracy we are compelled by their own statements to suspect. As to the empty tomb, the whole episode is pronounced by the *Encyclopædia Biblica* to be unhistorical. The manifestations of Jesus may have been reported as "widely extended." The question is, did they occur at all? Contradictory accounts afford little presumption in favour of their historical reality. And to say that Jesus was "with his disciples for forty days," when not one of the Gospels makes such a statement, and two of them exclude it, is to bring rational belief to close quarters with irrational credulity. The forty days' fast in the wilderness, and the forty days' post-resurrection life of Jesus, are the Christian analogies with the legendary forty days' fast of Moses in the mount, the new dispensation being made to correspond with the old by virtue of those arbitrary prepossessions of which we find so many traces in the New Testament records.

"There was no predisposition," says Bishop Westcott, "among the Christians to believe in a Resurrection, nor among the Jews."¹ The truth of this statement may easily be tested. According to the accounts in the

¹ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 114.

fourteenth chapter of Matthew and the sixth chapter of Mark, the very first thought of Herod when he heard of Jesus was that John the Baptist had returned to life. The natural assumption that another popular preacher had appeared does not even occur to him. He does not merely surmise that *possibly* a supernatural intervention had taken place, but at once jumps to the positive conclusion that a man whose head he had struck off had reappeared with it on his shoulders: "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."¹ Does this indicate no predisposition to believe not merely in the possibility, but in the actual occurrence, of resurrections from the dead? Such things, in the view of the Evangelist, present so little difficulty to Herod that they do not even arouse astonishment, but, on the contrary, appear to him the most natural explanation. If a monarch could form such an absurd idea, what must have been the popular conceptions of the time?

Herod, however, could not have been so foolish as Matthew and Mark represent. Another Gospel writer gives an account of the same circumstance which has a far stronger claim to probability. Luke relates that "it was *said by some* that John was risen from the dead"—a supposition clearly rejected by Herod himself, for he says: "John have I beheaded: but who is this?"² Obviously the credulity which, without even a moment's examination, assumes that a dead man has returned to life is to be charged not against Herod, but solely against the two Gospel-writers. And if these writers would think it perfectly natural that John the Baptist should rise from the dead, would they not have a far stronger predisposition to believe in the reported resurrection of their Master?

¹ Matt. xiv. 2; Mark vi. 16.

² Luke ix. 7-9.

The suppositions mentioned in Matt. xvi. 14, Mark viii. 28, and Luke ix. 19, that Jesus was really John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, exhibit the same readiness to believe that a dead man can return to life. The question said to have been put to John by the Jews, "Art thou Elias?"¹ further shows the widespread existence of this particular form of credulity. According to Matt. xi. 14, Jesus expressly declared that John *was* Elias, though John himself as distinctly said he was not. Very probably these accounts are all inaccurate, but they clearly evidence the superstition of the Gospel-writers, if not that of the Jews. Yet the apologist is hardy enough to declare that there was no predisposition among either to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. If Dr. Westcott is right, the Gospel accounts are not worthy of the smallest credence as histories.

Jesus is reported to have raised three persons to life—the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus.² On the supposition that these reports originated while the first disciples were still alive, could they possibly imagine that a person whom they held to be divine, who had proved his power to bring the dead back to life, would be unable to exert this power in his own case? No; to them "it was not possible that he should be holden" of death. In John vi. 40, Jesus is said to have promised that he would at the last day raise up those who believed in him. If he made such a claim, would it not create in those who accepted it a predisposition to believe that he would himself be raised? Even his disciples are said to have been endowed by him

¹ John i. 21.

² Little weight can be attached to these accounts, because they may be quite unhistorical.

with the power not only to heal the sick, but to raise the dead.¹

Beyond all this we have the repeated predictions of Jesus to his followers that he actually would return to life after being put to death. These predictions are reported in such precise terms that, if delivered, stupidity itself could not fail to understand them, for the circumstances would stamp them indelibly upon the memory of his hearers.² Why do modern apologists tell us that the disciples knew nothing of these prophecies? They were either made or not made. If the former, it is simply incredible that they could have been forgotten by the friends of Jesus, yet remembered by his enemies. If they were not made, the Gospel-writers who assert that they were solemnly and emphatically delivered by Jesus are self-convicted of flagrant error, and cannot be trusted in the simplest statements. If these predictions were made, they must of necessity have created an expectation that they would be fulfilled. Even if the actual words were forgotten, the idea must have remained present to the minds of the disciples. If the predictions were not made, words have been deliberately put into the mouth of Jesus which he did not utter. Men who would do that deserve little credit when they relate miracles. Whether or not the Evangelists were consciously fraudulent need not be discussed, since we do not know who they were; but it is not unreasonable to assume that their language merely illustrates the later tendency to clothe Jesus with the attribute of divinity, and consequently of superhuman power and superhuman foreknowledge of the future. Writing not from personal

¹ Matt. x. 8.

² Matt. xvi. 21, xvii. 23, xx. 19; Mark viii. 31, ix. 31, x. 34; Luke ix. 22; xviii. 33.

knowledge, but merely handling a confused body of traditions, the Gospel-writers attributed to Jesus all, and more than all, the characteristics which they believed the Messiah must have displayed. A passage in Hosea expresses in Oriental imagery the conviction that divine power will restore believers from depression to spiritual favour : "After two days will he revive us ; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."¹ Curiously enough, this saying, though comparatively explicit, is nowhere quoted in the New Testament, but appears to be referred to in the vague expressions "according to the scriptures," "he opened to us the scriptures," which afford some latitude for fanciful exegesis. The passage is not a prophecy of Christ's resurrection, or of any event in the distant future. So with the quotation from Psalm xvi. : "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption."² In saying this was spoken of the resurrection of Christ Peter simply perverts the original meaning. Persons accustomed to something like exactitude of thought find great difficulty in even understanding a mental tendency which sees a definite prediction in an irrelevant analogy, and unconsciously misleads by asserting as facts what are nothing but the naïve explanations of ignorance.

In view of these considerations, it is impossible to admit Bishop Westcott's contention that no predisposition to belief in a resurrection existed among the disciples of Jesus. If the records are accurate, a very strong expectation to this effect must have been formed among his followers. If no such expectation existed, the Gospels are seriously inaccurate in stating that Jesus

¹ Hosea vi. 2.

² Acts ii. 27.

had on several occasions distinctly foretold his rising from the dead, and on many other occasions implied its possibility. It must be added that to us it appears a series of clumsy devices on the part of the Evangelists to relate that the alleged prediction recurred to the memory of the disciples only after the death of Jesus; to put into his mouth a promise that this should be done by extra-natural agency; and, in addition, to attribute to the disciples such incredible stupidity that when the prediction was uttered for the second time they questioned among themselves as to "what the rising from the dead should mean." They could not have disputed about a conception which was perfectly familiar to them, which is represented as an obvious reflection to the non-believing Herod, and which finally they had themselves seen their Master illustrate on two distinct occasions.¹ All they could have been perplexed about was the application of the idea to their Master, though his words were distinct.

The last point in Bishop Westcott's argument which calls for notice relates to the alleged appearance of Jesus to five hundred persons. This incident is commonly treated as if it were fully established, and the circumstances fully known, thus affording a complete and final answer to all objections. "It is," says the Bishop, "unintelligible that there should be simultaneous perception by many persons of an alleged phenomenon unless it was objective."² This assumes, first, the truth of the story; second, the impossibility of the same subjective experience actuating a number of persons at the same time. We shall bring forward grounds for thinking the Bishop in error on each point.

Apologists are in the habit of confusing the issue by

¹ Matt. ix.; Mark v.; Luke vii. and viii.

² *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 111.

using the term "testimony" in two different senses. They invariably treat the report of an unknown person's testimony as of equal value with, and of precisely the same purport as, the direct testimony of such person—assuming he could be produced. Nothing could be more fallacious or less justifiable. A distinction must be drawn between a person's statements and their reproduction by someone else. "Never mind what the soldier said," objects the judge in *Pickwick*; "the soldier's statement is not evidence." The distinction is certainly just. Secondhand testimony to the supernatural can never be safely treated as firsthand testimony; both because it cannot be dissected or supplemented, and because of the ever-increasing liability to error which affects transmitted statements.

It cannot, in fact, be conceded that this manifestation to five hundred persons ever happened. We have not the testimony to that effect of any one of their number. The only New Testament writer who mentions it is Paul, and he does so in such vague terms that no clear conception can be got out of them. He does not state when, or where, the manifestation took place. He does not name the witnesses, or any of them, or give the faintest clue to their identity. The incident is entirely unconfirmed by the writers of the four Gospels—surely an "unintelligible" supposition if they had ever heard of the most convincing of all the alleged appearances. Paul nowhere claims that he personally was one of these five hundred witnesses. We are therefore compelled to conclude that he merely refers to a report current at the time. And it may be suspected that Paul is not referring to a physical event, but to a spiritual "revelation" similar to his own; in which case he would be treating the total number of believers as testifiers to an experienced

fact of the inner life. He does not state that he took any pains to verify the report, and we can from his own writings form an opinion as to whether he was likely to have done so. "Since it is impossible to believe that so important an appearance could have been omitted by those who wrote professedly on the subject, if they believed it, it follows that Paul adopted a story which they disbelieved or neglected, and consequently that he was far from rigid in investigating the historical basis of the accounts of the return of Jesus."¹ If belief in such an appearance was current when Paul wrote, it must have ceased to be so before any of the Gospels appeared. This is a clear presumption of its unreality. Ought one to accept without a fragment of evidence the truth of a mere report of an occurrence absolutely opposed to universal experience? It is said that Paul would not have made such a statement had it been erroneous, because he appealed to a number of then living witnesses who could have exposed any error. How do we know that they did not do so? That no writings in contradiction of Paul's words have come down to us is no proof that there never were any; for we know that, in later ages of the Church, writings which savoured of "heresy" were systematically destroyed. But assuming that Paul's statements were never challenged, they are not thereby shown to be true. Can we imagine that the Corinthian believers under the spell of the Apostle's powerful personality would have questioned his assertions unless they had grave reasons for disputing his authority? Can we suppose that they would have sent from Greece to Judæa in order to verify what, as Christians, they were willing to accept as one

¹ C. C. Hennell, *Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity*, p. 189.

of their principal doctrines?—that they would, in a manner totally foreign to the tendencies of the age, have taken the trouble to ascertain the names and addresses of a number of persons, and to sift their evidence with judicial impartiality? Such a proceeding would probably not have occurred to them. Yet, in spite of this improbability, have we any right to assert that they did not take these steps? If they did, the result is absolutely unknown; but, judging from the fact that doubts as to a general resurrection existed among Paul's Corinthian converts, it is by no means impossible that his previous verbal teaching on this subject (of which the passage in his Epistle seems to be a recapitulation) had been examined and found in some degree unsatisfactory.

This argument that passages in the New Testament ought to be accepted because, so far as we know, they were not contradicted, is a strangely precarious support for accounts of supernatural occurrences. What we want to ascertain is the intrinsic credibility, the evidential value, of Paul's statement. Two lines of bald assertion cannot be deemed to establish the reality of an event at variance with universal experience.

We do not insinuate that Paul propagated a report which he knew to be false. But was he capable of the rational discrimination which in our own time a sober reasoner would bring to bear on such a question? The mind of his age revelled in the supernatural, and, though he was probably less superstitious than the majority, he does not seem to have been able to avoid mingling impressions derived from objective realities with impressions which had no more than a subjective and idealistic basis.

Was the appearance to the five hundred of a visionary

character analogous to that experienced by Paul at his conversion? To Dr. Westcott such an explanation appears incredible. Yet it is none the less a fact that equally strange psychical phenomena are on record.

Constantine the Great is said to have had a vision of the cross which encouraged him in his military operations. According to Eusebius, "at mid-day, when the sun was beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, bearing the inscription, *By this conquer*; he himself, and his whole army also, being struck with amazement."¹ Eusebius states that this account was given to him by the Emperor himself, so that here we have the testimony of the original witness handed down by a known author, the first of which conditions is absent from Paul's statement. Yet who would be so foolish as to believe in the reality of Constantine's vision, though beheld by a "whole army," numbering many times five hundred persons? If Eusebius had made a similar statement regarding the resurrection, every Christian apologist in Europe would treat it as conclusive evidence of the fact.

In his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* Sir Walter Scott makes the following judicious observations:—

Even in the field of death, and amid the mortal tug of combat itself, strong belief has wrought the same wonder which we have hitherto mentioned as occurring in solitude and amid darkness; and those who were themselves on the verge of the world of spirits, or employed in despatching others to these gloomy regions, conceived they beheld the apparitions of those beings whom their national mythology associated with such scenes. In such moments of undecided battle, amid the violence, hurry, and confusion of ideas incident to the situation, the ancients supposed that they saw their deities Castor and

¹ Quoted in *The Non-Christian Cross*, by J. D. Parsons, p. 67.

Pollux, fighting in the van for their encouragement; the heathen Scandinavians beheld the choosers of the slain; and the Catholics were no less easily led to recognise the warlike St. George or St. James in the very front of the strife, showing them the way to conquest. *Such apparitions, being generally visible to a multitude, have in all times been supported by the greatest strength of testimony.* When the common feeling of danger, and the animating burst of enthusiasm, act on the feelings of many men at once, their minds hold a natural correspondence with each other, as it is said is the case with stringed instruments tuned to the same pitch, of which, when one is played, the chords of the others are supposed to vibrate in unison with the tones produced. If an artful or enthusiastic individual exclaims, in the heat of action, that he perceives an apparition of the romantic kind which has been intimated, his companions catch at the idea with emulation, and most are willing to sacrifice the conviction of their own senses, rather than allow that they did not witness the same favourable emblem, from which all draw confidence and hope. One warrior catches the idea from another; all are alike eager to acknowledge the present miracle, and the battle is won before the mistake is discovered. In such cases the number of persons present, which would otherwise lead to the detection of the fallacy, becomes the means of strengthening it.

These remarks are specially pertinent to the alleged appearances of Jesus after his death to many persons simultaneously. Various causes must at that crisis have combined to arouse a contagious enthusiasm which leaped, like an electric spark, from breast to breast. We have first the impress of Jesus's personality, which resulted in the conviction of his disciples that he was the Messiah, victorious over sin, destined to be also victorious over death; then the temporary eclipse of that idea; then its rapid revival, stimulated by feelings of deep personal affection, by shame at their desertion of a righteous leader, by the impression that they must have

failed to grasp the spiritual purport of his teachings. We have then the dominance of the idea that definite predictions of his death and resurrection must have existed in the Old Testament (where they were accordingly found), combined with a strong conviction that God would not allow his cause to end in shameful defeat. As action is followed by reaction, intense disappointment often gives birth to abounding hope. The death of Jesus was viewed as his entrance on a higher life—a belief which would soon be thought to involve a rising from the dead, at first spiritually, afterwards physically. We have the ignorance of all natural processes and critical methods which necessarily results in ready acceptance of the marvellous, in angels, heavenly visions, and other divine manifestations. We have the powerful sentiment of fellowship which knits together a small company of faithful believers, and is kindled into fervour by the very unpopularity of their cause with the wealthy and official classes. It would be to disregard all rules of reason and probability to hold that these considerations did not materially aid in producing in the followers of Jesus a strong disposition to accept the reports of his resurrection, and their own subjective experiences, as conclusive proof, where modern minds would find such evidence totally insufficient.

Scott proceeds :—

Of this disposition to see as much of the supernatural as is seen by others around, or, in other words, to trust to the eyes of others rather than to our own, we may take the liberty to quote two remarkable instances.

The first is from the *Historia Verdadera* of Don Bernal Diaz del Castillo, one of the companions of the celebrated Cortez in his Mexican conquest. After having given an account of a great victory over extreme odds, he mentions the report inserted in the contemporary Chronicle of

Gomara, that Saint Iago had appeared on a white horse in van of the combat, and led on his beloved Spaniards to victory. It is very curious to observe the Castilian cavalier's internal conviction that the rumour arose out of a mistake, the cause of which he explains from his own observation, while, at the same time, he does not venture to disown the miracle. The honest Conquistador owns that he himself did not see this animating vision;¹ nay, that he beheld an individual cavalier, named Francisco de Morla, mounted on a chestnut horse, and fighting strenuously in the very place where St. James is said to have appeared. But, instead of proceeding to draw the necessary inference, the devout Conquistador exclaims: "Sinner that I am, what am I that I should have beheld the blessed Apostle?"

The other instance of the infectious character of superstition occurs in a Scottish book; and there can be little doubt that it refers, in its first origin, to some uncommon appearance of the aurora borealis, or the northern lights, which do not appear to have been seen in Scotland so frequently as to be accounted a common and familiar atmospherical phenomenon until the beginning of the eighteenth century. The passage is striking and curious, for the narrator, Peter Walker, though an enthusiast, was a man of credit, and does not even affect to have seen the wonders, the reality of which he unscrupulously adopts on the testimony of others, to whose eyes he trusts rather than to his own.² The conversion of the sceptical gentleman of whom he speaks is highly illustrative of popular credulity carried away into enthusiasm or into imposture by the evidence of those around, and at once shows the imperfection of such a general testimony, and the ease with which it is procured, since the general excitement of the moment impels even the more cold-blooded and judicious persons present to catch up the ideas and echo the exclamations of the majority, who from the first had considered the heavenly phenomenon as a supernatural weapon-schaw, held for the purpose of a sign and warning of civil wars to come.

¹ Compare the similar avowal in Matt. xxviii. 17.

² Precisely the case with the Gospel writers.

“In the year 1686, in the months of June and July,” says the honest chronicler, “*many yet alive can witness*¹ that about the Crossford Boat, two miles beneath Lanark, especially at the Mains, on the water of Clyde, many people gathered together for several afternoons, where there were showers of bonnets, hats, guns, and swords, which covered the trees and the ground; companies of men in arms marching in order upon the waterside; companies meeting companies, going all through other, and then all falling to the ground and disappearing; other companies immediately appeared, marching the same way. I went there three afternoons together, and, as I observed, there were two-thirds of the people that were together saw, and a third that saw not; and, *though I could see nothing*, there was such a fright and trembling on those that did see that was discernible to all from those that saw not. There was a gentleman standing next to me who spoke as too many gentlemen and others speak, who said: ‘A pack of damned witches and warlocks that have the second sight! The devil ha’t do I see’; and immediately there was a discernible change in his countenance. With as much fear and trembling as any woman I saw there, he called out: ‘All you that do not see say nothing; for I persuade you it is matter of fact, and discernible to all that is not stone-blind.’ And those who did see told what locks the guns had, and their length and wideness; and what handles the swords had, whether small or three-barr’d, or Highland guards; and the closing knots of the bonnets, black or blue; and those who did see them there, whenever they went abroad, saw a bonnet and a sword drop in the way.”

If a similar story appeared in the Acts of the Apostles we should be assured that it was divinely inspired, that its details could not be explained except on the supposition of their truth, and that the conversion of the scoffer could not possibly be an invention. Obviously, if the military apparition had been real, it must have been

¹ Compare Paul’s expression, “Of whom the greater part remain until now.”

seen, not by some only, but by all, of those present. The candid admission that all did not see it, while sufficient warrant for the narrator's honesty, is so far from establishing the truth of his account that it forms one of the chief reasons for denying the objective reality of the incident.

These stories cast some light on the Gospel narratives of the resurrection, for they show how large a part the subjective element plays in each, and how completely this subjective factor is determined by the mental conditions of a particular age. They show how a relation of supposed events may be given by a person of good faith and general sobriety of judgment, may be dressed up in a number of apparently convincing details, yet be utterly unworthy of credit by persons living in such times as our own. That in their substantial features there is a close analogy between these stories and those of the resurrection of Jesus is hardly open to doubt. Indeed, in all of them the subjective process is the same; and if the Gospel incidents possess a superior importance and dignity, their attestation is much less clear and direct than their significance demands. In the narratives cited we have the detailed and particular testimony of a known observer then on the spot, who, while believing in the supposed miracle, candidly avows that it was not presented to his bodily senses. This testimony, superior though it is to the bald and anonymous testimony of the Gospels, is yet altogether too feeble to upset our belief in the invariability of natural sequences.

Professor Schmiedel, in his article on the "Resurrection" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, mentions that Steude, a recent upholder of the actual resurrection of Jesus, has quite given up the argument that it is impossible for many persons to have a simultaneous vision.

Ample evidence exists to prove that visions have been seen by many in the cases of Thomas à Becket, Savonarola, the Spanish General Pacchi, and several of the Crusaders, days and even months after their deaths. Similar occurrences are recorded in the cases of a body of eight hundred French soldiers; of the Camisards in 1686-1707; of the followers of a Roman Catholic priest named Pöschl, in Upper Austria, between the years 1812 and 1818; the "preaching sickness" and "reading sickness" in Sweden about the middle of the nineteenth century, and other abnormal phenomena.¹ Such instances do not prove that the incident mentioned by Paul was of a similar character, but they do prove the possibility that it may have been so, in spite of apologetic denials. Professor Schmiedel states: "That in circumstances of general excitement and highly-strung expectation visions are contagious, and that others easily perceive that which at first had been seen by only one, is, in view of the accumulated evidence, a fact not to be denied."²

"Taking all the evidence together," concludes Bishop Westcott, "it is not too much to say that there is no single historic incident better or more variously supported than the Resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."³

Now, this clearly *is* too much to say. The claim can only mean that the Gospel record fulfils the conditions

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Resurrection," sec. 36.

² *Ibid.* In the Report of the International Congress of Psychology, held in Paris in 1889, no less than ninety-five of these collective hallucinations are recorded in recent times (F. Podmore, *Studies in Psychological Research*, p. 261).

³ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 133. Of a similar claim Harnack remarks: "One does not know whether he should marvel more at its falseness or its unbelief" (*History of Dogma*, vol. i., p. 85).

of historical accuracy. This of necessity implies a liability to error, and justifies the application of critical tests. Let the apologists settle among themselves how far the tests can be complied with. It would be much more justifiable to retort that "nothing but the antecedent assumption" that the resurrection must be true could lead anyone to mistake bad evidence for good. Apologetic extravagance may be confronted with the verdict of a great Biblical critic: "Looking at it historically, as an outward event, the Resurrection of Jesus has not the very slightest foundation. Rarely has an incredible fact been worse attested, or one so ill-attested been more incredible in itself."¹

"Taking all the evidence together"! What extraordinary notions of evidence some clerical apologists seem to have! The very least we are entitled to ask for is that a miraculous event shall be vouched by the direct testimony of competent eye-witnesses.² In the case of the resurrection we do not possess this testimony. The claim that no historic incident is better supported is not in accordance with the facts. The implication that the return of a dead man to life is itself a historic incident cannot be admitted. That the evidence is inferential, obscure, and incomplete is not an opinion, but a certainty. But the obscurity of the evidence should teach the necessity of caution to those who put

¹ D. F. Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New*, p. 82.

² To prevent misapprehension, we candidly avow that we should *not* believe a miracle on such evidence. So many "miracles" have been thus proved that they make upon us no impression beyond showing the necessity for scepticism. Those wrought at the tomb of Deacon Paris and at the Grotto of Lourdes have been sworn to by numerous witnesses. Yet the Protestant believes in the resurrection of Jesus while rejecting far better attested marvels. Is it not obvious that, if the evidence for the resurrection fails to supply the minimum of cogency, it is an absurdity to suppose it complete?

forward positive explanations. That being the state of the case, it is reasonable that, if we must have an explanation, it should be of a probable rather than an improbable character. And the probable explanation is that among the ignorant and superstitious Galileans, filled with Messianic expectations and proneness to the marvellous, the subjective visions of one or more of them gave rise to hopes and convictions which long afterwards were expressed with traditional accretions in a narrative form. Such a view is not far-fetched or artificial; it is not only a necessary result of criticism, it is countenanced by dozens of expressions in the New Testament itself. Nor, on the other hand, does it clear up all difficulties. The records left by the Gospel writers and Paul are far too meagre for any hypothesis to be free from difficulty. Yet, in spite of these manifest defects, the force of which has been so felt by many of the clergy that they have abandoned the belief in the resurrection in its traditional form, the Bishop of Durham declares that only determined bias can perceive any deficiency in the evidence. Surely, there are none so blind as those who will not see.

The Bishop, however, must consider the evidence badly in need of supplement, or he would not indulge in such aberrations of reason as the following:—

If a single experience can show that the conditions of the present life are not destroyed, but suspended, as far as we observe them, or modified by the action of some new law; that what seems to be a dissolution is really a transformation; that the soul does not remain alone in a future state, but is still united with the body—that is, with an organism which in a new sphere expresses the law which our present body expresses in this—then reason will welcome the belief in our future personality no less than instinct. Such a fact is the resurrection. In one

sense natural, in another sense it is beyond nature, because it is the revelation of a new life and issues in the ascension.¹

In other words, assertion is as good as proof, assumption is to do duty for argument, and pious speculation is equivalent to ascertained fact. It is sufficient to say that no "single experience" has yet shown the truth of the Bishop's views about a future state, and the resurrection does not seem a very promising "fact" for that purpose.

In one respect the Bishop is correct. The resurrection does issue in the ascension; or rather the idea of the first is, from the Christian point of view, inseparably connected with the idea of the second. Now, it cannot be denied that the ascension has not one jot or tittle of rational evidence in its favour. Yet Bishop Westcott believes that it took place.² Any person who will believe one miracle on no evidence will believe another on inadequate evidence.

And these miserable evasions, these tortuous sophistries and facile hypotheses, are deemed necessary to support an accumulation of so-called "evidence" in which there is no "deficiency," and which is meant to confirm an expectation rooted in "instinct"!

¹ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 153.

² Professor Denney appears to think he is defending the ascension when he states: "No kind of objection lies against the Ascension which does not lie also against the Resurrection." (*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Ascension.")

CHAPTER II.

“THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD,” BY PROFESSOR W. MILLIGAN, D.D.

THE resurrection may be viewed in two aspects—(1) as a historical fact ; (2) as involving a spiritual relationship between Jesus and the believer. Obviously the latter cannot find a safe support unless the former be proved. The older school of apologists laid the stress of their defence on the historical evidence, and seldom said anything about the divine life of the risen Saviour being manifested in that of the modern believer.¹ To-day the process is to a great extent reversed ; the historical evidence is less dwelt on, while the spiritual affinity is emphasised. As, however, some basis of fact is necessary to the validity of a doctrine purporting to have been originated by fact, apologists maintain the absolute completeness of that evidence which to many inquirers is unaccountably deficient as a basis for transcendental doctrine. The two aspects are not necessarily opposed. If the first were true, the second would follow from it. On the other hand, the second need not involve the first. Special conditions might give rise to belief in the fact in the absence of the fact. Professor William Milligan is a theologian who thinks this could not have happened. The evidential part of his work, *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, is vitiated by strong theological prepossessions, and is quite subordinate to the devotional element.

¹ As an example, see Gilbert West's elaborately futile *Observations on the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

Professor Milligan states that it is not his intention to appeal to those whose views “exclude the possibility of miracles.”¹ This possibility need not be discussed here, but those who deny it are probably rare. As Professor Huxley many times pointed out, the question of miracles is not one of possibilities, since we have neither the knowledge nor the capacity to determine the limits of natural operations, which are still very imperfectly known. The question of miracles is purely a question of evidence.

Professor Milligan illustrates the difficulty in which the apologist finds himself when he attempts to reconcile incompatible ideas. He admits that all the writers of the New Testament and the Apostles meant the resurrection in a literal sense, and that their opponents so understood them;² that is, that the person who had been crucified was believed to have risen with the same body from the tomb. Such, indeed, is the meaning of the term “resurrection,” which distinctly implies a rising *again*, a return to life of that which had died. On the other hand, it “cannot be successfully maintained” that “the very body which hung upon the cross rose again from the dead.”³ Here, then, is an admission that we cannot believe the resurrection in the sense held by the Apostles and Evangelists. In other words, the modern believer rejects the view formed by those who were most likely to know the facts, and who are supposed to have been eye-witnesses of them. The logical result of this free interpretation of the records is that the testimony of the earliest witnesses cannot be relied upon, and that belief in the resurrection should be abandoned. In this dilemma there is evolved the idea of a “spiritual body,”

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 2.

² *Ibid*, p. 9.

³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

which is thought to harmonise with the New Testament idea of a physical resurrection, yet at the same time not to violate the conception that the law of physical death is inflexible. "The fundamental proposition of the present lectures," says Dr. Milligan, "is that the body with which our Lord rose from the grave, though still a true body, was not the same as that with which he died."¹ This is presumably held to explain why, though the body exhibited the marks of the wounds caused by his crucifixion, it was yet able to pass through closed doors, to appear and vanish instantaneously, and, finally, to transcend the law of gravity by ascending beyond the clouds.

Now, do the statements in the Gospels (which must, of course, be estimated with due regard to their origin) really form adequate evidence of this theory—a theory in itself so improbable that nothing but the most positive reasons can even recommend it?² As proof of a miraculous interruption of natural law we are offered an unintelligible proposition, supported by no other evidence than assertions! It may be said that this idea, though incapable of complete explanation, is evidently implied by many passages in the New Testament, and in particular by Paul's statement that "there is a spiritual body." So it is; but, as for Paul's statement, we have not an atom of evidence in favour of its truth, and no weight can be attached to bare assertion in proof of the supernatural. As for the remaining passages, Professor Milligan has himself put them out of court by admitting that we cannot accept the resurrection in the sense

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 31.

² Another Christian writer admits that the theory "is a purely speculative one, and rests on no historical evidence whatever" (Professor G. T. Purves, *Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, p. 14).

understood by the New Testament writers. What other evidence is there? There is none whatever. A body which is a “true body” must be material, or it could not be a body; it must be composed of particles of matter in an organic unity and perceptible by the senses. Yet an unvarying experience assures us that all bodies are subject to the laws of gravitation. We need not deny the possibility that these laws can be transcended by the intervention of a power superior to them. But we ask, not for evidence of this possibility, but for evidence showing that, in a particular case, this intervention was exerted, and the law of gravitation actually set aside. Does the explanation explain? Would it not be well to prove that Jesus rose from the tomb at all, before taking refuge in speculations concerning the nature of the body which are themselves as unprovable as the circumstance they are intended to support?¹

The term “spiritual body” is, in fact, nothing more than an attempt to blend two contradictory ideas. Body we know; but of “spirit,” as itself an entity, we can form no rational conception. No one, so far as we know, has ever seen a “spiritual body”; no one is able to define its essential nature.² We cannot accept an

¹ A recent writer assures us that “there was nothing in the Old Testament, or anywhere else, to suggest such a resurrection” as that assumed by the idea of the spiritual body, “which could not, therefore, have been put forward by impostors” (Major W. H. Turton, *The Truth of Christianity*, p. 144). But a higher and equally Christian authority refers to this theory as “merely a stone which lay ready to hand in the beliefs of the time,” and adds that “the notion of a spiritual body, as opposed to the body of flesh and blood, is one which exists almost everywhere among peoples at a lower range of civilisation, as well as sometimes among more advanced schools” (Dr. Percy Gardner, *A Historic View of the New Testament*, p. 223).

² To examine the claims of modern spiritualism and the mass of phenomena collected by the Society for Psychological Research would carry us beyond the limits of a discussion which is concerned principally with historical evidence. Here it need only be said that, while many striking

incomprehensible idea as a solution of other incomprehensible ideas. If we are to have a miracle at all, we may as well have the miracle of a purely physical organism being reanimated after death, and transcending all natural laws, as attempt to minimise the marvel by unintelligible limitations of divine power. We venture to think that an investigator has no right to put forward a "fundamental proposition" which is purely negative, adds nothing to our knowledge, and is incapable of verification.¹

It may here be proper to remark that the extraordinary divergences of opinion which existed in the early Church as to the nature of Christ's body afford conclusive evidence that the truth concerning it was not known. Alike in fact and doctrine, the utmost doubt and uncertainty prevailed. Conflicting opinions on this subject are not peculiar to modern times; we find them confronting us at the very sources of the historical record. They must therefore have arisen at an even earlier date. Modern criticism warrants us in holding that there are undoubted traces in the New Testament of the influence of the Gnostic idea that the body of Christ was but a phantom, and that the accounts of his speaking and eating represent efforts to rebut that conception. If this criticism is well founded, the probability that the Gospel narratives of the resurrection are legendary embodiments of visionary experiences is greatly increased. Dr.

and extraordinary incidents have been related, it does not appear that natural explanations of them are impossible; that, in any case, the disputable nature of these phenomena precludes dogmatic interpretation of them; and, finally, that the resurrection stories appear to have so close an analogy with experiences known to be of subjective origin as to render unlikely the intervention of supernormal agency.

¹ Many orthodox writers—Lange, for instance—deny that there was any essential change in the body of Jesus between the resurrection and the ascension.

Milligan does not explain how, if the risen body was not the body that died, it could have exhibited the marks of wounds, one of them being so large that a man's hand could have been thrust into it. It is not easy to suppose either that in a glorified body such ghastly evidences of agony should have remained unhealed, or that a simulacrum of them should have been supernaturally produced in order to convince the disciples of their master's identity. Such details were manifestly the product of pious tradition working into doctrinal shape a very meagre and imperfectly known basis of fact. But if the details of the Gospel narratives cannot be trusted, how is it possible to prove the resurrection? The essential contradictions, the unaccountable *lacunæ*, of the story render its composite character self-evident.

In answer to the objection that Jesus, in order to prove the reality of his resurrection, should have shown himself to other persons than his own disciples, Dr. Milligan has nothing more than a singularly weak rejoinder. He tells us (on what authority we know not) that such a course “was not possible.” “To have done so would have been to arouse misunderstanding, to create false impressions”—of what nature is left undefined. It would have been to renew his “passion,” his “burden,” and his “suffering.” From the nature of the case, he could come into contact only with disciples—with those in whom, instead of finding cause for a renewal of his pain, he might “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.” If his resurrection was the beginning of his glory, it would have been a reversal of the whole plan of our redemption, a confounding of the different steps of the economy of grace, had he, “after his passion,” presented himself alive to any but disciples.¹

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 34.

Solemn trifling like this hardly deserves serious consideration. But we would point out that it involves a number of theological assumptions which, judging from the records, were never clearly stated by Jesus himself, and certainly formed no part of his public teaching. If he came to announce a divinely-ordained scheme for the redemption of mankind, it seems only fair that he should, in plain terms, have declared its nature to those for whose benefit it was intended. If the salvation of the world was at stake, would it not have been worth the renewal of his suffering? Considering that no "plan of our redemption" had been formulated to mankind in general by Jesus before his death, what more effectual means could have been adopted than to repair the omission after his resurrection had established his authority, and so clear up all doubt and uncertainty? To show conclusively, before hostile witnesses, the reality of his triumph over death was the only way of proving the divinity of his mission, and of saving future generations from infinite difficulties and perplexities. Professor Milligan is in a position to say that to divine power this was impossible. To any less partisan spirit his reasons must appear inadequate to justify so rash an assertion. He does not fully explain in what manner the "passion" of Jesus would have been renewed, and we are therefore left to conjecture that he considers it probable Jesus would have been a second time crucified. This, however, is doubtful in the extreme, for a being who had proved his divinity by rising from the dead would surely have had a better chance of making known his "plan of redemption" than a reforming preacher who never even proclaimed it. We are told that he would have been misunderstood. Again, is this a certainty or a mere conjecture? Does not the actual

evidence for the resurrection afford room for the greatest possible variety of opinion? And was not the teaching of Jesus, both ethical and theological, repeatedly misunderstood, not merely by his enemies, but by his own followers? If the mission of Jesus was, as he is said to have declared, confined to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” why was it not completely fulfilled by at least a general conversion of the Israelitish people? It seems, indeed, that much misunderstanding and doubt would have been, and could only have been, removed by a public manifestation. The argument recalls an expression attributed to Jesus himself: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.”¹ It indicates some mental confusion to put the vague and inconclusive “prophecies” of Old Testament writers on the same evidential level as the actual return of a dead person to life. Let us be certain that such a miracle actually takes place before we assert that it can have no effect on human obduracy. Why, indeed, were any miracles supposed to be wrought, if the recital was not intended to convince the sceptical and persuade the wavering? If the object of Jesus was the salvation of the world, why should he have concealed from the world the divine ratification of his claims? Why, in fact, was Christianity proclaimed at all?

The fact that no one saw Jesus rise from the tomb presents no difficulty to Professor Milligan. “What of that? A friend has been absent on a journey, and no one witnessed his return. Would any member of his family dream for a moment of urging, when he is found in his own room, that it was not himself?”² A more

¹ Luke xvi. 31.

² *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 55.

complete instance of "begging the question" by a false analogy could hardly be hit upon. The point is: Have we good evidence that Jesus *did* return? If we were in the position of those who behold with their bodily senses the return of their friend, we should, of course, have the best possible evidence. But we ourselves are not eye-witnesses, and we are without the testimony of any persons who were eye-witnesses. If such persons ever saw Jesus after he returned to life, they have omitted to record any clear declaration to that effect. Moreover, the return of a person to life after his death demands a very different degree of testimony from the return of a person who has been on a journey. The one is *primâ facie* incredible, because it conflicts with universal experience. The other is an everyday occurrence, which, being within the experience of all, there is not the slightest difficulty in believing. The first violates the evidence of our senses, the second strictly conforms to it. Yet Dr. Milligan puts both on the same level of probability.

"It is denied by no one," says Dr. Milligan, "that through all the evidence afforded by our witnesses there runs the one decided conviction that their risen Lord had manifested himself to them or others."¹ Whether the "others" referred to in this saving clause passed on to the Evangelists their experience of an objective fact or merely their "decided conviction" that it had happened, or a few vague impressions, or, in fact, anything at all, makes a good deal of difference to the argument. The modern inquirer wants to know the grounds on which the conviction was first formed. The original eye-witnesses render no direct testimony; and

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 57.

reports as to its character emanating from a credulous age cannot, and ought not to, receive implicit credence.

Dr. Milligan objects to the Evangelists being treated as witnesses in a court of law. “In those days men did not need to have every great fact of the Christian faith proved to them by historical narrative before they believed.....The first stirrings of faith were awakened by the general tradition of the Church.”¹ This is perfectly true. But we, who live so many generations afterwards, have to depend upon historical narrative for our knowledge of the “great facts of the Christian faith.” If the historical narrative were unimpeachable, we should have, at any rate, a presumption that the alleged facts were true facts. But a historical narrative which is not the account of eye-witnesses, which is vitiated by the most surprising contradictions and omissions, necessarily renders doubtful the facts themselves, whatever may have been their nature. Historians who display an undue readiness to accept the supernatural, and who neither furnish the sources of their information nor investigate its details, may intend to relate nothing but the truth, but they cannot be relied upon to do so. The “general tradition of the Church” was no doubt sufficient attestation for the Evangelists, but we have to inquire into the origin of that tradition. The “general tradition of the Church” testifies to innumerable miracles since Apostolic times; but what sensible man believes them? Something more than tradition is required. For a miracle the evidence should be even better than legal evidence. If human salvation depends upon belief in Jesus Christ, no pains should

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 58.

have been too great to establish by irrefutable evidence the reality of the "great facts of the Christian faith."

"Each Gospel writer," we are told, "selected what was most appropriate to his object. He was, to a certain extent, indifferent to its bond of connection with what he was not concerned to relate."¹ Probably this was so. The selection, however, could not have been the result of deliberation between the writers, for we cannot be sure that the compilers of the nucleus of each existing Gospel either knew each other or were actually the reputed authors. None of the Evangelists (unless it be the fourth) tells us what his object was, or what was the principle of selection he adopted. Certainly they have not managed to put together a probable or coherent story, which, had they been liars, they would have been careful to do. There is no evidence that the Evangelists consulted together and came to a mutual arrangement as to what portion of the facts each one should relate. As the Gospels appeared at different times and in different localities, there is the strongest presumption that each purported to be an independent and complete narrative of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Why, then, should important parts of the Gospel facts have been omitted, without the slightest hint that they might possibly be found in another version, to be issued at some time and in some other place by some other writer? It seems evident that each writer must have related the whole Gospel tradition so far as it was known to him, but that he did not know all.

If this explanation of Dr. Milligan's is sound, how are we to explain the fact that of four writers, all fully aware of the extraordinary and miraculous manner in which

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 59.

Jesus was supposed to have left this earth, only one mentions it, and that in the most casual, matter-of-fact way possible? Why was it “appropriate” for Luke to do this, but not for Matthew or John? On what principle of selection do they leave it out, while all four give detailed accounts of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus? The object of the Fourth Gospel is manifestly to present Jesus as in some sense an incarnation of deity. For such a purpose no more “appropriate” incident than the ascension could have been conceived; it was the fitting climax to the scene on the shore of Galilee, when the farewell injunction to Peter was given. Yet the Fourth Gospel (supposed by many to have been written by an eye-witness of the event) gives no account whatever of this wonderful circumstance of the ascension.

One may also ask why the Synoptic Gospels convey no hint of the long discourses attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. We entirely fail to understand how it could have been “appropriate to their object” to omit from their records injunctions of such great importance, and delivered at a time of such solemnity. The earliest tradition, that of Papias, relates that it was Matthew’s object to put together the discourses or words of Jesus.¹ Yet Matthew not merely fails to report these discourses—he does not even in the most distant manner refer to their having been uttered; indeed, his narrative seems, on the face of it, to allow no time for them, and they certainly interrupt the narrative of John himself in a very surprising way. If they were delivered, it is to us entirely incredible that three out of four Evangelists should say nothing whatever about them. It is said that Mark compiled his Gospel from information supplied

¹ Dr. Giles, *Hebrew and Christian Records*, vol. ii., pp. 116 and 154.

by the Apostle Peter himself; and Eusebius expressly states that the Evangelist "took forethought of one thing—not to leave out anything of what he heard, or to make a mistake about anything."¹ Peter is said to have heard these discourses—the most important that Jesus ever uttered—yet he told Mark nothing about them!

According to Dr. Milligan, the object of Matthew is to give an account of the Galilean appearances which assumed "supreme importance in his eyes."² How is it, then, that he entirely omits to relate, or even notice, the most important of them—that detailed in the last chapter of John? Nor does the exclusion by Luke of these appearances receive any elucidation. It can only be inferred from Matthew's bald and unsatisfactory account that he failed to carry out his object. In the closing words of Mark "we find particulars and words of the risen Lord which at once recall to us that mighty march of his power with which we have been made familiar by the Gospel as a whole."³ Why is the argument obscured by meaningless rhetoric? That we are familiar with certain conceptions derived from the "Gospel as a whole" is no evidence that every part of it is true. And why should Dr. Milligan assume that the concluding portion of Mark gives the "words of the risen Lord," when, as he admits,⁴ that concluding portion was added to Mark's original Gospel by a later and unknown hand?

Luke, we are told, by representing Jesus as eating with his disciples, emphasises the universality of his mission of forgiveness. This is nothing more than a fanciful interpretation of an extremely doubtful incident—

¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, Book iii., chap. 39.

² *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

an interpretation which Luke himself does not appear to have had in his mind. If Jesus intended his mission to be universal, how much simpler it would have been to have said so before his death, instead of forbidding his followers, as Matthew records, to enter “into any city of the Samaritans.”

With regard to John, he, according to Professor Milligan, fixes upon those details which illustrate the manifestation of the glory of Jesus and the triumph of faith over unbelief.¹ In other words, John writes with a definite theological purpose in view, and it is precisely this difference of standpoint which makes it impossible to harmonise the narrative of John with that of the Synoptics. Can we be sure that John did not mould his materials in accordance with this theological purpose? Judging from his first chapter, which, it is well known, embodies speculations derived from other than Christian sources; judging also by the wrangles of Jesus with the Jews, and the mystical discourses already referred to, we should say that John did, beyond doubt, handle the existing traditions with remarkable freedom. One could hardly expect an apologist to make any detailed reference to the doubts which exist as to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel; but it is none the less a fact that a very large number of Christian critics hold that, in its present form at least, it could not have been written by the Apostle. Even if we concede that the evidence for and against its Johannine authorship is evenly balanced, the inevitable doubt precludes any very firm reliance upon its statements.

We may also point out that all this variety in the objects of the Evangelists (these objects not being

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 61.

declared by themselves, but left to be inferred) not only greatly perplexes the inquirer who wishes to get at the truth of the matter, but is surely presumptive evidence against the theory that they were divinely inspired to announce it. Apologists constantly remind us that all human testimony is fallible and varying—that no two persons relate a fact in precisely the same language, and so forth. At the same time, they assert that the Gospels are not human testimony, but divine. Where, then, is the analogy? In human testimony we look for imperfection. Divinely inspired testimony ought to be clear, explicit, coherent, and true.

"The peculiarities of the Lord's Resurrection body must," Dr. Milligan states, "be kept distinctly in view; and when they are so it is impossible to produce the faintest shadow of evidence that, before the Christian Church came into existence, there was any preparation for such an idea in the minds of men."¹ How is it possible to keep "distinctly in view" that of which it is *not* possible to form any distinct conception? On this point the apologist gives no information whatever, doubtless because he has none to give. He does not say what the "peculiarities" in question are, or in what way knowledge of them can be gained. Dr. Milligan really claims that blind faith is to take the place of critical examination. To many minds such a process is entirely satisfactory. To those who hold that historical facts must be ascertained by historical methods, it is very much the reverse.

What does Dr. Milligan mean by "preparation for such an idea"? Apparently he refers to the idea of forming a separate Christian Church, though his

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 64.

language is not very clear. One would gather from it that the idea of a Church was almost unknown before Apostolic times, and that it sprang immediately into existence as a consequence of the resurrection. An implication so misleading must be exposed.

By “preparation for an idea” we understand the prior existence of certain external facts and internal tendencies without which the idea could not be formed. The Apostles found the external facts in the then existing Jewish Church; the internal tendencies were supplied by their own belief in the Messiahship of their Master, and their inferences from that belief. The first Christian assemblies were modelled on the Jewish synagogues, and the reason why they became separate congregations was that the bulk of the people rejected their specific doctrine that Jesus was the Messiah. For some years the Apostles did not come to any decisive rupture with the Jewish Church. They worshipped and taught in the synagogues;¹ regarded the Jewish law as still binding upon all but Gentile converts;² and claimed no distinctive sectarian title. There was at first no idea of forming such a separate ecclesiastical body as we understand by the term “Church”; and it was at least ten years before the disciples were termed Christians, and then in another country.³ It is evident, from the book of Acts, that the original disciples at first regarded themselves as reforming Jews, differing from other Jews only in their recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus. It was mainly by the exertions of one who was not personally known to Jesus that they were ultimately, and after strenuous opposition from the Apostles, formed into non-Jewish communities.

¹ Acts iii. 1, xiii. 14, xiv. 1, xvii. 2 and 17, xviii. 4, etc.

² Acts xv. 28 and 29.

³ Acts xi. 26.

A Christian writer, Mr. Homersham Cox, states that the "constitution of the early Christian Church strongly resembled that of the coeval Jewish synagogues."¹ He gives some instances of this resemblance. "The practice of baptising proselytes existed among the Jews before the birth of Christ."² "The institution of the Lord's Supper is so closely connected with the Passover that it is impossible to understand the history of the Christian rite without some knowledge of the Jewish festival."³ "The presumption that the first Christians, in ordering the worship of the Church, would have regard to the model of the synagogue and Temple amounts almost to certainty."⁴ "The resemblances of Christian prayers to those of the Jews arise from a natural process of development. The first Christians adopted in modified forms various Jewish rites and ceremonies."⁵ "The arrangements and furniture of the first Christian places of assembly resembled the Jewish model."⁶ "The practice of antiphonal singing was undoubtedly borrowed from the Jewish ritual."⁷ "The Christians washed their hands before prayer; in this respect also following a Jewish practice."⁸ "The ministry of the synagogue and that of the early Church closely resembled each other. In both there were presbyters, deacons, and readers."⁹ "The appointment and ordination of presbyters in the synagogue and the Church were similar."¹⁰ In addition to this, evidence is quoted from Eusebius and Epiphanius that the Apostles John and James both wore "the *petalum*, or golden mitre plate,

¹ *The First Century of Christianity*, vol. ii., p. 46.

² *Ibid*, p. 71.

³ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 230.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 231.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 258.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 262.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 265.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 266.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 267.

which had been the distinctive ornament of the Jewish priests.”¹

We have already seen that the idea of Messiahship, which was the distinctive feature of the Christian body, was quite familiar to the disciples; it was merely in the application of it to Jesus that they differed from the bulk of their countrymen. The idea of resurrection from the dead was also a well-known conception. “In great pity He raiseth the dead.....Blessed be the Lord who restoreth life to the dead,” are expressions from the *Shemoneh Esreh*, or Eighteen Benedictions, which were composed before the Christian era.² Here, again, it is not the prevalence of an idea which can be called in question. The Jews merely disbelieved that which the Christians believed had been illustrated in the return of Jesus to life.

Here, then, we have all the elements which were required for the formation of a reformed religious faith, the stimulus and motive-power being supplied by the belief of the disciples that in Jesus the expected Messiah had been found, and that, by virtue of his divine power, he had “loosed the bonds of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

Presumably Dr. Milligan knows all these facts. Yet he can say that, when we keep “distinctly in view” the “peculiarities of the Lord’s Resurrection body” (in other words, have a correct appreciation of something we know nothing about), “it is impossible to produce the faintest shadow of evidence” that there was any preparation for the idea of a Christian Church. It seems, on the contrary, impossible that, if the disciples retained their faith in Jesus, they should *not* have

¹ *The First Century of Christianity*, vol. ii., pp. 268 and 269.

² *Ibid*, p. 224.

formed the idea of setting up an organisation similar to the Church to which they already belonged, with, of course, the addition of the belief on which that Church was at issue with them.

It may be pointed out that, if the records are accurate, Jesus himself established his Church during his life. The passage in Matthew—"If he refuse to hear them (the witnesses), tell it unto the Church"¹—may, of course, relate to the Jewish Church; but if Jesus uttered these words we have direct proof that the idea of a Church could not have been strange to the original disciples. It is generally admitted, however, that the passage is not genuine.

We now come across an astonishing feat of apologetics. "The first Christians must have been satisfied that those who proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus had ample evidence of it. They must have questioned them regarding it to a much greater extent than has been told us."² This means that our faith rests on that of the first Christians, and that of the first Christians on that of the persons who proclaimed the resurrection. What the faith of these persons rested on is not known, and, in the absence of their own testimony, is never likely to be made known. The argument is constructed on the lines of the nursery story about "The House that Jack Built." To put it forward as evidence shows an incapacity to appreciate what evidence is. And to proclaim it as perfectly strong and satisfactory evidence is sheer presumption. The first Christians were satisfied—therefore we should be satisfied. What guarantee have we that the first Christians were competent investigators of evidence? Why, they never thought of demanding

¹ Matt. xviii. 17.

² *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 65.

any. If they had, they would certainly have been satisfied with evidence which would fail to convince the reasoners of to-day. It may be replied that Peter and Paul were not at once convinced of the truth of the resurrection. But we have seen that the details of the book of Acts cannot be relied upon. We have not the direct statements of Peter himself; but, judging from the expressions attributed to him by the writer of Acts, he must have been an extremely credulous man, who experienced visions, and had an extraordinary way of interpreting the Jewish scriptures. How is it possible to rely upon the accounts by later writers of what such a man believed? Can we be sure that their reasoning faculties were more highly developed than his own? The passages indicating the first disbelief of the Apostles have a suspicious air of having been introduced to repel later charges of credulity. Paul's evidence we have examined; it is but a very doubtful support that he lends to the view of a bodily resurrection.

The second sentence of the last quotation is a practical admission that evidence which once existed, or was assumed to have existed, does not exist now. How, then, can it be taken into account? We cannot examine or estimate the worth of evidence which has been lost. That it has been lost is no fault of the modern critic. He can only deal with the evidence actually available. In any case, Dr. Milligan's argument puts wholly out of court any theory of inspiration as guaranteeing the accuracy of the records. It is out of the question to suppose that, if Christianity were a divinely ordained system, all necessary means would not have been taken to preserve the evidence in order that future ages might be in a position to judge of the truth of its claims.

Professor Milligan is unable to account for the faith of

the first Christians unless "the Lord actually rose."¹ History is so full of instances of faith having appeared under the most adverse conditions that it seems the extremity of rashness to postulate the supernatural origin of the Christian faith because we are not fully acquainted with the circumstances under which it originated. Even the Gospel records make it fairly clear that the beginnings of that faith are to be traced in pre-Christian times—in the growth of the Hebrew monotheism of which it was the offshoot, and its modification by other influences.

"It is in the fact first, in the idea afterwards, that the vast importance of the Resurrection of our Lord is to be found. Before we can be influenced by it we must be convinced by distinctly historical evidence that it actually took place."² It is no doubt difficult to gather from the Gospel accounts the proper sequence of the ideas involved; but, as they repeatedly state that it was necessary the Christ should suffer and rise again in order "that the scriptures might be fulfilled," it seems probable that the idea of the resurrection gave rise to the "fact." And we may fairly ask whether the process of belief is at the present time as represented by Professor Milligan. Almost invariably we find that the persons who most fervently believe in the resurrection do so before, not after, a study of the historical evidence. The popular revivalist would not dream of examining it, and many would look upon the mere desire to do so as an indication of latent scepticism and suppression of the "Holy Spirit." If an earnest pietist investigates the question at all, he is content to read defences of the resurrection, which are doubtless convincing as long as

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 71.

² *Ibid*, p. 74.

all hostile criticism is carefully avoided. Many good people look with suspicion upon Christian evidences. And they are quite right. Christian advocates have many times ere now directed inquirers into the pathway of scepticism, and those who are content with faith had better let the intellectual supports of faith severely alone.

Referring to the changed characters of the Apostles after the resurrection, Dr. Milligan, in common with many other apologists, seems to find a strong argument in the fact that “the men who had not only quailed before the authorities when their Lord was seized, but had forsaken him in his hour of utmost need, now face without hesitation the highest tribunal in the land, and openly defy it.”¹ Such phenomena are far from uncommon in the annals of religious enthusiasm. Many a martyr, yielding to human weakness, has at first shrunk from the fiery ordeal over which the exaltation of faith has afterwards enabled him to triumph. Cranmer recanted, but afterwards, it is said, held in the flames the hand which had written the surrender until it was slowly consumed. Are we not told that Jesus himself, whose nature was divine, who was strengthened by supernatural aid,² yet shrank from the doom he foresaw, and prayed that the cup might pass from him? Yet he bore with brave and dignified resignation the ordeal of rejection, ignominy, and death. So it was with his disciples. Their unquestioning belief in his mission gave them a courage and a power which they could not previously have shown. We have already given reasons for holding that portions of the book of Acts have received a heightened colouring in the light of tradition;

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 47.

² Luke xxii. 43.

it would not, therefore, be proper to place implicit reliance on its accounts of the conduct of the Apostles before "the highest tribunal in the land." These accounts may, however, be fairly accurate in substance; for, if the Apostles had, on whatever grounds, formed a strong conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead, they could not well do otherwise than preach boldly, regardless of ill consequences to themselves. A similar constancy has been found in the adherents of every creed.

With regard to Paul, the effect produced upon him by his vision of the risen Jesus is given as one reason for believing in the truth of his statements. It would be more reasonable to draw an opposite conclusion. A highly-wrought state of religious excitement such as Paul was in before his supposed vision is one of the least favourable conditions for the discernment of prosaic facts by the laws of evidence. To the mystic a critical investigation of his faith is not only impious, but impossible. According to Dr. Milligan, the Apostle Paul is as excellent in logic as in faith; he gives his testimony in such a way "that the most skilful counsel in a modern court of law will scarcely venture to think that, were the Apostle now before him, it would be in his power to shake it by any cross-examination which he could conduct."¹

We wonder whether Dr. Milligan has ever been inside a modern court of law, and heard a cross-examination conducted. He actually supposes that a skilful counsel would not insist on eliciting from Paul a detailed account of the circumstances under which he had seen Jesus; would not find out whether the Damascus incident was fact or fiction; would not ascertain from what source

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 45.

Paul derived his information as to the appearances to Peter, to James, to the twelve Apostles, to the five hundred persons; would not demand dates, places, and names of witnesses in respect of each allegation. As long as Paul confined himself to the mere statement that he had “seen Jesus,” it might be difficult to “shake” such “testimony.” But who can imagine a “skilful counsel” simple enough to remain content with a bare and unsupported assertion? If he could not disprove Paul’s evidence, he would very soon have it most materially supplemented. Dr. Milligan should have taken “counsel’s opinion” before making his statement. And if he claims that Paul would stand cross-examination, why does he imply that the Gospel writers would not?

Dr. Milligan reminds us that, although “the members of the Corinthian Church with whom Paul reasons denied the possibility of their own resurrection, they did not deny the resurrection of Christ.”¹ This negative argument in no way strengthens his evidence, for it is not disputed that the Christian Churches generally believed that Jesus rose from the dead, and the addition to their number of a community residing at a great distance who had few means of verifying their belief does not affect the question of historical evidence. If the Corinthians believed, they could have had no better evidence than the assertions of others, whereas we have to investigate the facts on which those assertions were based. The significant thing, however, is that any Christian Church should, even in Apostolic times, have had any doubts at all upon the subject. Paul recognises these doubts by his emphatic statements that Jesus was seen by a number

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 67.

of persons (including himself) after he had been put to death and buried. The Apostle meets an implied demand for evidence by giving the best evidence in his power. This evidence was merely hearsay, as regards the other persons; in his own case it consisted of an inward experience, and he implies that the experience of the other witnesses was of a similar nature.

Dr. Milligan leaves entirely out of sight Paul's assurance that the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of believers stand on precisely the same level of probability, so that, logically, disbelief of the one involves disbelief of the other. If Christ is not raised, the faith of the Corinthians in their own resurrection is "vain." This conception of the resurrection of Jesus as a guarantee of that of human beings has, in all ages of the Christian Church, been held as sound, though, in truth, there must be a wide difference between the return to life of a divine being who saw no corruption, and that of human beings whose bodies rot in the grave. But if the Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Jesus without regarding it as any guarantee of their own, they must have been Christians who, after the personal teaching of the greatest Christian Apostle, had failed to grasp the first principle of the Christian system—namely, the revelation of personal immortality by and through their redeemer.

As Paul's evidence is admitted on both sides to be important, we may in this place fitly consider the arguments of another apologist in connection with those of Dr. Milligan. "It is well," says the Hon. and Rev. James Adderley, "to study carefully St. Paul's arguments in 1 Cor. xv. And, first, note that St. Paul is not arguing with people who denied Christ's Resurrection; he is arguing with people who were beset with doubts as

to whether anyone could rise from the dead. This is most important. I have met people who completely missed the point of his argument, because they thought he was arguing to prove that Christ rose from the dead. He takes for granted that his readers, ‘ordinary Christians,’ all believed that Christ rose from the dead. Then he proceeds to argue that, because they believed that Christ rose from the dead, they ought not to find any difficulty in believing that human beings may rise also. That this is his argument no one can doubt who reads.”¹

Adopting Mr. Adderley’s recommendation, we have “studied carefully St. Paul’s arguments.” Here they are:—

“Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. 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: and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable.”²

If Paul was arguing, not “that Christ rose from the dead,” but that human beings did so, we can only say that he conducted his argument with a disregard of

¹ *Religious Doubts of Democracy*, p. 91.

² 1 Cor. xv. 12-19.

logical reasoning which is a little stupefying. Instead of trying to prove the possibility of human resurrection because Jesus rose, the Apostle does exactly the reverse. He uses the supposed fact that human beings *will* rise in order to show that Jesus *did* rise; he postulates an uncertain and future event as establishing the truth of his preaching of a past event. The last three verses of the quotation, especially taken in conjunction with the preceding and following paragraphs, seem to imply that Paul is seeking to prove the resurrection of Jesus, though Mr. Adderley does not think so. The passage, indeed, contains expressions which favour both interpretations, and Paul does not clearly separate them.

Assuming, however, that the Apostle is trying to convince his converts that they will rise from the dead, what arguments does he use? If Paul could have appealed to a known historical fact possessing a clear analogy with the circumstance he was trying to establish, he might have made out a strong case. But he assumes his fact on the testimony of others; he implies that it may have arisen from vivid mental impressions; and he fails to show that it has any definite relation to that which he seeks to prove. He goes on to assume that, because he preached the resurrection of Christ, it must have taken place. Evidently with Paul the preaching of the resurrection proved the fact of the resurrection. What evidence can that be to later ages? Paul seems to have had no idea that it would have been advisable to draw some sort of distinction between the assertion of a fact and the fact itself.

The Apostle may, of course, have been arguing in the sense assumed by Mr. Adderley; but, if so, he was unfortunate in his expressions. He repeatedly and

emphatically puts the argument “the other way round.” “*If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised.*” This makes the truth of the resurrection of Jesus depend on the probability of the resurrection of human beings. The Apostle thus reduces the resurrection of Jesus to the level of probability which exists for that of his followers. According to Paul, therefore, denial of their own resurrection by the Corinthians carried with it denial of that of Jesus. Mr. Adderley says they did not deny the latter. Paul strongly urges that both stand or fall together—that what the Corinthians accepted is dependent on the truth of what they denied. According to Mr. Adderley’s argument, Paul in this passage is seeking to prove the future resurrection of men. Yet he treats the conception he is seeking to establish as an even greater certainty than something which had been divinely revealed to him. He aims to show that an idea which the Corinthians already held is dependent on another idea which they denied. Could any reasoning be more futile? Paul had the strongest reason for showing that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, if he knew that to be a real event. But he does not even make the attempt—beyond vaguely saying “Jesus was seen.”

Observe the curious deduction made by the Apostle. The Christian faith becomes vain if there was no resurrection of Jesus. He would be a false witness, because he “witnessed of God that he raised up Christ, *whom he raised not up if so be that the dead are not raised.*” For the second, and again for the third, time Paul positively labours to make this clear: “*For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised.*” This repeated and dogmatic resting of a past event on a future contingency is, to our mind, absolutely inconsistent with the

Apostle's belief in the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Paul's reasoning is, no doubt, extraordinary; but he could not have argued in this way if he had been, as some apologists declare, an eye-witness to a fact of history.

The Apostle's words are consistent only with the idea of a strong internal conviction which a visible appearance of Jesus to him had no share in producing. Surely Mr. Adderley must have felt a little uncomfortable when writing a paragraph which is seriously misleading.

The moral aspect of Paul's argument cannot be entirely left out of sight. We find in it no perception of one of the commonest facts of life—that a man holding strong convictions may be honestly mistaken. Of this, history affords numberless illustrations, from Augustine's belief in a never-ending hell of physical anguish to John Wesley's conviction of the reality of witchcraft. Paul tells his converts that if Christ was not raised they are still in their sins. In other words, purity of life is a delusion unless guaranteed by the prospect of eternal reward. Such a conception is radically unsound. We may *hope* that righteousness avails in a future life; we *know* that it avails in this. No protest can be too strong against the false and pernicious idea that moral goodness is of no use unless Jesus rose from the dead and assured men of immortality. Yet the only conclusion which Paul can come to is that, "if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

One more "argument" of the Apostle deserves to be noticed: "Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptised for them?"¹ In other words, there

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 29.

must be a resurrection, or it is useless to “baptise for the dead.” If we adopt Paul’s belief why should we not adopt his logic? The notion that the baptism of a living person as proxy for a dead one will ensure, or help to ensure, the latter’s salvation is so evidently superstitious that it has been disregarded by the Christian Church for many ages. Yet we find Paul referring to it as if it were an obviously true conception, and a weighty argument for the resurrection. It is impossible to admit that a writer who could adduce such a practice as confirming what he thought was a central fact of religion had an adequate conception of the nature of evidence.

One would much like to know whether the Corinthians regarded Paul’s reasoning as conclusive. That they possessed and exercised some powers of criticism is probable from the pains taken by the Apostle to impress his view upon them; and, if they were sceptical enough to doubt their own resurrection, it seems inevitable that they should have doubted also the resurrection of Jesus, which Paul declares to possess no higher probability.

“Men,” says Dr. Milligan, “had not yet learned, like us, to glory in the cross of Christ. The Resurrection dissipated the shame.”¹ If the speeches of Peter are accurately reproduced in the book of Acts, it seems clear that this idea of glorying in the cross of Christ had been formed by the Apostles at a very early date. It is possible, indeed, that in the revulsion of feeling which followed the crucifixion, when the idea of a spiritual Messiahship rushed in all its force into the minds of the disciples, the conception of a spiritual resurrection was eagerly seized upon, and contributed greatly to the rapid spread of the belief in the supposed reanimation of the

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 68.

body of Jesus.¹ Minds of a spiritual tendency would find in the idea of a spiritual revivification ample food for the highest flights of religious zeal. More matter-of-fact minds would at a later date add, in good faith, details of material appearances. The very form of Jesus's death would, to a non-believer, disprove his claim to be the Messiah; while those devoted to him would be thrown back upon a spiritual interpretation of his mission.

Dr. Milligan remarks that the enemies of Paul "cannot have considered visions a sign of weakness..... They must have argued against him on the ground that he had too few, rather than too many, visions."² The "enemies of Paul" appear to have been the Judaising section of the Church, who represented the orthodox Christianity of their time;³ and, if they were so fond of visions as to make them a test of religious truth, they could have had no adequate conception of historical evidence. Dr. Milligan admits the general predisposition to these subjective phenomena which is sometimes denied; but it is difficult for anyone who is not an apologist to see how the prevalence of this peculiarity adds any weight to the statements of a person who, though possibly less affected by it than his "enemies," was evidently disposed to pay greater regard to visionary tendencies than seems justifiable to ourselves.

In order to save the "miracle" of Paul's conversion, Dr. Milligan seeks to minimise the mental conflict which he admits Paul must have experienced. The indications

¹ It seems to us probable that the Pentecost incident simply expressed in the supernaturalist terms of the age the power and reality of this great conviction that Jesus was still alive, though in a spiritual sense, and may thus embody the first manifestation of the belief.

² *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 90.

³ *Supernatural Religion*, pp. 319, 320.

of the Apostle's character which are to be gathered from his Epistles point to internal agitation of unusual intensity. And Dr. Milligan admits that it is “not at all impossible that there may have been some struggle”;¹ “there must have been in the persecutor's mind a deep sense of guilt *long* incurred, remonstrances of conscience *long* silenced, the thought of injury *long* done to the Redeemer against his own better judgment.”² Here, indeed, we find the genesis of Paul's conversion—in the doubts of the justice of his conduct as a persecutor which must have arisen in a mind so active and sincere. We have no safe warrant in assuming a miraculous origin for his change of belief. His own words, “When it pleased God to reveal his son in (or within)³ me,” imply a purely psychological change. The author of the book of Acts possibly shared the view mentioned by Dr. Milligan, that Paul had too few visions, and thought his conversion required a supernatural setting to make it intelligible to the general body of believers.

Dr. Milligan says that “no belief was stronger in the Church than that of the second coming of Jesus, yet it led to no vision.”⁴ The paucity of the records hardly warrants this assertion. Can we be sure that Paul's alleged vision was not itself the result of this belief? It is true that the New Testament, with this possible exception, gives no accounts of such visions regarded as facts of experience, though we must remember that in the Christian apocalyptic books similar phenomena are not infrequent, and that until the Canon was completed no distinction seems to have been drawn between “inspired” and uninspired writings. Why, however,

¹ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 93.

² *Ibid*, p. 92.

³ Alford's *Greek Testament*, vol. iii., p. 8.

⁴ *Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 99.

does Dr. Milligan make no reference to the book of Revelation, which there is some warrant for attributing to the Apostle John? It is largely occupied with visions of Jesus, and three times in the last chapter the promise, "I come quickly," is given as the utterance of Jesus himself. And if Stephen could have a vision of the glorified Christ after his ascension, it is natural to suppose that others had visions of him before the ascension.

The apparently sudden cessation of visions is considered by some writers a serious bar to any natural explanation. But surely the visions would cease when the excitement which gave rise to them could no longer be sustained at fever-heat. And the time during which Jesus could be seen would be limited to the conventional period of forty days, though possibly the visions lasted longer. The point is this: the reports, whatever they were, were not put into their present literary form till long afterwards. Many visions of Jesus have since been experienced, even in modern times, which visions Dr. Milligan doubtless regards with the same incredulity that may well be felt with regard to Paul's vision. And it is significant that the Apostle's own belief in the second coming proved utterly erroneous.

CHAPTER III.

“THE RISEN MASTER,” BY REV. HENRY LATHAM

MR. LATHAM'S book offers a refreshing contrast to the majority of apologetic efforts. Its modest and benignant tone, and its absence of dogmatism, almost disarm criticism; while its attractive style, if it fails to command assent to all the author's conclusions, is calculated to awaken the sympathy of the reader with his aims. Yet we cannot but hold that the evidential value of the book is weakened by a number of assumptions which are not warranted by the facts, so far as these are known.

Mr. Latham's leading idea is that the *absolutely undisturbed* condition of the grave-clothes, with the spices lying within their folds, and the head-napkin lying in a place by itself, indicates that the body of Jesus had been removed from the tomb by other than human agency.¹

Now, it must be admitted that this view, whatever may be said for it, is an extremely slender basis on which to assume a miracle. It is merely an assumption based on ignorance. If the grave-clothes were found exactly as Mr. Latham supposes, we are not entitled to conclude that only supernatural agency could have left them in that position. The fourth Gospel merely states that on entering the tomb Peter found the clothes lying there, “and the napkin that was about his head not

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 12.

lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."¹ If a cultured believer of the present day can assume a miracle on such vague evidence as this, we cannot be surprised if an Apostle was similarly impressed. This apparently insignificant detail may indeed have formed one of the germs of the resurrection belief. But, if John or Peter thought the resurrection proved by the position of the grave-clothes, it is difficult to understand why neither gave clear testimony to the precise facts.

An incidental and vague expression in a book of unknown date and authorship, but certainly coming from an extremely superstitious age, thus becomes, in the hands of the apologist, an important link in the evidence for a miracle. Mr. Latham, it is true, sees in these particulars the relation of an eye-witness. This, of course, does not follow, for particularity of details is not confined to accounts which are true, nor does an eye-witness invariably give an accurate recital of what he has seen. But the "eye-witness" is pure assumption. We do not know that the writer of the fourth Gospel was an eye-witness, or even that any of the traditions embodied in his account were handed down by an eye-witness. Where a miracle is alleged we are entitled to require that the minimum amount of evidence supplied shall beyond doubt be the statements of actual observers. This lowest possible degree of evidence the Gospels nowhere convey, and the apologetic school seem to think the deficiency is made up by generous assumption and ingenious inference. It is clear that much has been omitted, and in these omitted portions it may reasonably be concluded that grounds for natural explanations originally existed. No one knows the truth

¹ John xx. 7.

about the removal of the body of Jesus. It may have been effected by human agency, and in that case we cannot suppose it was impossible for the unknown agents to have arranged the grave-clothes with such degree of neatness as the Evangelist's words may imply. Or the body may never have been removed at all.

That the Gospels contain suspicious indications that human agency may have effected the removal of the body (if it was removed) can hardly be denied. All the Evangelists speak of unknown visitants to the tomb, terming them sometimes “angels,” sometimes “men.” People to-day find it impossible to believe in angels. The probabilities are that these unknown visitants were really men. Who were these men? An incidental remark of Mr. Latham implies that they may have belonged to that sect of the Essenes with whom the early Christians seem to have had such close affinity. In Luke ix. 49 we read of a person who carried on independently of Jesus, but *in his name*, a somewhat similar mission. In Mark xiv. 51 there is a reference to a young man (not apparently one of the Apostles) whose clothing, a linen garment, was torn from his body at the apprehension of Jesus. It is well known that the Essenes clothed themselves in garments of white linen, and it is not impossible that Jesus himself was in closer relations with that body than the Gospels disclose.¹ How do we know that Essene friends of Jesus, unknown to the Gospel writers, did not effect the removal of the body? Mr. Latham's remark is: “More than once I have called attention to the existence at Jerusalem of a body of disciples who stood somewhat apart from the

¹ See *The Prophet of Nazareth*, by E. P. Meredith, ch. 7, sec. 10, and E. P. Nesbit's *Christ, Christians, and Christianity*, for evidence on this point. The latter author contends that Jesus was an Essene.

Galilean company. I suppose that the young man 'having a linen cloth cast about him,' who followed our Lord at the time of his apprehension, may have been of this number."¹

It must be admitted that all this is nothing more than conjecture. But the incompleteness of the Gospel narratives makes conjecture of some kind a mental necessity, and it is reasonable to put forward any natural conjecture rather than to assume a miracle on totally insufficient evidence. Our contention is that, in the absence of the actual facts, all positive explanations rest on a precarious footing.

Mr. Latham maintains that Jesus did not return to the natural life, as Lazarus did, and quotes in support a passage from Bishop Westcott's *Revelation of the Risen Lord*, which runs as follows: "This fact seems to me to involve the essence of the whole revelation of the Risen Christ. If the Lord had been raised again to our present life, subject to death, there would have been no pledge of a new human life. The chasm between the seen and the unseen world would have remained unbridged.....If the post-resurrection life of Jesus was really like our own—carried on, that is to say, in a body provided with heart and lungs and other organs performing their functions as ours do—then the Resurrection would tell us nothing whatever about another life, or about a spiritual existence of a different order from our own."²

The cultured Christian thought of modern times, therefore, puts forward the suggestion that the body of the risen Jesus must have possessed certain unknown qualities, because the desire for a future life requires those qualities to be assumed as a guarantee for its fulfilment.

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 402.

² *Ibid*, pp. 67-68.

As evidence of a theory of such moment as that of a future state the suggestion is not worth discussion. But no one can be surprised if the credulous mind of the first century stated the claim in a somewhat cruder form. The Gospels themselves show that the writers looked upon the resurrection as a necessity, both as a proof of their own immortality and as an inevitable result of supposed divine predictions. But such *a priori* considerations cannot fairly be termed evidence of a historical fact. Historical investigation the apologists themselves challenge, and where supernatural events are in question they must expect it to be rigidly applied. The resurrection being an occurrence absolutely unique (leaving aside the analogies of pagan myths) and conflicting with a known law of universal validity, we claim that absolutely perfect evidence must be produced before it can be accepted as a real event. All evidence derived from the existence of the Christian Church and the remarkable faith of its first members is purely inferential evidence, and therefore inadequate to prove a variation of natural law.

So far from the longing for a future life proving that a future life will be bestowed on man, it is rather to be viewed with suspicion, as implying the erroneous notion that human desires are the measure of their own fulfilment. A strong desire that the resurrection should be proved a fact naturally lessens that scrupulous care to see that the evidence is unassailable which only the impartial mind can employ. Emotional bias usually magnifies the evidence with which the apologist is in sympathy, and minimises that to which he is opposed. Even the ablest defenders of the resurrection overlook the serious gaps in their evidence, while imperiously demanding that their opponents should fill up these

gaps by positive explanations which they do not claim to possess.

Considering the strength of the case against the resurrection derived from universal experience,¹ and the incompleteness of the positive testimony in its favour, it is astonishing that anyone should assume it constitutes any revelation whatever of a future life for man. Revelation should make clear. The evidence for the resurrection is a perfect maze of doubt and perplexity. While we know with absolute certainty that our physical organisms moulder in the grave, the body of Jesus, according to the argument, was preserved from all corruption. It was a spiritual body that rose, we are told. Yet it was a body that could be handled, that could walk, speak, and eat. Then it must have possessed the physical organs which Dr. Westcott says it did not possess. If the Evangelists are wrong in stating these important details, does that prove the rest of their narrative to be correct? The writers must have believed in a bodily resurrection, or such details would not have formed part of the records. As we have seen, Dr. Milligan admits that they held a theory which cannot be held by us. That being so, what becomes of the argument of Dr. Westcott? The Apostles could not have believed in a future life on the strength of a bodily resurrection, because it told them "nothing about a spiritual existence of a different order" from their own. The "chasm between the seen and the unseen world remained unbridged," as far as they were concerned. It seems evident that the apologetic house of cards must tumble to pieces.

Mr. Latham candidly admits that this "spiritual

¹ We term the experience "universal" because we cannot hold it to be depreciated by one doubtful exception.

body” puzzles him. While some controversialists imagine that a meaningless and self-contradictory phrase settles the question, this honest writer confesses his ignorance. “What connection was there between the body that disappeared from the tomb and the body that the disciples were invited to handle? This, I believe, we cannot understand till we get out of the body ourselves. Almost as inscrutable is the question of what it is in which personal identity consists.”¹ That personal identity is a mystery is no doubt true. The nature and origin of mind, and its connection with organised matter, are part of that primal mystery of life which we must be content to leave unexplained, though, if solution ever comes, it will come from science, not from religion. But we cannot admit that the known fact of this mystery is any reason for holding as true other mysterious doctrines which cannot be shown to be facts at all. To suppose that, because we cannot explain what life is, we ought therefore to believe that a particular being returned to life in a form of which nature affords no other example, is to make a demand which requires to be backed by very much stronger evidence than any contained in the New Testament. To the Rationalist the question is not so much whether Jesus manifested himself after his death in a semi-spiritual form, as whether after his death he manifested himself alive at all. There is little profit in speculating about a spiritual body until it has been proved that Jesus left the tomb alive.

Mr. Latham thinks that the wounds in the body of Jesus were “signs,” or rather that he assumed as a sign a form which bore the marks of the crucifixion, so that men would know him as Jesus of Nazareth.² The dis-

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 73.

² *Ibid*, p. 74.

appearance of the body and the unaltered condition of the grave-clothes were "a sign" to the people, and contributed to the reception of the Gospel. In view of Dr. Milligan's contention that it was impossible for Jesus to appear to other persons than his own followers, it would seem essential to the purpose of the "scheme of redemption" that these signs should have been exhibited to those who were expected to heed them, and not to the disciples alone. A "sign" is of little value when it has to be accepted on hearsay.

In another respect Mr. Latham is hardly at one with his apologetic brethren. He considers that the transfiguration resembled the resurrection, and in a way foretold it, or prepared the minds of the disciples. Why, then, are we so frequently told that the disciples were utterly unprepared for the resurrection, and that it was the last thing they would expect? Dispassionately viewed, it is impossible to regard the transfiguration as a true objective event such as the Gospels imply. If it was, the beholders could never have forgotten it, or the purport of the words they had heard. Modern critics are practically unanimous in holding the transfiguration to have been a purely visionary experience on the part of some of the disciples, and even the Gospel account is not without a suggestion to this effect in relating that the disciples were asleep just before the vision. If the critics are right, we have in this story a remarkable example of the way in which the Evangelists translate subjective experiences into objective facts, and a strong confirmation of the theory that they treated the visions of the risen Jesus in precisely the same way. As the narrative shows, the Jews thought that holy men could be translated to heaven, and afterwards revisit the earth. Quite naturally, the idea was applied to Jesus.

A large portion of Mr. Latham's book is concerned, not with the usual elaborate futilities of the apologist, but with the exposition of passages which, in his opinion, indicate that they proceed from eye-witnesses. Thus we gather that the "superlative art" of Luke, in not putting words into the mouth of Jesus during the journey to Emmaus, affords a strong probability of the truth of his account. It may just as easily tell the other way.¹ Luke certainly states that words were uttered by Jesus, though he does not expressly quote them, evidently because he did not know what they were. Had the tradition with which he was dealing comprised the exact words believed to have been spoken, we decline to suppose that Luke omitted them for artistic reasons. Either he knew or did not know what words had been uttered. If he knew what they were, it was his duty to embody them in his account. There can be no "superlative art" in suppressing communications of a divine being which should have been of priceless value. If Luke did not know what the words of Jesus were, we fail to perceive the "superlative art" of omitting what was not in his possession.

But, even assuming this astonishing talent of Luke, how does it prove his story to be true? The very expression implies that he freely modified his materials, whatever their character may have been. Mr. Latham's implication is that, if Luke had added words of his own,

¹ Some Christian writers consider the whole story an account of a visionary experience. Thus the conservative Steinmeyer says: "The whole region of ocular appearance is completely removed from their (the disciples') senses" (*History of the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord*, p. 349). And he calls attention to the significant point that "the moment the eyes of the disciples were opened Jesus disappeared from their view" (*ibid.*, p. 351). Of the resurrection stories generally the same writer admits that they secure "only a limited measure of historical certainty" (*ibid.*, p. 232).

they would have detracted from the genuineness of his narrative. But a writer who could display "superlative art" was surely capable of attributing to Jesus the most suitable words; at any rate, words as suitable as those attributed by the other Evangelists to the risen Jesus. Mr. Latham considers that had the story been invented it would have contained the alleged words of Jesus, for the writer would have thought them to be necessary. As such words are certainly employed by Matthew and John, what guarantee have we—unless they also possessed superlative art, but applied it in a way contrary to that of Luke—that their narratives were not invented? If they are true, we must hold them to be so for precisely the opposite reason that Luke's story is held to be true. The result of Mr. Latham's argument is that we must view with strong suspicion all words put into the mouth of Jesus after his alleged resurrection.

The argument amounts to this: that, because writers of that age were in the habit of embellishing current traditions, their omission to do so in a particular instance proves the truth of the tradition, and consequently of a miracle. But it is not unreasonable to suppose that, even in the first century, writers existed who at least sometimes passed on traditional beliefs in the form in which they were acquainted with them. It is not necessary to follow Reimarus in accusing the Apostles of deliberate fraud;¹ they simply adopted the literary methods common to an uncritical age. If Matthew and John attributed words to the risen Jesus, they believed, equally with Luke, that they were relating a faithful account; that is, each dealt with the tradition he happened to know. Luke's reticence, however, tends

¹ *Fragments from Reimarus*, p. 73, etc.

to show the imperfection of his materials, for, if words presumably of great importance were actually uttered, they would certainly not have been omitted had Luke been able to transmit them.

Let us go a step further. Can we assume the accuracy of the statements that Luke does make? Internal evidence seems to indicate the contrary, for, if Jesus really expounded as concerning himself prophecies which had no relation to him, he misled his disciples.¹ If the error rests with the Gospel writers alone, it discredits their evidence as to the supernatural, since it shows that they disseminated a tradition the true character of which they failed to perceive. It is more probable that Luke's account simply embodies one of the conceptions which a later generation had formed as to what was then assumed to have been the character of the discourse in question. The attribution to Jesus of imaginary prophecies was simply part of the theological outfit of the time.

Mr. Latham is of opinion that the rudimentary views of Cleopas about the Lord, the reference to Peter as "Simon" only, the artless character of the literary style of this narrative, and its "vivid reproduction of the politico-theocratic hopes which must have entirely disappeared some time before St. Luke wrote," indicate a very early date for the account of the journey to Emmaus, and the probability that it emanates from an eye-witness, possibly Cleopas himself. "These views as to the nature and functions of the Lord would by that time have been thought to require excuse, and the writer would have been tempted either to modify what Cleopas

¹ The disciples were reproached for their slowness to believe. May not this have been the form in which was expressed their *self-reproach* for their tardy apprehension of spiritual truth?

says, or to apologise for his ignorance."¹ Obviously we cannot draw any positive doctrine of the resurrection from inferences of this nature. The characteristics referred to are more probably due merely to the Evangelist not feeling himself at liberty to modify the tradition which he had received. But how even the early existence of the tradition proves its truth is not very clear. Had it been derived from an eye-witness, the fact should have been stated, if the narrative was intended as evidence of a miracle. Even this would not have rendered the resurrection credible, but it would have been better evidence than we actually possess.

So many events are crowded into Luke's account of the post-resurrection life of Jesus that it is hard to suppose they all occurred in the course of one day, especially as, on that supposition, the ascension must have taken place at night, after the gates of Jerusalem had been closed. Mr. Latham feels this difficulty, and thinks it more probable that the writer records events which took place at various times during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension.² Luke, however, does distinctly imply that these events occurred on the same day, and, if he is inaccurate in that somewhat important detail, we do not think he makes a very reliable witness for a miracle. And, as this inaccurate writer is our only authority for the conventional period of forty days, we are reduced to balancing one doubtful story against another.

The appearance to Thomas is believed by Mr. Latham to have been not a spirit, but a real body, though not the same as before. The doubting Apostle was thereby convinced of the reality of the resurrection, and, further

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 160.

² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

demonstration being needless, did not put his hand into the wounds. It would have been very remarkable if the doubts of Thomas had not been removed by a physical appearance of Jesus. Any modern sceptic in the same position would probably find his doubts vanish if they conflicted with the unmistakable evidence of his own senses. But the apologists must please bear in mind that we are not in the position of Thomas, nor have we even the testimony of Thomas to the facts. It is not Thomas himself, but another person, who relates that he was satisfied. Our own opinion is that the appearance to Thomas never took place.¹ It is highly probable (though not certain) that the story grew, that many of the early Christians believed the resurrection to be a spiritual process, and that the story of Thomas was, among others, an imaginative presentation of a supposed fact which could be used to silence an opinion which was dangerous to the Church. To many minds nothing is more impressive than the conversion of an honest doubter. The whole account of Thomas's incredulity, and its removal by a professed physical test, the impossibility of which is quite unperceived, has an extremely artificial air, and the doubtful authorship and late appearance of the fourth Gospel fairly entitle us to hold that what seems to be legendary material is really such. And this view is strengthened when we note that in the words “My Lord and my God” Thomas expresses a theory of the deity of Jesus which was of later origin.

“All the accounts we possess,” says Mr. Latham, “of what happened on the resurrection-day must ultimately be derived from those who had been eye-witnesses of the events.”² This may be so; but how does it affect the

¹ If it did take place, how is it that Thomas did not at once recognise Jesus a few days later? (John xxi. 4.)

² *The Risen Master*, p. 220.

question? All accounts of historical events must "ultimately be derived" from those who have been eye-witnesses. All events are not equally credible, all accounts of them are not equally true. In proportion to their incredibility must we demand clearness and directness in the evidence. If Mr. Latham could show that the accounts of eye-witnesses are invariably true, and that they are never modified by being transmitted through other persons during a long period, his argument would possess considerable weight. But it is the reverse of this which happens. We know that transmitted statements always become more or less changed in passing from one person to another. We know that an unimaginative reporter will materialise spiritual impressions, while a religious mind will spiritualise physical facts. It is sufficiently obvious that the Gospel writers exhibit both these peculiarities. Mr. Latham's argument might be used to justify belief in almost any alleged miracle.

"Eye-witnesses of the events"! What events? What we want to ascertain, and what the Evangelists ought to have related, is the precise nature of the events which led to the belief in the resurrection. The evidence that this belief originated in the actual bodily appearance of Jesus after his death is so meagre that the only reasonable conclusion is that the facts were not within the personal knowledge of those who purport to relate them. If this evidence was so scanty after the lapse of forty or fifty years, the presumption is that at an earlier date it was more slender still. It is not likely to have diminished with the lapse of time; it is more probable that the oral tradition became amplified by popular reports, current among persons actuated by religious enthusiasm and totally incapable of critical investigation.

We do not know when this evolution of the resurrection-belief began. We do know that it took place. The Gospels themselves show that, during the interval which elapsed between the appearance of Mark's Gospel and the appearance of John's Gospel, the belief assumed a more definite literary form. The latter relates four appearances, each accompanied by spoken words; the former, in its genuine portion, relates no appearance whatever. If the resurrection had been known as a physical event to Mark, it is practically impossible that he should not have related it. And, if he was associated with Peter, it is almost as incredible to suppose him ignorant of the most important circumstance in the career of Jesus.

The Gospel writers are commended by Mr. Latham for not adding to the tradition with which they were acquainted. Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to James. There is no record of this in the Gospels, but Mr. Latham treats it as a fact. "The first meeting between James and the Risen Lord must have offered an attractive subject to persons who looked to literary success; and it speaks well for the conscientiousness with which the Evangelists wrote that no legend on this subject is even hinted at. It may be that, when the earlier Gospels were written, James was still alive, and that it was known that on this subject he held his peace himself, and would not that others should speak."¹ In other words, the credit of a supernatural story is to be assumed not only from what it contains, but from what it omits—a method of argument which hardly commends itself to those by whom the story is doubted. It is well known that the apocryphal Gospel of the Hebrews contains an

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 323.

account of this appearance. In that Gospel it is to the apologist nothing but a legend; had it been in one of the canonical Gospels, it would have been a fact, to be defended at any cost. On what grounds is the distinction drawn? Paul's reference is doubtless derived from the tradition embodied in this admittedly legendary account. Yet Paul's allusion is treated by all apologists as referring to an actual occurrence. Paul is thus a credible witness to an incident because he mentions it; the Evangelists are credible witnesses to the same incident because they do not mention it. One would have thought their "conscientiousness" might have resulted in a faithful recital of the fact, without legendary embellishment. The absence of the latter is not in all cases so undoubted as Mr. Latham supposes.

James was, we are told, a "disbeliever in the Lord's mission to the very close of His earthly life. He was convinced, it would seem, by an appearance of the Risen Jesus."¹ Like the apologist, we can only conjecture the cause of James's conversion, though we cannot share the comfortable belief that "it would seem" is sufficient evidence of occurrences which involve a variation of the order of nature. We will only remark that the Rationalist of the present day is in a position somewhat similar to that of the Lord's brother, with the difference that James is rather commended for declining to believe without actually seeing Jesus, while the unhappy Rationalist is sometimes sternly reproved for disbelieving without a like aid to faith.

Mr. Latham refers with some frequency to the Gospels being derived from the reports of eye-witnesses. It may be well to remind him of something which he knows

¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 320.

quite well—viz., that the testimony even of eye-witnesses may be very far from proving the truth of what they relate. In times when miracles are readily believed nothing is more common than testimony that is unwittingly false, and reasoning that is evidently erroneous. For a delightfully written and convincing illustration of this let the reader turn to Professor Huxley’s essay “On the Value of Witness to the Miraculous,” from which the following passages are extracted. Eginhard, a writer who held a confidential position in the Court of Charlemagne, having related certain miracles which he had personally witnessed, Huxley observes:—

It might fairly be said, Here you have a man whose high character, acute intelligence, and large instruction are certified by eminent contemporaries; a man who stood high in the confidence of one of the greatest rulers of any age, and whose other works prove him to be an accurate and judicious narrator of ordinary events. This man tells you, in language which bears the stamp of sincerity, of things which happened within his own knowledge, or within that of persons in whose veracity he has entire confidence, while he appeals to his sovereign and the Court as witnesses of others; what possible ground can there be for disbelieving him?¹

Eginhard, in fact, gives us evidence precisely similar in kind to that of the Gospels, with the addition of one important particular in which they are lacking—viz., the direct testimony of an eye-witness. According to apologetic canons, he ought therefore to be believed without a moment’s hesitation. How does the Protestant controversialist treat Eginhard’s testimony? He either flatly disbelieves or calmly ignores it. He does not believe that Eginhard is correct in asserting that demons

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 170.

were exorcised by the medium of holy relics, or that he saw blood exuding from a chest containing the bones of martyred saints. Why this scepticism? Because the incidents are not recorded in the New Testament. But the evidence is exactly similar to that of the New Testament. To accept the one and reject the other is to make theological bias the test of historical truth.

Huxley answers his question thus:—

Well, it is hard upon Eginhard to say so, but it is exactly the honesty and sincerity of the man which are his undoing as a witness to the miraculous. He himself makes it quite obvious that when his profound piety comes upon the stage, his good sense, and even his perception of right and wrong, make their exit.¹

A Roman Catholic writer, the Rev. Sydney F. Smith, commented on Professor Huxley's argument in terms too choice to pass unnoticed:—

He relates a little mediæval story, how some supposititious relics were palmed off upon the good Abbot Eginhard. He then draws the inference that witness for the miraculous is in all cases unreliable. If so large a conclusion follows from these premisses, one does not see why one still larger should not follow as well, and require us to disbelieve in historical testimony all round.²

That is how orthodoxy pulverises a man like Huxley. The reverend gentleman cannot even state with any approach to accuracy the premisses to which he is opposed. Eginhard declares that he saw miracles wrought by the power of certain relics. He was mistaken; consequently the testimony of even an eye-witness to the miraculous becomes unreliable. And Eginhard was for his time an exceptionally competent witness. He was mistaken merely because he was

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 170.

² *The Month*, June, 1889, p. 218.

chock-full of superstition. Therefore the testimony of even a capable person may be vitiated by his religious beliefs. That is clear enough for any reasonable man. The point for us is not whether the relics were or were not spurious, but whether Eginhard was really justified in believing that they were the means of a miracle being wrought, and also whether we are justified in so believing on his evidence. Probably the relics were supposititious, though the story does not definitely say so, or that they were “palmed off” upon Eginhard, who certainly, with many others, believed them to be genuine. The question is: Were the *miracles* genuine? Mr. Smith implies that had the relics been genuine the miracles would have been real, and that, because he believes the former to have been spurious, the miracles did not happen. He thus discredits evidence more direct than that for the resurrection.

We present the apologists with another quotation from Huxley’s essay :—

Quite apart from deliberate and conscious fraud (which is a rarer thing than is often supposed), people whose mythopœic faculty is once stirred, are capable of saying the thing that is not, and of acting as they should not, to an extent which is hardly imaginable by persons who are not so easily affected by the contagion of blind faith. There is no falsity so gross that honest men, and still more virtuous women, anxious to promote a good cause, will not lend themselves to it without any clear consciousness of the moral bearings of what they are doing.¹

The annals of the Christian Church afford ample proof of the truth of these words.

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 182.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST,” BY THE REV. JOHN KENNEDY, D.D.

THE bouncing confidence of the Rev. John Kennedy is out of all proportion to the strength of his arguments. To begin with, he quotes some passages from Sir George Cornwall Lewis and other writers, on the nature of evidence, which signally fail to render the support that he imagines his case derives from them. Two of these passages may be reproduced:—

Historical evidence, like judicial evidence, is founded on the evidence of credible witnesses. Unless these witnesses had personal and immediate perception of the facts which they report, unless they saw and heard what they undertake to relate as having happened, their evidence is not entitled to credit. As all original witnesses must be contemporary with the events which they attest, it is a necessary condition for the credibility of a witness that he be a contemporary, though a contemporary is not necessarily a credible witness. Unless, therefore, a historical account can be traced by probable proof to the testimony of contemporaries, the first condition of historical credibility fails.¹

The same authority also states:—

The credibility of a witness to a fact seems to depend mainly on the four following conditions, namely:—

1. That the fact fell within the reach of his senses.
2. That he observed or attended to it.
3. That he possesses a fair amount of intelligence and memory.

¹ Sir G. C. Lewis, *Credibility of Early Roman History*, p. 16.

4. That he is free from any sinister or misleading interest, or, if not, that he is a person of veracity.¹

Dr. Kennedy boldly claims that the evidence for the resurrection meets these requirements. As regards the Gospels we have no proof (but a strong contrary presumption) that their authors were contemporaries, and, if it could be shown that they were, we have to remember that “a contemporary is not necessarily a credible witness.” We have to prove that the Gospel writers “saw and heard” before we discuss their competency as historians. On Dr. Kennedy’s own showing, therefore, the four Gospels must be struck out as failing to fulfil “the first condition of historical credibility.”

As regards Paul there is a loophole, though it is nothing more. We may at once admit that Paul was a man of intelligence and veracity. Does that alone make him a good witness for the resurrection? Certainly not. Have we never heard of intelligent and truthful men being mistaken? Are we in a position to say that in his case no possibilities of error are to be discerned? Are we certain that his Epistles have never been retouched? Unquestionably the actual resurrection of Jesus did not “fall within the reach of” Paul’s senses. Nor can we say that the Damascus incident was equivalent to the actual perception of a dead person returning to life. It may have been, it probably was, nothing more than a vision, of which natural antecedents may be predicated. And—chief point of all—this incident is nowhere related in Paul’s own writings. Even in the case of Paul, therefore, Dr. Kennedy’s evidence resolves itself into a series of inferences, the value of which is highly questionable. He maintains that Paul *must* have

¹ *On Authority in Matters of Opinion*, pp. 21, 22.

investigated the evidence. Only there is not an iota of proof that he did so. On the contrary, he says he learnt nothing from the other Apostles. We may add a definition of hearsay evidence which will show beyond reasonable doubt that the Gospel statements come under this category. "Hearsay evidence is the name given by lawyers to evidence given in a court of justice at secondhand, where the witness states not what he himself saw or heard, but what somebody else said. This evidence is as a general rule inadmissible, because the axiom is that the best evidence that can be had must be produced, and therefore each witness must be confined to stating what he knows of his own personal knowledge, or what he has learned by the aid of his own senses; and as he is sworn to the truth, his truthfulness is thus secured as far as human testimony can be so. If evidence were once admitted at secondhand, there would be no limit to its uncertainty, and there would be thus introduced vague statements of absent persons, who, not being sworn when they made them, are therefore incapable of being punished if they speak falsely, and cannot be cross-examined."¹ Why should not the evidence for a divine revelation be at least as good as that required by a human tribunal?

Moreover, what events are they to which Sir G. C. Lewis's canons are intended to apply? Miracles? Not at all. Sir G. C. Lewis was referring to natural events. As Dr. Kennedy himself admits, a higher degree of evidence is required to prove supernatural events. To them even more stringent canons must be applied. Yet, with all his efforts, he is able to bring forward in support of these supernatural events a degree of evidence which

¹ *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, art. "Hearsay Evidence."

only partially suffices to establish events within the scope of ordinary experience. This amounts to nothing less than a collapse of the entire case which he claims to have proved.

Although we consider at the outset that Dr. Kennedy's whole argument is self-refuted through its failure to satisfy his own tests of credibility, we feel bound to notice in detail the most important of his propositions.

He states: “The principle of the impossibility or incredibility of miracles, and the consequent rejection of all supernatural narrative as legendary, would put a stop at once to any inquiry respecting an alleged revelation.”¹

It is pleasant to find an apologist who is anxious to have his alleged revelation inquired into, though cases to the contrary have been known. We merely ask which is the worse and more mischievous alternative—to reject miracles as incredible, or to swallow them without examination? History, which shows us the unreasoning credulity of the Middle Ages and its disastrous moral consequences, supplies an answer which is clear and conclusive. The great evil of the belief in the supernatural is this—it never knows where to stop. If you believe one miracle, on what principle can you reject another? On the authority of the Bible we are clearly justified in believing in angels, devils, evil spirits, witchcraft, and, indeed, in a comprehensive dislocation of the natural order. Let the Rationalist at once confess to a bias against the miraculous. In that he is more than justified. In all his experience he has never seen the laws of nature interrupted, nor has he ever met with testimony capable of proving that any interruption has

¹ *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 21.

taken place. This is not obstinate incredulity, but a well-founded reliance on a preponderating body of evidence, which, unlike that for miracles, is not even open to dispute. Yet the apologist regards the rational attitude as almost criminal, while an irrational bias in favour of what no one can verify is commonly held to be essential to true religion. The logical result of belief in the supernatural is, *Credo quia impossibile*. And it frequently carries with it a certain scepticism with regard to the conclusions of science and reason. Thus Mr. McCheyne Edgar would prefer to reject the whole body of modern science rather than the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.¹

Naturally enough, Dr. Kennedy misrepresents the case which he imagines he is pulverising. The modern Agnostic (such a man as Huxley, for instance) does not positively assert that miracles are impossible. He simply says that the evidence in their favour is not strong enough to warrant belief in a variation of natural laws; his verdict is that miracles are "not proven."

Lashing out at this "principle" that miracles are impossible, Dr. Kennedy brings up Dean Milman, who declares it to be "unphilosophical," and Canon Mozley, who describes it as "the crudest and shallowest of all the assumptions of unbelief."² Our apologist fancies he has reduced unbelief to an absurdity if he can but show that it involves disbelief in the evidence of our own senses. Let him answer a plain question: Are our senses infallible? One does not need much reflection before saying "No" to that. Leaving the Biblical writers out of the question, instances of honest delusion, from Joan of Arc to Swedenborg, from George Fox to

¹ *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, Present-day Tracts, No. 45, p. 62.

² Kennedy, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 21.

Joanna Southcott, are simply innumerable. Even in our own day the pathetic demand for miracle creates its own fulfilment. Every cripple who goes to Lourdes is not healed, but the formally attested cures are declared to number ten per cent.¹ Does Dr. Kennedy believe them, or does he apply to them the rationalistic explanations which the unbeliever applies to the belief in the resurrection? Thousands of miracles are more directly attested, and by more competent witnesses, than the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus. The apologist will not admit it to be unphilosophical to reject the one while accepting the other. But if one miracle, why not an infinite number? The philosophical difficulty remains the same. When the Rationalist finds miracles supported by the direct testimony of eye-witnesses to be unworthy of credit, he cannot be expected to share the apologists' tenderness for the indirect and traditional evidence by which alone the resurrection-belief is supported.

Dr. Kennedy quotes approvingly the Rev. Isaac Taylor's remark that "the validity of evidence in proof of remote facts is not affected, either for the better or the worse, by the weight of the consequences that may happen to depend upon them."² Again, Dr. Kennedy fails to perceive that this quotation tells against the case for the resurrection. Isaac Taylor's words exclude the argument based upon the diffusion, the energy, and the influence of the Christian Church, from the legitimate evidence of the resurrection as a real occurrence. Yet nearly all apologists make these consequences of the resurrection-belief one of the chief points in its favour.

¹ Zola, *Lourdes*, 6d. edition, p. 81.

² *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 22.

Referring to the accounts of Paul's conversion, Dr. Kennedy considers the discrepancies in Acts only "apparent"—the most useful term the apologist has at command, though he never explains why even "apparent" discrepancies should be exhibited by a divine revelation. "Luke says 'hearing the voice,' whereas Paul says 'they heard not the voice of him who spoke to me.' The solution of this difficulty is very simple. According to Luke, those who travelled with Paul heard the sound of the words that were spoken; but according to Paul they did not understand what was spoken.¹ The words spoken by the Lord were heard both by Paul and his companions, but were understood only by Paul. We have a similar instance in the life of Christ, where a voice from heaven to him was heard in a threefold manner; those who were believers recognised it as the voice of God, and heard the words; some hearing it said it thundered; others hearing it said an angel spake to him. When two narratives which are manifestly independent of each other supplement the one the other, and thus throw light the one upon the other, they furnish mutual confirmation."²

It would perhaps be a waste of time to analyse this masterpiece of reasoning. It seems that "a voice from heaven" may be interpreted either as the voice of God or as a simple peal of thunder, according to the predisposition of the observer.³ We know well enough which explanation would be preferred in an age of rank superstition. Dr. Kennedy's explanation has not the

¹ Dr. Davidson pronounces this distinction illegitimate. (*Introduction to New Testament*, v. ii., p. 125).

² *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 55.

³ The Jews, like many other peoples, were in the habit of regarding thunder as the voice of God.

remotest resemblance to evidence of a supposed supernatural event, nor is such an explanation hinted at by the writer of Acts. Evidently it is the fruit of a strong conviction that every passage in the New Testament *must* be inspired, *must* be true, and that all discrepancies *must* be merely “apparent.” But even after his lucid exposition we still fail to understand how God, if he is, as Jesus declared, “a spirit,” can possess a physical vocal apparatus, and utter from the realms of space articulate words in a human language.

This brings us to what is with the apologist a serious difficulty. Jesus is alleged to have died and ascended into heaven long before the conversion of Paul; how long we cannot say, nor can any theologian help us. No one knows the date of either event. He must, therefore, even according to the apologists, have appeared to Paul as a spirit. Weizsäcker confirms this view. Paul’s words in Corinthians prove “conclusively that what he saw was only visible to his spirit. For nothing else existed than a spiritual nature, a spiritual body. Any other ‘seeing’ was therefore impossible, and, accordingly, every assumption that involves the perception of the material body in its original form falls to the ground.”¹ We ask for some evidence that a spirit can articulate “words in the Hebrew tongue”—or any other. And is it not strange that Paul’s companions, who must have been Jews, were somehow incapable of comprehending words spoken in their own language? It looks as if Dr. Kennedy’s “solution,” instead of being “very simple,” involves a succession of miraculous phenomena for which there is not a shadow of warrant.

Again, the Greek word for “hearing” is the same in

¹ *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, vol. i., p. 5.

both passages, and the word "voice" is the same. Obviously Dr. Kennedy assumes a difference of meaning for purely apologetic purposes.

The critical acumen which accepts as historical the account of the baptism of Jesus, when it bears legend stamped on almost every line, may be left to sink into oblivion without assistance.

One more peculiar feature of Dr. Kennedy's defence must be noticed. He has no hesitation in accepting as Paul's own words the speeches attributed to the Apostle by the writer of Acts. One statement is by Luke; another by Paul! Both, however, are from the pen of Luke. Since when has it been discovered that Paul's speeches were reported verbatim, and revised by the orator? Dr. Kennedy would doubtless proffer another "very simple solution" of this difficulty: Luke must have derived his information from Paul himself; it must therefore be accurate. This, however, is nothing but assumption, and it is not confirmed by Paul himself. In his own writings he ignores the Damascus incident altogether, even when mentioning his visit to that place. Moreover, it is a commonplace of modern criticism that the Book of Acts is not historically reliable, especially in those portions which lack the confirmation of Paul himself.

The reasonable suggestion that Paul's nervous temperament was a factor in his conversion is thus summarily dismissed: "Readers may be excused if they resent such suggestions as an insult to their understanding. But we are content to say that how a convulsion or an epileptic fit, or even a nervous constitution, could contribute to the conversion of Saul, or to the circumstances in which it took place, passes our knowledge. It may be, however, it is said that there was a

sudden flash of lightning and a sudden peal of thunder, which, coinciding with the inward struggles of his mind, was considered by the Apostle as the appearance and angry voice of the Christ whom he persecuted. We can understand how a thunderstorm might produce awe and lead to solemn reflection ; but how Saul could convert the sound of thunder into a conversation between him and Jesus Christ we cannot understand.”¹

The dazed inconsequence of these remarks is rather trying to anyone who wishes to know what really took place when Paul became a Christian. Dr. Kennedy does not explain on what principle the Apostle’s conversion should be regarded as a unique case having no relation to similar phenomena. Even a rudimentary acquaintance with the psychology of conversion might have shown it not to be beyond any ordinary person’s knowledge that the particular features of a human personality are necessarily involved in every change, mental or spiritual, which that personality undergoes. Dr. Kennedy would not, we think, on sober reflection, deny that, even if Paul was supernaturally converted, his native temperament was one of the forces which were at work during the crisis, and helped to determine its character and tendencies. Even a supernatural revelation could not annihilate, though it might greatly modify, the essential nature of the person to whom it was made. And to assume that Paul’s conversion lacked the subjective element which was necessary (or there could have been nothing to convert), and was due solely to a supernatural cause, because the Book of Acts mentions only the latter, is merely to beg the question. Criticism—even Biblical criticism—proceeds on the

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 59.

principle that a supernatural explanation should not be invoked if a natural explanation is possible. Conversion is a modification of the inner nature, and is consequently a process in which the subjective element is of the first importance, whatever may be the external co-operating agencies. Dr. Kennedy not merely ignores, but practically denies, the existence of this subjective factor in the case of Paul. He will not even allow that it contributed to the result. To suggest such a thing is to "insult" the reader's understanding. Only the most determined bias could thus disregard the facts essential to a comprehension of the event, and set at defiance the voice of reason.

As we have already seen, this dogged supernaturalism finds little support in the language of Paul himself. Why does Dr. Kennedy persist in preferring the authority of another and much later writer, who was not present, to that of the principal person concerned? He considers the "hypothesis of mental struggle in Paul" not only without historic foundation, but "contrary to all that he tells us of his state of mind in this great crisis of his life."¹ This assertion is based on two passages in Acts and one in Galatians, which merely refer to Paul's having formerly been a persecutor; and, though they give no clear indication of his state of mind at the time of his conversion, they imply an after-feeling of reproach which is hardly consistent with the callous passivity assumed by Dr. Kennedy. The uncertain authorship of the passages in Acts is passed over without notice. These may have been, and probably were, put into the mouth of Paul by the later compiler. At any rate, criticism stands self-condemned when it assumes the

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 59.

truth of propositions which it is called upon to support by positive reasons. On the other hand, Dr. Kennedy ignores the passage in Galatians which clearly refers to an inward revelation, as well as the various other passages relating to experiences which in modern language would certainly be termed subjective.

At this point we may interpolate the opinion of a Christian author of some repute. Dr. Percy Gardner says: “It is a cardinal principle that in speaking of Paul we must judge him from his own writings, and not from what we are told about him in the Acts.....In many ways the picture of the Apostle as given in the Acts differs from that which we derive from the Epistles; and when this is the case we cannot hesitate which of the two accounts we should prefer. In particular, the story of the sudden and complete conversion of Paul, of which we have three varying accounts in the Acts, though it may probably have some basis of fact, is yet no doubt misleading.....The great change was inward, perhaps gradual, and, though it may well have culminated in a vision, yet the writer of Acts probably misleads us in his love of the external, the sudden, the dramatic.....Almost all theologians have been misled by attaching too much weight to the vivid account in Acts of Paul’s conversion, to the speeches which on various occasions are in Acts put into the mouth of Paul, and to other passages which are, in fact, expressive of the views of Luke rather than of Paul.”¹

Dr. Kennedy claims that we find in the Apostle’s writings clear “evidence of a sober, sound, and self-possessed mind.....the very opposite of nervousness or excitability, which could make him an easy prey to his

¹ *A Historic View of the New Testament*, pp. 211-13.

own imagination, or to any form of delusion."¹ Has the apologist never heard of opposite characteristics being displayed by the same person? Has he never heard of the scientific mystic, Swedenborg? Does he really imagine that Paul was entirely uninfluenced by the special tendencies of the age in which he lived? One has only to read Paul's Epistles with an open mind, and numerous indications of mysticism and emotional religion will be plainly seen. To some of these we have called attention in a preceding chapter. Dr. Davidson remarks that "Paul's temperament was highly nervous. He was epileptic, mystical, to some extent visionary, and the subject of apocalyptic revelations. Images in his mind were often turned into objective phenomena" (*Introduction to New Testament*, vol. i., p. 181).

"There was," says Dr. Kennedy, "an external or objective cause for all the Apostle Paul's visions."² Positive assertions of this character should be proved. So far from even attempting to prove this one, Dr. Kennedy does not consider the attempt worth making. "We need not trouble ourselves with any inquiry into either physical or metaphysical explanations of visions of this order. One thing is certain—that what the vision-seer, if the vision is of himself, sees and hears must have lain previously within him."³ To say this was the case with Paul would be to say "that his conversion was the fruit of his conversion, he being already inwardly that which he became manifestly after his vision."⁴ On this theory "it must be proved that Paul was already a converted man" before the Damascus vision. Here Dr. Kennedy, by some lucky accident, has come near to what is probably the truth. "Probably"—because there are

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 60.

² *Ibid*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 62.

good reasons for holding, though we cannot prove it, that, as Dr. Gardner says, Paul's vision, if he had one, was just the culminating point in a prolonged psychological struggle. This would certainly be represented by the writer of Acts as an external manifestation, though Paul himself speaks only of an inward process. Dr. McGiffert has remarked: "Such a transformation necessitates some preparation; without it the event is psychologically inconceivable. The preparation need not be direct, but some preparation there must be. What it actually was we may learn from Romans vii. 7."¹ The seventh chapter of Romans, in fact, reveals a dissatisfaction with legal forms of righteousness which was likely to issue in a spiritual crisis with such a man as the Apostle Paul. We have no right to ignore all the natural antecedents of Paul's faith because a later chronicler does not refer to them. He states the result; he does not enlighten us as to the process.

"If the vision is of himself" is Dr. Kennedy's qualification. This amounts to saying that, if the vision is subjective, it is not objective. It is for the supernaturalist to prove the absence of normal contributing agencies. Was Paul's conversion any more miraculous than Luther's? It is quite in accordance with our knowledge of visions that some trifling external occurrence should set aflame, as it were, a number of subjective impressions, the force and vividness of which are not until then fully realised by the slumbering consciousness. Dr. Kennedy, however, considers that a miracle alone can account for so remarkable an event. But then he has to account for the miracle. For this he has no other authority than an unreliable and superstitious chronicler, and the

¹ *History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, p. 126.

excellent character of a person who has not recorded his testimony on the subject. An apologist does not show his competence by airily dismissing the natural and reasonable explanation of the facts as not even worth the trouble of examining.

What did Paul really *know* about the resurrection? "It was," says Dr. Kennedy, "simply impossible that a man of his cast of mind, and in a matter which involved such tremendous issues to himself and to mankind, should receive idly and unquestioningly what chance might bring to his ears."¹ We are not aware that anyone has said that Paul received his information "idly and unquestioningly." The point for us is whether or not that information was absolutely true and accurate. Paul does not state that he verified it, and we cannot be sure that his unknown informants were intellectually qualified to declare the precise truth on a matter in which emotional bias may have misled them, as it has misled many others since that time. Apparently, in the opinion of Dr. Kennedy, the fact that evidence for the supernatural cannot be verified in no way detracts from its value. Yet no reasoning being ought to accept the supernatural on conjecture, and none but an apologist of the deepest dye would ask him to do so.

Whether Paul received his information "idly" or the reverse, the result is for us pretty much the same. If his conversion "involved such tremendous issues," it is a great pity that he did not leave to posterity a full and accurate statement of the facts. In an earlier chapter of his book Dr. Kennedy says he received the "fullest and most minute information" from Ananias. What was this information? Who was Ananias? How did he obtain *his* information, and from whom? And why

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 68.

did Paul not give posterity the benefit of it? To these questions Dr. Kennedy has no reply. To crown this amazing evidence Paul declares on oath that he did not receive his gospel from any human being.

Dr. Kennedy goes on to say that Paul could not have alleged the appearance to Peter unless he had been “told of the fact and the circumstances by Peter himself.”¹ This, of course, may or may not be so, but we have still to balance the probabilities of Peter having seen Jesus as an objective reality or as a subjective vision. And as neither Peter nor Paul says a word about the “circumstances,” how can we possibly treat them as evidence?

Again, with regard to the appearance to the 500, “Paul must have had good grounds for his assertion.”² As, however, Paul’s grounds are not before us, we can at the best only assume their sufficiency.

Matthew’s expression that “some doubted” (the appearances to “the eleven” and to the 500 are assumed to be identical—a matter of the utmost uncertainty) “increases our confidence in the candour and truthfulness of the historian.....Matthew could afford, if the expression may be used, to tell the whole truth.....Some uncertainty having been felt, it was only after the manner of all the Gospel writers to mention it, without troubling themselves as to how it might be interpreted.”³ A more helplessly crippled defence of the supernatural no opponent could desire to meet with. The “candour and truthfulness” of a writer may be undoubted. But what about his knowledge? What about his capacity to examine evidence? What about his liability to prepossessions, and to the perturbing influence of tradition upon a credulous mind? These things enormously affect the

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 69.

² *Ibid*, p. 73.

³ *Ibid*, p. 75.

value of testimony. Dr. Kennedy wholly disregards them. If Matthew knew "the whole truth," why did he not declare it, instead of referring to eleven witnesses only, if 500 witnesses were present? If he did not know the whole truth, that alone settles the question of his competency as a "historian." It appears also that it was "the manner of all the Gospel writers" not to "trouble themselves" to make their accounts accurate and complete. That is precisely what the unbeliever has been saying for generations.

In the same eccentric vein Dr. Kennedy asserts that "Paul cannot have been mistaken" as to the appearance to James. "He must have received the information from James himself during that visit of fifteen days to Jerusalem."¹ Perhaps he did; but where is the evidence either that James told Paul, or that James saw anything but a vision?

It is often profitable to put the dicta of theologians side by side. Dr. Gardner remarks: "In those fifteen days spent with Peter we cannot suppose that St. Paul occupied himself with gaining all possible information as to the human life of our Lord; the context utterly excludes this."² Is it said this did not apply to the post-resurrection life of Jesus? Dr. Gardner holds that, excepting in a spiritual sense, there was no post-resurrection life.

The extraordinary manner in which the apologist can shut his eyes to facts is shown by Dr. Kennedy's remarks on Luke's little discrepancy as to the forty days. "It is simply impossible that a writer who had taken pains to acquire 'a perfect understanding of all things from the first' should have fallen into any mistake in the matter."³

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 69.

² *The Origin of the Lord's Supper*, p. 6.

³ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 79.

The apologist here commits himself to the proposition that Luke, who admits that he was not an eye-witness of the events, but simply made the best use he could of his materials, was incapable of error—in a word, infallible; a claim sufficiently refuted by the character of his account. And were Luke's unknown informants also infallible? Dr. Kennedy is no doubt aware that the more exact rendering of Luke's expression is “having traced the course of all things accurately from the first”—an expression which it is “simply impossible” to regard as anything more than an assurance that Luke had given a correct recital of the events to the best of his ability. But accuracy in the first century was one thing; accuracy in an age of science is quite another. The Evangelist's words do not justify Dr. Kennedy in “running *amok*” with historical criticism. And, after all, the discrepancy is there beyond question; Luke does in one place imply one day, in another he says forty days. Yet we are asked to admit that an author who actually makes a mistake could not possibly have made it. The critical bias against which the Doctor inveighs is nothing to the determined prejudice which will not admit an error that stares every reader in the face. It is explained that Luke may in Acts have repeated “in the most summary way” the “facts regarding the forty days” which he had previously narrated.¹ We do not see how even an infallible writer could “repeat” facts which he had not before mentioned. Nor is it clear why he should have added speeches unrecorded in his Gospel, and given a second version of the last words of Jesus.²

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 80.

² According to the Revised Version, no less than eight passages are by “some ancient authorities” omitted from the last chapter of Luke's Gospel.

In the usual manner of the "thick and thin" controversialist, Dr. Kennedy will not have it that the disciples could have been mistaken, nor the Gospel writers either, even when they were merely compiling from traditional materials: "No middle term can be found between the reality of the fact and conscious falsehood on the part of the witnesses."¹ Really it is tiring to keep pointing out that the Gospel writers cannot be admitted as the original witnesses, and that they could not help sharing the intellectual tendencies and the imperfect knowledge of their time and country. It is clear that these affected even Jesus—why not, therefore, his followers? "Unlearned and ignorant men," it is admitted, were the Apostles; but they could not be in error concerning the resurrection! The supposition of many of the best modern Christian scholars that the germ of the resurrection belief was visionary experience, material details being added by tradition, does, we think, supply the very "middle term" which the strenuous Dr. Kennedy says cannot be found.

Having proved the resurrection, Dr. Kennedy goes on to show that we are in a position to accept all the other miracles recorded in the four Gospels. Instead of being improbable, they now become probable, because they form part of a supernatural scheme. We quite agree that, if we can but accept as proved a great miracle, we need have no qualms about believing any number of little ones. Even this tempting prospect, however, will not cause us to swerve from Paul's admirable injunction to "*prove* all things"—that is, so far as Dr. Kennedy and the Evangelists will permit us to do so. To make all the Gospel miracles "probable" is to furnish one more reason for viewing them with suspicion.

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 104-5.

After some remarks on the Temptation, the accounts of which Dr. Kennedy apparently believes to be literally true, he goes on : “ Assured that He rose from the dead to die no more, we are not surprised to be told that He was distinguished from mankind in this, that He alone, of all born of woman, was born miraculously, and that He alone was sinless. Moreover, if He was sinless, death was not His due ; and if, from any cause or for any reason, He suffered death, it was only right that His sinlessness should be attested by the reversal of the sentence which doomed Him to the Cross.”¹

Here we seem to find a modern analogy with the genesis of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. We have no doubt whatever that this was exactly how the first Christians reasoned, only in their personal knowledge of Jesus some of them had better evidence than Dr. Kennedy possesses. They too held Jesus to be sinless, though clearly they did not regard him as God. They (or rather the later generation which produced the records) held that he was miraculously born, that he was the divinely-sent Messiah, and that the shocking tragedy of his crucifixion needed to be reversed. How was that to be effected ? It is no insinuation of “conscious fraud” to allege that to the simple piety and love of the disciples, strengthened by the supposed predictions of their sacred Scriptures, the conclusion was inevitable that Jesus, the Messiah, must have conquered death, must have burst in glory from the tomb, must have ascended into heaven and taken his place at the right hand of his Father. Poetic justice demanded the resurrection. The Gospel traditions supplied the demand. But how material, how crude and infantile, the whole scheme becomes in the light of modern knowledge !

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 110.

Dr. Kennedy admits the "wonderfulness and unlikelihood" of the resurrection "in ordinary circumstances," but contends that, when we look at the "circumstances and character" of Jesus, "the wonderfulness of His resurrection remains, its unlikelihood vanishes."¹ This argument would not be without force if it could be proved that Jesus actually was a divine person. A miraculous birth would afford at least some probability that the subject of it would transcend the law of death. But the supernatural birth of Jesus, like his ascension into heaven, is avouched by testimony so feeble and so dubious that it cannot properly be dignified by the term "evidence." It does not appear to have been the original belief of the disciples, or the Davidic genealogy could not have been assumed. Dr. Kennedy appears to forget two important facts. One is that the conception of the divinity of Jesus is (rightly or wrongly) derived from the same documents which relate his miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension. In the absence of independent evidence it is hardly a legitimate mode of reasoning to bring forward one of these conceptions as proof of the remainder, when all alike rest upon the same questionable authority. The other fact is that, in order to comprehend the "circumstances and character" of Jesus, full and accurate data are essential. The Gospels present us with pictures of the life of Jesus which, while comprising valuable reports of his teaching, are, in a historical and chronological sense, fragmentary and disjointed to a degree for which we are not able to account. They relate the events of one year, or possibly three years (no apologist knows which), out of a life extending to at least ten times the latter period, and even then with nothing

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 121.

like completeness. From these imperfect materials we have to frame as best we can a synthetic view of his whole life, his mental outlook and capacity, his ideas, his culture, his hopes and aspirations. Does the apologist seriously maintain that this can be done? We cannot but hold that the Christian synthesis of his divinity, with its exorbitant supernaturalism, has been put forward on very insufficient data.

As might have been anticipated, Dr. Kennedy rides roughshod over the contention that the first century was an age of superstition. The argument involves the conclusion that Jesus himself, “the idea of whom originated in that age, is the product of ignorance and superstition,” and thus “answers itself.....If Jesus was the natural product of his age, the argument is a fair one that the age which has accomplished this great result was capable of the lesser achievement of raising up trustworthy historians of the ‘Man and His doings.’”¹ On the other hand, it is also a fair argument that if Jesus was not a natural product of his age, “the divine favour could secure to the world a trustworthy history of what He was and did.”²

One has to exercise several of the Christian virtues in dealing with Christian apologists. The substance of Dr. Kennedy’s claim is that, whether we take the natural or the supernatural view of Christ’s nature, God “could” have caused a trustworthy history of him to be written. What has that to do with the question? We are not dealing with suppositions as to the degree of literary capacity possessed by a supreme being, and we will not deny that such a being “could” write a perfectly

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 123, 124.

² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

trustworthy history if he chose. But has he done it? If the four Gospels are his work, they are not remarkable achievements in the way of accuracy. Among modern critics there is a practical consensus of opinion that their historic details cannot be implicitly accepted, and this conclusion the plain man can with ease verify for himself by simply reading the Gospels. It would be very extraordinary if documents of unknown date and authorship were free from error, and when error is patent to every unbiassed reader we cannot admit that a bold denial of its existence serves the cause of truth. And we repeat with a confidence equal to that of Dr. Kennedy that the Gospels *were* produced, and that Christianity *did* arise, in an epoch of gross ignorance and superstition. Sufficient proof of this statement has already been given; every scholar, well-nigh every reader, knows it to be true. Dr. Kennedy also knows it quite well; he is merely seeking to throw his opponents into a perplexing dilemma.

The dilemma is this: How is it possible on naturalistic principles to account for such a moral and spiritual phenomenon as the nature of Jesus Christ? We doubt whether any perfectly satisfactory solution of the problem can be found, nor have we at present any ready-made solution to offer. Two or three reflections, however, may be borne in mind: (1) The fact that our knowledge is imperfect is not a good reason for assuming explanations which involve the supernatural. (2) All great men are necessarily the products of their age, but many so far transcend it as to make explanation of their appearance difficult, if not impossible. Mohammed sprang from a clan of semi-barbarous idolaters. (3) Dr. Kennedy confuses the qualities necessary to report in a simple, disconnected style an

outline of the moral teachings of Jesus with the intellectual power and veracity proper to the historian. The Gospels indicate the first set of qualities; they do not reveal the second. (4) Whatever the basis of the Gospel tradition may be, the character of Jesus has evidently become, to an undefined extent, idealised in the written accounts of him—a process which went on until he was assumed to be the Deity in human form.

In addition to this, the more closely the origins of Christianity are studied the less reason do we find to assume their supernatural origin. The remarkable similarity of many of the ethical teachings of Jesus to the doctrines and practices of the Essenes, and to the current morality of Judaism, demonstrates that much of the Christian morality was derived from pre-existing sources. Professor Graetz considers that John the Baptist was (as indicated by his appellation) an Essene, and that, as one of his disciples, Jesus must have been “powerfully attracted by the pure and ascetic doctrines of that body.”¹

Dr. Kennedy remarks that modern times are not free from superstition, and we are therefore “landed in the strange conclusion that the only persons fit by their enlightenment to bear witness to the supernatural are those who believe the supernatural to be antecedently incredible, and who would not believe it though one rose from the dead before their eyes.”² Such a conclusion might be strange if it were enunciated by anyone else, but with Dr. Kennedy it is only his peculiar way of exposing the absurdity of rational methods. Disbelievers in the supernatural neither claim nor intend to claim

¹ *History of the Jews*, vol. ii., p. 150. For details of the Essene beliefs see chap. i. of that volume.

² *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 126.

that they alone are competent witnesses to it. They have not yet had such a test put to them as seeing a man rise "from the dead before their eyes." When they get the chance of observing such a phenomenon, Dr. Kennedy may rest assured they will examine it fairly, and, if both the death and the resurrection be certainly proved, they will then—*but not until then*—believe that a dead person can return to life. Dr. Kennedy is right in supposing that the unbeliever demands proof of such an occurrence; he is wrong in supposing that the proof would, as a matter of course, be rejected. The unbeliever contends that even the testimony of one's own senses is liable to error. That is a fact which not merely history (for that, too, is but fallible testimony), but every man's personal experience, proves. Uncompromising as he is, Dr. Kennedy cannot deny it. So he evades the force of this fact by the charitable insinuation that the unbeliever is guilty of a wilful persistency in error. He does not understand that, even if the unbeliever were in the wrong, his error would rest upon a firm realisation of that inflexible natural order which is a necessary condition of all scientific knowledge, and would, so far, be defensible. This conviction does indeed, and quite rightly, render miracles "antecedently incredible," for it is impossible that a qualified intellect should at the same time hold the inconsistent ideas that natural law is at once variable and invariable. Every thinking person regards experience transmitted to him by others as possessing less certainty than his own. We do know that human testimony errs; we do not know that the laws of nature are ever broken. Consequently we cannot admit that the unbeliever is wilfully blind to truth. For ourselves we would say that if a man "rose from the dead before our eyes," beyond the

possibility of dispute, we should accept the miracle—and look out for an explanation of it. Dr. Kennedy might reply that there is no merit in believing a certainty. Neither is there merit in believing an uncertainty.

Our apologist sternly reproves the unholy demand for certitude in regard to matters supernatural. “The spirit which demands more evidence for the resurrection of our Lord is a spirit which would reject more evidence if it were forthcoming, which would reject every conceivable amount and variety of evidence. The demand is practically hypocritical, for, if conceded, the additional evidence must still be rejected.”¹ Is Dr. Kennedy’s case so strong that he can afford to indulge in unworthy aspersions? The acceptance of additional evidence would, of course, depend upon what that evidence is, and until it is produced we cannot say what its effect would be. Our concern is with the evidence that actually exists, and such remarks as Dr. Kennedy’s do not add much to its weight. It must need an undue bias to regard the evidence for the resurrection as conclusive. If it were so, the most competent Christian scholars of to-day would not be giving up their belief in it. We recall the Gospel incident of Thomas, whose incredulity is said to have been removed by a physical manifestation of Jesus, while the modern unbeliever is called “hypocritical” because he demands no greater evidence for the supernatural than Thomas had, but a little more than Dr. Kennedy is willing to accept.

Dealing with the objection that no one actually witnessed the resurrection, Dr. Kennedy asserts that we have the “positive evidence” of Peter, James, and John that they saw, heard, and conversed with Jesus

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 140.

after his death and burial. "It would be no sufficient answer to these witnesses to say: 'You did not see Him rise.' Their reply might be equally brief: 'No, but we saw Him risen.'"¹ Our rejoinder is also brief: This is what the Apostles *might* have said, but it is what they never *do* say. As regards Peter we have only the doubtful authority of Acts, and in his first Epistle two or three references to the resurrection, one of which describes it as a quickening "in the spirit." The second Epistle attributed to Peter is given up by Christian scholars as not the work of the Apostle himself. Now, if it was not considered improper to attribute to Peter a whole Epistle which he did not write, we cannot be sure that Luke did not attribute to him speeches which Peter did not utter. As regards John, we again cannot be sure that we possess his evidence. It is far from certain, but, on the contrary, very improbable, that the fourth Gospel was written by him. As regards James, we have not a vestige of direct evidence on the subject. How often is one to repeat that a mere assertion of a person's belief (written by someone else) which leaves out of account both the grounds of the belief and the possibility that it was purely subjective does not amount to "positive evidence"?

Dr. Kennedy says the Gospels were written "independently of each other," and quotes a remark by Godet that "no ingenious calculation" guided their compilers. The absence of collusion is fairly obvious, but how that proves that each witness speaks the truth, no less when he differs from the others than when he agrees with them, we are at a loss to comprehend. Dr. Kennedy cannot see that this very independence is fatal to his

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 130.

argument. Evidently each Evangelist knew no more than he related, and knew that only by report.

“It is only by the double charge of folly and deceit,” says Dr. Kennedy, “that the ‘visionary’ hypothesis can set aside the plain historic statements” of the Evangelists.¹ He does not seem to understand what is meant by the hypothesis in question. It is a theory which must of course embrace those visionary experiences which were common to the Apostolic age, and are so frequently related in the New Testament. The statements of the Evangelists are not “plain,” because they are not full, consistent, and intelligible. And they are not “historic,” because they are unconfirmed, and because they involve a violation of that principle of continuity on which alone history can rest.

Dr. Kennedy insists that the faith of the disciples in the resurrection “dates from the very morrow of the resurrection itself.”² How does he know that? He does not know it. He merely believes it, and that on the totally inadequate authority of documents written long afterwards, and lacking almost every condition of historic credibility.

Dr. Kennedy examines the view that “the appearances of Jesus after his death were real objective occurrences, apparitions or communications from the spirit-world, to assure the disciples that Jesus was glorified.”³ This view, which is but seldom put forward, is held by the Rev. R. C. Fillingham,⁴ who has probably derived it from Keim, and we are not concerned to defend it. Dr. Kennedy considers this idea completely refuted by the words in Luke xxiv. 39: “See my hands and my feet,

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 154.

² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴ *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1905.

that it is I myself." But he does not say how he knows that Jesus ever spoke those words.

Finally, Dr. Kennedy asks what, on any of these theories, became of the body of Jesus?¹ Well, what became of the body on *his* theory? That will always be a difficulty, whichever view we adopt. The story of the ascension does not solve it, for that miracle rests on evidence which is simply paltry, and cannot be received by any candid and competent inquirer.

¹ *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 164.

PART III.

NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS

CHAPTER I.

GNOSTICISM AND THE MESSIANIC IDEA

AN impartial scrutiny of the accounts relied on by Christian advocates to prove the bodily resurrection of Jesus discloses in those accounts features which cannot be reconciled with that view, but which tend to support the conclusion that the belief in the resurrection may have originated in Messianic notions and subjective impressions on the part of one or more of the followers of Jesus. Some of these features may here be grouped together for the sake of convenience:—

1. The rebuke to the eleven disciples mentioned in the legendary addition to Mark for not believing the report of (apparently) the arrivals from Emmaus, when, according to Luke, one of the eleven had already seen Jesus after his death. If these two Evangelists are correct, it follows that the eleven continued incredulous after they had heard that Jesus had appeared to the women, to Cleopas and his companion, and to Peter. This unbelief is entirely improbable. The passage reveals a disposition to exaggerate the alleged incredulity of the disciples, which indicates the later origin and dogmatic tendency of the accounts.

2. The similar rebuke given to the Emmaus disciples

for their blindness to the meaning of supposed Jewish prophecies. This is highly significant, because it shows that to the writer of the third Gospel absolutely irrelevant passages in the Old Testament were the best evidence of the resurrection.

3. The omission of any account of the appearance to Peter. It would seem that great importance was attached to this manifestation, for it was announced immediately to the Emmaus disciples without waiting to hear their story or mentioning the appearances to the women. Weizsäcker regards the omission of any account of an appearance to Peter "as a proof that the legendary element has quite got the better of the historical element in the Gospel narratives, and explains it by the conjecture that the actual appearance to St. Peter, on which so much depended, was not of such a nature as to satisfy the craving of the Church for a palpable, *i.e.* objective, manifestation."¹

4. The words attributed to Jesus in John xx. 29, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed," have a distinctly theological air. They are at least unlikely to have been spoken by Jesus after his death, and they would hardly have been attributed to him by tradition unless it had been thought advisable to lay stress on the importance of faith as distinguished from sight.

5. The expression in Luke xxiv. 24, "but him they saw not," points to a very confused state of the original tradition. Matthew plainly relates that the women on returning from the tomb did see Jesus in person. Luke says they did not. Of the two accounts the less improbable is to be preferred. And Luke, by terming the

¹ Mackintosh, *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 261.

appearance a "*vision of angels*," lends some support to the idea of subjective manifestations. There is no good evidence for the existence of angels, yet we find their objective reality assumed by the Gospel writers, and *spoken words freely attributed to them*. Some apologists contend that several visits were made to the sepulchre by the women, who were not all together; and this is, of course, possible. But both Matthew and Luke refer to a first visit made at early dawn, and the former states that, as the women were on their way to tell the disciples the message of the angel, they were met by Jesus. The disciples therefore *could not have heard of the appearance of the angels without also hearing of that of Jesus*. Yet Luke says the women did *not* see Jesus. We are again led to suppose that behind these vague and contradictory accounts lay psychological impressions which were long afterwards misunderstood, and clumsily put into a more concrete shape.

6. John's immediate belief on entering the tomb. It is true we are not told what it was he believed; but if, as the tendency of the book would imply, it was the rising of Jesus,¹ we perceive that it was possible for the mind of that age to believe in miracles on no real evidence whatever.

7. The story of the guard at the sepulchre is so full of improbabilities that it is now abandoned by most conservative critics. Its significance is that it is an obvious attempt to support by legendary details a narrative which was felt to be so indefinite as to require apology.

8. The formula of baptism employed in Matthew xxviii. 19, though it merely refers to, but does not define, a doctrine which, if true, is of great importance, certainly

¹ This view is held by Ewald (*History of Israel*, vol. vii., p. 69) and by other theologians.

implies a Trinitarian belief which cannot be shown to have existed till long after the death of Jesus. We are therefore warranted in holding that in this, as in several other instances, words are put into the mouth of Jesus which he never uttered.

9. The accounts by Luke of the sudden appearing and disappearing of Jesus are consistent only with the perception being of a subjective kind, and cannot be made to agree with the statements that he spoke and ate—that is, that he possessed vocal and digestive organs. The accounts, in fact, embody traditions the conflicting nature of which their compiler had not the knowledge to perceive. The explanation of a “spiritual body” does not remove the difficulty, for it merely substitutes one inconceivable hypothesis for another.

10. Matthew’s expression, “some doubted,” also confirms the view that the appearance was subjectively apprehended by some rather than that it was an objective reality, which must of necessity have been visible to all those present. In this narrative the unsubstantial character of the tradition is forced upon our notice; for if, as both Luke and John allege, the risen Jesus had previously been seen and spoken to by the eleven disciples, it is well-nigh impossible that they should have “doubted” on seeing him a second time.

These indications that the manifestations were not of an objective but of a subjective nature are afforded by the Gospels themselves, and, considering the superstition of the time, it is rather surprising that they are so numerous. A closer scrutiny would doubtless reveal others, which we have not space to examine. Added to this the inquirer finds it impossible to ignore the conditions in which the belief in the resurrection originated and the soil in which it fructified. The prevalence of

the idea that dead persons could and did return to life must have greatly aided an uncritical acceptance of the belief, while the emphatic stress laid upon supposed prophecies shows what was then regarded as evidence. That the Evangelists exerted a "creative pressure" upon their materials is apparent in almost every page of the Gospels. Dr. McGiffert remarks that the Jews looked upon prophecy as the best of all evidence, and thought no other was necessary. A glaring instance of this peculiarity is to be found in the words: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."¹ This can only mean that the testimony of "Moses and the prophets" is better evidence of a future state than the return of a dead person to life. That the Jewish scriptures contain no such testimony is no difficulty to the reckless Evangelist. A like inaccuracy appears in John v. 39, where Jesus is said to have reminded the Jews that they thought to find eternal life in their scriptures, and that these bore witness of him. Moreover, the extreme tenuity of the ascension tradition is irreconcilable with the idea that it had any objective basis. We can but conclude that the materialistic details supplied by the Gospel writers, so far from proving that Jesus returned to bodily life, are themselves the most suspicious features of the accounts. When we find the Evangelists giving but a few meagre and contradictory particulars of the alleged post-resurrection life of Jesus (which, if real, was the most important part of his career), leaving unexplained incidents of the greatest moment and interest, and finally failing to account for his ultimate disappearance, how is it possible to come to any other

¹ Luke xvi. 31.

conclusion than that the evidence for his resurrection is hopelessly insufficient? Whatever elements of truth the accounts may contain, it is certain that their form was determined by the general tendency of the first century to believe in phenomena which to us are altogether incredible, and on grounds which at the present day no educated man would for a moment entertain.

The above considerations are strengthened by a glance at the Gnostic sects which were so numerous in the first and second centuries. Under the general term "Gnostics" are grouped a surprising number of bodies whose religious conceptions were made up partly of Christian and partly of Jewish and Pagan elements; and orthodox writers admit that the New Testament contains several references to these heretical doctrines. All these sects denied a bodily resurrection. This alone is proof that at a date prior to the appearance of our present Gospels great uncertainty was felt as to the exact character and validity of the Christian tradition.

"The term 'Gnostic,'" says the Rev. J. H. Blunt, "properly signifies 'the perfect Christian,'" so that it is evident the heterodox of the first century claimed to belong to the Christian Church. "The Docetæ are usually traced to Simon Magus as their founder, and were becoming numerous at the close of the first century, when St. John's Gospel was written."¹ Although Simon Magus is treated in the New Testament as a real personage, he is probably a mythical figure; but, as it is clear that the Clementine

¹ Dr. Blunt, *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historic Theology*, art. "Docetæ." The real origin of Gnosticism is of much earlier date than the times of the Apostles. It "virtually began in the pre-Christian period, when, in Alexandria, Judaism became blended with Greek philosophy" (R. W. Mackay, *Rise and Progress of Christianity*, p. 110).

Homilies refer to the Apostle Paul under this name,¹ there is strong probability that his teaching was believed to favour the Docetic ideas. As the Clementine Homilies belong to the latter part of the second century, it seems obvious that the antagonism which existed between the Judaic and Pauline forms of Christianity was not removed until a very long time after the death of Jesus. Dr. Blunt states that Docetism was a reversal of the fundamental teaching of the Gospel; hence the emphatic condemnation in 1 John iv. 3, which applies to a sect of Docetæ then existing. "There is no doubt that the heresy as to the unreal nature of Christ's body existed in Apostolic times, and was generally held by the Gnostics."² It is probable that Paul himself, in 1 Cor. xv. 12, refers to the Docetæ. Dean Mansel states that "the earliest distinct indications of a Gnostic teaching contemporary with the Apostles are to be found in the Epistles of St. Paul."³ The same authority admits that the Gnostic heresy, "though utterly contradicting the whole tenour of Paul's teaching, might have found an imaginary support" in some of his expressions.⁴ "The Gnostic heresy was manifested in two forms—first, that of the Docetæ, who held the body of our Lord to be an immaterial phantom; and, secondly, that of the Ebionites and others, who asserted that the spiritual being Christ was a distinct person from the man Jesus."⁵ Mansel says: "As regards the Gospel of St. John, we

¹ The Ebionites also called him Simon Magus. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, v. ii., p. 371.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59. See also *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Gnosis." Mr. Gerald Massey found it possible to contend that Paul was not an Apostle of Christianity, but its Gnostic opponent. *Vide* his lecture on this subject.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

have the express testimony of Irenæus that it was written to oppose that form of the Gnostic heresy which was taught by Cerinthus, and before him by the Nicolaitans."¹ The Nicolaitans are referred to in the book of Revelation, which is believed to have appeared prior to any of the four Gospels.

"The Docetic sects held that Christ was either a mere man, to whom the Holy Spirit was given at baptism and withdrawn before his crucifixion, or a phantom. They denied the general resurrection of the body. They were little heard of after the second century; but their principles survived."² The famous heretic Marcion, who lived in the latter part of the second century, contended that the Jewish Christians had corrupted true Christianity, and he denied the resurrection of the body. Valentinus held that Jesus was only a man. The Philetians, referred to in 2 Tim. ii. 17, also denied the resurrection of the body. A great number of the early sects held that Christ was only a man, and was not born of a virgin.³ It seems impossible to account for the early prevalence of these Gnostic ideas unless we assume that they and the nascent Christianity were alike survivals of still earlier conceptions.

Christian advocates sometimes claim that the Apostolic announcements of the resurrection were not denied at the time. If the fact was so, the argument would not have the slightest weight. But the fact was not so. As an eminent critic has pointed out, "there is the very strongest evidence that, when the assertion of the resurrection and ascension as 'unquestionable facts' was made, it was contradicted in the only practical and

¹ *Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, p. 74.

² Hook, *Church Dictionary*, art. "Gnostics."

³ Foulkes, *Manual of Ecclesiastical History*, ch. i.

practicable way conceivable: (1) by all but universal disbelief in Jerusalem; (2) by actual persecution of those who asserted it. It is a perfectly undeniable fact that the great mass of the Jews totally denied the truth of the statement by disbelieving it, and that the converts to Christianity, who soon swelled the numbers of the Church and spread its influence among the nations, were not the citizens of Jerusalem, who were capable of refuting such assertions, but strangers and Gentiles.”¹ This view is confirmed by an orthodox writer, Dr. Harold Browne. “The Sadducees, who denied all resurrection, of course would deny the resurrection of Christ. The Essenes also, though they believed the immortality of the soul, yet did not believe that the body would rise.”² The Docetæ, “of necessity, disbelieved the truth of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Augustine tells us that the Cerinthians held that Jesus, whom they took to be a mere man, had not risen, but was yet to rise.”³ Dr. Browne refers to the “strange fables” of some of the earlier heretics, such as that of Hermogenes, who “believed our Lord’s body to be placed in the sun,” while others held “that the flesh of Christ was in the heavens, devoid of sense, as a scabbard or sheath, Christ being withdrawn from it.” The Manichees denied the resurrection, and the doctrine of Eutyches, “by implication, opposed the verity of His resurrection; and so Theodoret accuses him of considering that the Godhead only rose from the grave.”⁴ The Fathers held that Christ’s body was “truly human,” but “divested of all that was mortal, carnal, and corruptible, and became a spiritual body incorruptible, intangible, impassable.”⁵

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, 1-vol. ed., pp. 899-900.

² *Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 98.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The Scriptural statements merely illustrate the confused state of the resurrection tradition; yet Dr. Browne regards them as forming the "strongest proof" that the "spiritual body" of Jesus was a reality.

Many other heretical bodies existed during the first two centuries of Christianity, of which a few may be mentioned. The Apellæans held that Christ ascended to heaven without a body. The Archontics denied the resurrection of the body. The Bardesanists believed the incarnation and death of Jesus to have been only apparent. They denied the resurrection of the body. The Lucianists denied the immortality of the soul. The Marcionites denied the real birth, incarnation, and passion of Jesus. The Marcosians also denied the reality of Christ's sufferings and the resurrection of the body. The Ophites identified Christ with the serpent that tempted Eve. The Sethites were less uncomplimentary to Jesus, for they regarded him as having had a prior existence as Seth, the son of Adam.¹

As Christian writers have made it clear that the Gnostic sects were in existence before the Gospels appeared, and that John wrote with a definite polemical

¹ *A New Theological Dictionary*. Edinburgh, 1805. Most of the uncanonical writings of the first and second centuries were of decidedly heretical tendency. We need only mention—

The Gospel according to the Hebrews ...	Ebionite
The Gospel of the Ebionites	"
The Gospel according to the Egyptians ...	Docetic
The Gospel according to Peter	"
The Gospel of Matthias	"
The Descent of Mary	Gnostic
The Gospel of Philip	"
The Pistis Sophia	"

(*Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Apocrypha.")

The four Gospels are admittedly far superior to these works, but it would be desperately uncritical to suppose that they bear no traces of the ideas common to the times in which they were produced.

purpose, the reader will perceive that we are not without warrant for maintaining that the details regarding the physical appearances of Jesus after his death—that he walked, spoke, and ate food—have been inserted in order to refute the contention that the appearances were those of a phantom. Whatever reason and fact may lie behind these heresies, it is self-evident that their existence in Apostolic times proves that among the Christians themselves an extraordinary degree of doubt as to the facts of the life, death, and personality of Jesus prevailed in the very epoch when, as a recent writer uncritically asserts, “the facts were fresh in men’s memories.”¹ It is abundantly clear that, as regards the resurrection, the Church was, in the days of the Apostles, “a house divided against itself,” and it was inevitable that in those times the party which presented the more dogmatic and material view of the event should ultimately prevail.

There is, as we think has been shown, a presumption fairly clear and fairly strong that the belief in the resurrection began in subjective impressions. It is admitted that this view, owing to our ignorance of the facts, involves certain difficulties, and cannot be decisively proved. But it is obviously more reasonable to suppose that the belief originated by a natural process than to assume a break in the natural order for which nothing approaching to proof can be brought forward. The inquirer must make his choice between these two explanations.

We find Christian writers in the present day preferring the view that the resurrection was a spiritual process rather than a physical fact. We cannot, therefore, be

¹ *The Resurrection of Christ*, by Gideon W. B. Marsh, p. 46.

sure that the spiritually-minded among the first Christians did not, in spite of the prevalence of superstition, hold the belief in this form, while matter-of-fact believers found a materialistic view more congenial to their unscientific intelligence. The Rev. W. R. Inge says: "The real basis of our belief in the resurrection of Christ is a great psychological fact—a spiritual experience. We know that Christ is risen because, as St. Paul says, we are risen with him."¹ Again: "Whenever the carnal mind is set to judge of spiritual things this degradation of the symbol into a bare fact is bound to occur."² He admits the inadequacy of the evidence for the miracle: "It is barely honest to assert that the discourses of Christ, or his miracles, or his Resurrection on the third day after his crucifixion, are absolutely certain. The evidence may be as good as possible; it is not possible for it to be good enough to justify such a statement as this."³ Even Dr. Westcott renders testimony to the strength of the subjective element: "The Apostolic conception of the Resurrection is rather 'the Lord lives' than 'the Lord was raised.'"⁴

When he is driven into a corner the apologist is compelled to admit (very unwillingly) that his evidence for the resurrection is bad. But he turns round, and says: "What other explanation have you to offer? Unless you can prove that the miracle did not happen you are bound to assume that it did, for you cannot otherwise account for the Christian Church." The demand for strict proof of a negative is not consistent with untenable positive claims. It has been shown, however, that a natural explanation does exist, and, if not conclusive, it has at least the advantage of not postulating any

¹ *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 87.

² *Ibid*, p. 87.

³ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁴ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 294.

interruption of the normal processes of thought, and of being in accord with the phenomena of history and experience.

If the visions which the New Testament shows to have been so common in the first century were really experienced, but never accurately defined, and were afterwards sometimes misapprehended, the strange gaps in the Gospel evidence are accounted for. The evidence is precisely of the character that justifies this inference. The ideas which we have assumed as animating the minds of the disciples must have presented themselves as profoundly and divinely true, and it was by the force of this newly-apprehended truth that they preached Jesus risen from the dead. If due regard be paid to the mental conditions of the Apostolic age, we do not think that an explanation on some such lines as those indicated can be deemed inadequate. If it is so, the inadequacy is owing to the imperfect manner in which the facts have been transmitted. When the conceptions of the first believers came to be written down, probably by those who had not experienced their original force, the desire to know more would lead to additions being made, so as to make the tradition more readily comprehended by those homely and uncultured persons who formed the majority of the early Church. It could scarcely have been otherwise. Why should men be careful of the past when they awaited an immediate and glorious return of the Son of Man? And spiritual conceptions, in their union of poetical and ecstatic aspirations, are very hard to explain clearly, especially to minds whose sympathy with them is limited. It is so in the cultivated societies of the present day. It must have been more difficult in an age which was on one side hopelessly prosaic, and on another wildly imaginative. Jesus had not often defined

his sayings so that they could not well be misunderstood. His disciples were still less likely to discern limits between the action of God and the working of natural laws which to them were totally unknown.

Mr. Mackintosh remarks: "We can hardly resist the feeling that the idea of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is more like a suggestion of human fantasy to account for that great revolution in the spiritual life than like a divine expedient to produce it."¹ Christian apologists argue that only the return of Jesus to bodily life could have produced the great change in the Apostles. This means that a psychical change is good evidence for a physical miracle. Is not this to go back deliberately to the mental confusion of the Apostolic period? And is it not evident that in that age many people were impressed as effectually by a supposed miracle as they would have been by a real one?

It may indeed be surmised that the very fact of Jesus having been executed as a malefactor would facilitate the belief that he had risen. So unjust a fate needed reversal, needed to be turned into a triumph. And this could only be done by holding that at death he had entered upon the higher life of the heavenly Messiah. The mythopœic instinct would supply the details. But how, it will be asked, could this idea have caused the disciples to think that they had seen and touched him? We have no sufficient evidence that they did think so. Their statements are not before us. We have only statements attributed by others to the disciples after they were dead. It may not be possible to prove that the details in question are a product of a later tradition; it is certainly impossible to prove that they are not. The

¹ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 259.

spiritual idea underwent a transition from the purely spiritual to a materialistic form, which, in the particular conditions of the age, was inevitable. It does not follow that the process was consciously perceived by the Apostles; but "the situation was favourable to an interpretation of their experience which the disciples were otherwise, as can easily be shown, disposed to put upon it."¹ Their inspiration, in fact, "was but the outcome of past impressions now re-asserting themselves."² When this latent faith sprang into life it produced an effect as great as the physical resurrection of Jesus would have done. In such a state of mind the disciples might readily suppose that Jesus had, unknown to them, been present with them in a semi-spiritual form, and the supposition would, it cannot be doubted, be embodied in some such vague and inconclusive traditions as those of the Gospel records. The mythical details of the resurrection reflect in the sensuous or outward form common to that epoch the mental experiences presented to the consciousness of the disciples.³ It is more than probable that experiences of this nature, left entirely undefined, would receive in time such details as would tend to represent an established historical fact in the Christian tradition.⁴ In the same way the story of the virgin birth of Jesus is a result of the belief that the heaven-sent Messiah must have been conceived in a way different from the ordinary physical process—an idea found in many non-Christian religions. The whole cycle of "mighty works" attributed to Jesus gathered round his name before the Gospels were compiled, as a result of the same idealising sentiment—perhaps by way of compensation for his admitted failure as a temporal

¹ *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 286.

² *Ibid.*, p. 287.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

Messiah. As Strauss contended, the Gospel miracles are "concrete representations of the Messianic idea."¹

As we have remarked, the apologist will contend that this reasoning is inconsistent with parts of the Gospel narratives. It is true that it is inconsistent with the statements that Jesus spoke and ate after his death. But the explanation is not to be dismissed on that account, unless those particular statements can be proved to be literally true. Such a conclusion the evidence does not justify. They belong to the form in which an unscientific age expressed a psychological process. The faith in the resurrection of Jesus had precisely the effect which the event itself would have had. It was this faith which became to the disciples "a fact of their consciousness as real as any historical event whatever, and supplied a basis for the historical development" of the Church.² The New Testament assertions (that of Paul, for example) that certain persons had "seen Jesus" are, as we know, made without that definition of the sense which is to us a necessity in order to prove an external fact. The meaning may well be that it was by the spiritual eye; it would be understood to mean with the physical eye. A figurative expression would become transformed into a relation of literal fact. Even in an age of science language is loosely employed: we say that we see the point of a joke, without meaning to imply either that a joke has a point or that our perception is anything but mental. The Gospel writers neither define nor reconcile the terms of their narratives. How, then, can we suppose them to be sufficiently full and accurate to establish a variation of natural law?

¹ A. W. Benn, *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, vol i., p. 382.

² *Natural History of Christian Religion*, p. 292.

The apologist rejects a rational explanation of the belief in the resurrection on the strength of a few expressions by unknown writers, the historic truth of which is at best extremely doubtful. Thus so moderate a writer as the Rev. T. Vincent Tymms remarks: "Before the visionary theory can be reasonably accepted, some advocate must instruct us how *such visions as are related in the New Testament* can conceivably have happened to such men as the disciples, and how the various moral, mental, and *physical* conditions which beset the hypothesis can be disposed of."¹ Here it is implied that modern knowledge "must" be accommodated to obsolete conceptions. Again: "It is idle to suppose that genius will ever be able to reconcile Paul's words and conduct with a 'subjective' theory of his own vision of Christ."² We reply that it is "idle" to ask even genius to "make bricks without straw," to frame a perfect explanation from insufficient and conflicting data. Yet, in spite of this, we think the explanations of modern Christian scholarship are satisfactory enough to enable us to dispense with a miracle. Paul's *genuine* words do not need to be "reconciled" with the subjective theory, because they imply it. By assuming that any theory must be unsatisfactory which does not fit in with every detail of the Gospel records, Mr. Tymms uses those records as a fixed standard of historical truth, when the point at issue is precisely the legitimacy of that view.

Reverting to the Messianic conceptions which dominated the first Christians, we extract the following from the work of a great critic. The death of Jesus, says Ferdinand Christian Baur, "made a complete and

¹ *The Mystery of God*, pp. 293-94. (Italics ours.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

irreparable breach between him and Judaism. A death like his made it impossible for the Jew, as long as he remained a Jew, to believe in him as his Messiah. To believe in him as the Messiah after his dying such a death involved the removal from the conception of the Messiah of all the Jewish and carnal elements which were associated with it. A Messiah who died, and by his death put an end to all that the Jew expected his Messiah to accomplish—a Messiah who had died to the life in the flesh—was no longer a ‘Christ after the flesh’ (2 Cor. v. 16) such as the Messiah of the Jewish national faith was. Even to the most faithful adherent of the cause of Jesus, what could a Messiah be who had fallen a prey to death? Only two alternatives were possible—either with his death the faith which had gathered round him must be extinguished, or this faith, if it were firm and strong enough, must break through the barrier of death itself, and force its way from death to life. Nothing but the miracle of the Resurrection could disperse these doubts, which threatened to drive away the faith of the disciples after its object into the eternal night of death.”¹

This passage is not to be taken as an admission of the reality of the miracle; it is an explanation of the process by which it became a dogmatic necessity. The conception of a spiritual Messiahship led the way to the conception that the Messiah had triumphed over death, had returned in spiritual power and glory, and had in the spirit ascended to his father. And this conception in turn was afterwards understood in terms of the bodily life to which it was inapplicable.

Baur guards against the assumption that the physical

¹ F. C. Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, vol. i., p. 42.

miracle is the paramount concern. "History must be content with the simple fact that in the faith of the disciples the Resurrection of Jesus came to be regarded as a solid and unquestionable fact.....By whatever means this result was brought about, the Resurrection of Jesus became a fact of their consciousness, and was as real to them as any historical event."¹

Moreover, it seems clear that even when the disciples had formed the belief in the resurrection of Jesus they by no means abandoned the prepossession that his return would involve a great manifestation of divine power on behalf of their nation. That event, though postponed, was still hoped for. Dr. McGiffert remarks that the Apostles seem to have believed that the death of Jesus "would be but his translation into the heavenly sphere, in order that he might at once appear in glory as the conquering Messiah.....For a death unaccompanied by any such manifestation they were certainly not prepared.....The Apostles, and almost the entire early Church after them, continued to believe that an earthly kingdom was yet to be founded by Christ. But if the time for its establishment was postponed by Jesus' departure from the earth, it was evident that the work of preparation must still go on, and thus there was thrust upon the disciples a new and unexpected duty. Upon them rested the responsibility of carrying on until the consummation the work which Jesus had begun."² This explanation appears to account for that Apostolic zeal which is sometimes said to be inexplicable apart from a bodily resurrection, and also for various allusions in the New Testament to the materialistic ideas which remained

¹ *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, pp. 42-43.

² Professor A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, pp. 36-41.

in the early Church.¹ The belief in the return of Jesus took different forms in different minds. The Gospels show a vague remembrance of the immateriality of the apparitions struggling with an ardent desire for their tangible reality.²

The following passage from a cautious British theologian is adduced as further evidence: "There can be no doubt," says Professor A. B. Bruce, "that along with sympathy for the fate of a beloved Master went a theoretic or dogmatic interest, at least in a rudimentary form. There was a desire to harmonise the passion with faith in the Messiahship of Jesus. This was obviously a vital matter for the disciples. They could not continue to believe in Jesus as the Christ unless they could satisfy themselves that he might be the Christ, the Cross notwithstanding; nor could their faith be triumphant unless they could further satisfy themselves that he was all the more certainly the Christ just because he was crucified. The words of the Master concerning suffering as the appointed lot of all faithful souls might help to attain this insight. With this doctrine as a key, they would see new meanings in Old Testament texts, and gradually learn from histories, psalms, and prophecies that the path appointed for the godly, and therefore above all for the Messiah, was the path of sacrifice."³

That the particular conditions of the earlier part of the first century favoured the growth of the Messianic idea is shown by Professor Graetz, who remarks: "The ever-recurring evils brought on the Jewish people by the rapacity of their Roman rulers, the shamelessness of the

¹ Even after the re-appearance of Jesus we find his disciples asking if he was about to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts i. 6).

² A. Réville, *Jésus de Nazareth*, vol. ii., p. 470.

³ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Jesus," sec. 30.

Herodian princes, the cowardice and servility of the Judæan aristocracy, the unworthiness of the high priests and their families, and the dissensions between rival parties, had aroused the longing for the deliverer announced in the prophetic writings—the Messiah—to so great a pitch that any highly-gifted individual, possessed of outward charm and imbued with moral and religious grace, would readily have found disciples and believers in his Messianic mission.”¹ We in the present day cannot appreciate the intensity of this hope, or the extent to which the beliefs then current influenced the beginnings of Christianity. “The Messiah and the Messianic time were pictured in the most idealistic manner by the Essenes, the great object of whose asceticism was to advance the kingdom of heaven and the coming time. Their adherence would be granted alone to him who led a pure and spotless life, who renounced the world and its vanities, and gave proofs that the Holy Spirit dwelt within him. He must also have power over demons, reject mammon, and inaugurate a system of community of goods, in which poverty and self-renunciation would be the ornaments of mankind. It was from the Essenes that for the first time the cry went forth: ‘The Messiah is coming! The kingdom of heaven is near!’”²

It must be pointed out that, while the term “Messiah” personified the highest expression of Jewish life, its

¹ *History of the Jews*, vol. ii., p. 142. In times of national trouble exaggerated hopes of deliverance usually arise. In 1870, during the war between Germany and France, numberless predictions of this character appeared in the latter country, and were collected into twenty volumes. One prophecy had a sale of 50,000 copies (Professor James Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, p. 183).

² *Ibid.*, p. 145. The Jews assert that whole chapters from the apocalyptic writings of the Essenes were put into the mouth of Jesus (*Jewish Encyclopædia*, art. “Jesus”).

meaning is extremely vague and fluctuating. Nor is it clear that Jesus ever claimed to be the Messiah, though there is no doubt he was so regarded by his followers, particularly after his death. The term "Son of Man," by which Jesus usually spoke of himself, does not imply his Messiahship; and even the expression "Son of God," which he is represented as accepting rather than using, does not appear to have conveyed any clear Messianic significance. The Rev. V. H. Stanton states that the term "Son of Man" is not equivalent to the term "Messiah," and could not have been used by Jesus in that sense.¹ The phrase "Son of God," says Dr. James Martineau, "received its Messianic significance from the Christians themselves; neither in the true text of the anterior Apocalyptic literature nor in the Hebrew scriptures does it ever appear in that sense."² "The name 'Son of God' became appropriate to Jesus in virtue, not of the Messianic office, but of the heavenly nature discovered in his person, and was therefore first freely given to him by his disciples after his passage to immortal life. This is strongly marked by the Apostle Paul's distinction that he was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the *resurrection of the dead*."³

"In speaking of himself Jesus habitually employs the expression 'Son of Man,' and on its meaning, when thus appropriated, depends the question as to the range and character of his self-conscious mission. That for the Evangelists themselves it had settled into its Messianic sense, and that they attributed the same to him, is not disputed. The point to be determined is whether this

¹ *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Messiah."

² *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 333.

³ *Ibid*, p. 334.

is historically true, or is a Christian afterthought thrown back upon the personal ministry of Jesus. The previous history of this phrase certainly gave it sufficient elasticity to leave room for reasonable doubt. The use of it as the name of a personal Messiah was supposed to be sanctioned by the pseudo-prophecies of Daniel, but was drawn thence only by a misinterpretation of the author's symbols."¹

"If, then, Jesus occasionally spoke of himself as the 'Son of Man,' it by no means implied any Messianic claim. It might, on the contrary, be intended to emphasise the very features of his life and love which are least congenial with the national ideal. That in the days of his Galilean ministry it had not passed into a Messianic title is proved by the startling effect of Peter's recognition of him as 'the Christ.'.....If the term 'Son of Man' was only a synonym for 'the Christ,' and Jesus had been habitually applying it to himself throughout the previous year or years, there is no room for his question addressed to the disciples, and their answer was a mere tautology; and if he actually framed the question in Matthew's words, 'I the Son of Man,' he dictated the very answer which, when uttered, produced so intense a sensation, and was ordered to be suppressed and told to no man."²

Dr. Martineau's conclusion is that "the identification of Jesus with the Messianic figure is the first act of Christian mythology withdrawing him from his own religion to a religion about him."³

A writer in the *Jewish Encyclopædia* states that it was not until after the fall of the Maccabæan dynasty, when the state of the Jews was becoming ever more deplorable,

¹ *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 336.

² *Ibid*, p. 339.

³ *Ibid*, p. 355

that they sought refuge in the hope of a personal Messiah.¹ They looked for a temporal redeemer of the type referred to by Josephus, who testifies that the belief in the immediate appearance of the Messianic king gave the chief impulse to the war that ended in the destruction of the Jewish state; after the fall of the Temple the last Apocalypse (4 Ezra) still loudly proclaimed the near victory of the God-sent king; and Bar Kocheba, the leader of the revolt against Hadrian, was actually greeted as the Messiah by Rabbi Akiba.²

The most important point, however, in connection with the present argument is that the conception of a spiritual Messiah was gradually coming into existence before the time of Jesus. The Rev. V. H. Stanton writes: "There were differences in the spirit in which the Messiah and his times were thought of and desired. The mass of men thought chiefly of victory over their enemies, and the bringing in of great material prosperity, while the truly pious dwelt on the remission of sins."³ This fact is shown by the *Testaments of the Patriarchs* (written in the second and first centuries B.C.), and also in the book of Enoch, which exhibits the idea of a pre-existent heavenly Messiah.⁴ If Jesus believed himself to be this divine messenger, can we be certain that he, and his disciples after his death, did not draw their inspiration from current Jewish literature? That the belief in a resurrection from the dead formed part of the Messianic hope generally held by the Jews is declared in the *Jewish Encyclopædia*.⁵ It seems manifest that, as

¹ *Jewish Encyclopædia*, art. "Messiah."

² *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Messiah."

³ *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Messiah."

⁴ *Jewish Encyclopædia*, art. "Messiah."

⁵ Art. "Resurrection."

the Messianic idea had, long before the Gospels were written, undergone this transformation from the material to the spiritual (though naturally in some minds only), the idea of resurrection which was part of it must have passed through a corresponding change. We thus find prevalent in the time of Jesus the conception that rising from the dead meant passing from physical to spiritual life, as well as the conception that it meant an actual return to bodily conditions. In this spiritual sense Jesus may have interpreted the conception, and a tardy apprehension of his meaning may, after his death, have come to his followers.

One other point in relation to the Messianic belief remains to be noticed. The prophecies of the Old Testament are, it is well known, concerned mainly with the restoration or resurrection of Israel as a people. But before the time of Jesus a sentiment of individuality was evolved, which modified this idea by regarding the Messiah as a distinct personality, as well as a national ideal. The growing claims of the individual "made it impossible for any conception of the divine rule and righteousness which did not render adequate satisfaction to the claims of the righteous individual to gain acceptance. Thus, in order to justify the righteousness of God [a problem which became more pressing as the nation's troubles grew more serious], there was postulated not only the resurrection of the righteous nation, but also the resurrection of the righteous individual."¹ Can we be sure that men like the followers of Jesus, men who were deeply penetrated with the national hope of a Messiah, would not have concentrated these ideas on him who embodied their highest conception of the ideal

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Apocalyptic Literature," sec. 2.

individual? If we may judge by the book of Acts, we can hardly doubt that they actually did so, and that the idealising process combined with and strengthened the belief that their Master could not be "holden of death." To the enthusiasm of the disciples, rendered more vivid and elastic by their return to the hills of Galilee, "it would be a thing incredible that Messiah should be 'cut off from the land of the living'; it was only that 'heaven should receive him until the time for the restoration of all things.'"¹

Dr. Martineau fully recognises that around the figure of Jesus there grew up a Christian mythology. "Within the limits of the New Testament we can follow it for nearly a century and a half; and we find there the vestiges of three successive theories respecting the person of Jesus. He is construed into (1) the Jewish ideal or Messiah; (2) the human ideal, or second and spiritual Adam; (3) a divine incarnation, whose celestial glory gleamed through the disguise of his earthly ministry. The personal attendants on Jesus worked out the first; the Apostle of the Gentiles the second; the school whence the Fourth Gospel proceeded the third."²

It has now been rendered extremely probable that the Messianic conceptions of the New Testament were not derived from an immediate manifestation of a divine personality with which the disciples of Jesus had been brought into contact, but were to a large extent the product of ideas and hopes then current among the race which gave birth to the religion afterwards known as Christian. And it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that these pre-formed, vague, and spiritual conceptions helped to idealise the person of Jesus, and to mould the tradition that he rose from the dead.

¹ Martineau, *Seat of Authority*, p. 363.

² *Ibid*, p. 361.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOOK OF ENOCH AND THE UNCANONICAL GOSPELS

VERY few Christians are aware of the extent to which the doctrines of their faith have been borrowed from previously existing sources. One of the most important of these sources survives in the book of Enoch, the various sections of which were written by five different authors during a period of about a hundred years, extending from the time of the Maccabees to about seventy years before the Christian era. The influence of this book is, as will presently be shown, clearly traceable in many parts of the New Testament.

The book of Enoch was discovered in 1773 by James Bruce, the traveller, and was translated into English by Archbishop Lawrence in 1821. There are two versions in existence, which form practically separate works—an Ethiopic version, of which a revised translation was published in 1892, while the book of the Secrets of Enoch, comprising only a few chapters of the longer work, was translated into English from a Slavonic manuscript and issued four years later. These books have been edited by the Rev. R. H. Charles, who, with rare candour, writes thus: "The book of Enoch was well known to the writers of the New Testament, and, to some extent, influenced alike their thought and diction. Thus it is quoted as a genuine work of Enoch by Jude. Phrases, and at times entire clauses, belonging to it are reproduced in the New Testament, but without acknowledgment

of their source.”¹ The literary etiquette of the present day cannot, of course, be applied to the writers of the first century; but this significant admission deserves the attention of Christian advocates.

Professor Charles also states that “the doctrines in Enoch that had a share in moulding the corresponding New Testament doctrines, or formed a necessary link in the development of doctrine from Old Testament to New Testament, are those concerning the Messianic kingdom and the Messiah, Sheol and the Resurrection, and demonology.”²

The Apostle Paul appears to have quoted freely from the book of Enoch, and must therefore have been familiar with it. May we not conjecture that it was one of the factors in his conversion, and that he made a further study of it during his three years’ retirement? He certainly seems to have formed a conception of Jesus very unlike that of the Synoptic Gospels, and strangely similar to the heavenly man of the book of Enoch. This explanation is favoured by Hausrath, who considers it “beyond doubt that in Paul’s view the heavenly man has a similar position among the spirits of heaven as Enoch’s Son of Man.”³ Vague ideas of this nature were floating about during the first century, Philo also having formed the conception of a heavenly man who was pure spirit.⁴ Nor was Paul likely to hesitate about accepting and propagating them in the sincere belief that they were the product of a direct revelation. He may well have been the first to discover points of contact between the conceptions of the pseudo-prophets Daniel and

¹ Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. “Enoch.”

² *Ibid.*

³ *History of New Testament Times*, vol. iii., p. 102.

⁴ There are numerous resemblances between the ideas of Paul and Philo.

Enoch and the tradition that a divine messenger had appeared in the person of Jesus. If his former conviction that Jesus was a false prophet had by his experience of the disciples' faith once begun to be shaken, a painful mental disturbance was inevitable. And it is not surprising that this should issue in a powerful impression that the crucified teacher fulfilled the anticipations of the seer, which would in their turn ratify the claim that Jesus was the Christ. Some such view seems to account for many distinctive features in Paul's theology. One of these is very noticeable. The Apostle made it one of his leading principles that in Christ the Jewish law had been abolished. Jesus taught that every "jot and tittle" of the Jewish law must be fulfilled. Is it likely, then, that he revealed to Paul a conception opposed to that which he himself had announced?

In Enoch four titles are applied to the Messiah—the Anointed One or Christ, the Righteous One, the Elect One, and the Son of Man. These are all reproduced in the New Testament. In the Jewish belief the office of judge in the universal judgment of man was not ascribed to the Messiah, but always to God alone. It is Enoch which first represents the Messiah as the judge of mankind; and in Matthew xix. 28 and John v. 22–27 this novel view is faithfully followed, the former passage being attributed to Jesus himself.¹

In the older parts of the book of Enoch "we have the earliest appearance of the Messiah in non-canonical literature."² These parts were written before 161 B.C., in the time of the Maccabees, and there can be little doubt that the Messiah was then thought to have appeared in the person of the great patriot Judas

¹ Hastings' *Dictionary*, art. "Enoch."

² *Ibid.*

Maccabæus; but after his death the despairing nation began to turn its thoughts towards a spiritual deliverer. "There was no need," says Professor Charles, "of such a personality as the Messiah while Judas Maccabæus was living, but it was very different fifty years or more later."¹

The title "Christ" is found repeatedly in writings of earlier date than Enoch, but always in reference to actual contemporary kings or priests. Professor Sanday observes: "The title 'Messiah,' 'Christ,' 'Anointed,' is simply that of the current Jewish expectation."² And we note the admission, "Only once does our Lord use this term of himself (John xvii. 3), and that in a passage where we cannot be sure that the wording is not that of the Evangelist."³ In Enoch the term "Christ" is applied to the Messianic king that is to come, and is associated with supernatural attributes.⁴

The title "Son of Man" also appears "for the first time in Jewish literature in Enoch, and is the source of the New Testament designation. To the latter it contributes some of its most characteristic contents, particularly those relating to judgment and universal authority. Thus statements in Enoch respecting the Son of Man are quoted by the Evangelists respecting the New Testament Son of Man." "The Father.....hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John v. 22) is equivalent to Enoch lxix. 27—"The sum of judgment was committed unto him the Son of Man." "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. v. 9) differs but slightly from the "Blessed is he who establishes peace" of Enoch. "Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth"

¹ Charles, *Book of Enoch*, p. 31.

² Hastings' *Dictionary*, art. "Jesus Christ."

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

(Matt. v. 5) reminds us of: "For the elect there will be light and joy and peace, and they will inherit the earth" (Enoch v. 7). The well-known passage in John xiv. 2, "In my Father's house are many mansions," may be compared with chap. lxi. 2 of the Slavonic Enoch: "For in the world to come there are many mansions prepared for men." A verse in the second chapter of the same book, "Do not worship vain gods who did not make heaven and earth," may have suggested the words in Acts xiv. 15, "turn from these vain things unto the living God, who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." The conception of the future life in the words attributed to Jesus in Matt. xxii. 23-33 "tallies almost exactly in thought, and partially in word, with that described in Enoch xci.-civ., which speaks of a resurrection of the spirit, when the righteous are to rejoice as the angels of heaven." And the words of Jesus in Matt. xix. 28, referring to "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory," cannot well be anything but an adaptation of Enoch lxii. 5: "When they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory." In fact, the doctrine of the resurrection "was made a commonplace of Jewish theology by the book of Enoch."¹ We are the less surprised at the contradictory notions of the New Testament when their composite sources have been discovered. In some parts Enoch teaches the resurrection of the body, in other parts there is a resurrection of the spirit only, as in chaps. xci.-civ. It teaches also that all Israelites will be raised, that only the righteous Israelites will be raised, and that there will be a general resurrection of all mankind. It teaches that the Messiah

¹ Charles, *Book of Enoch*, p. 52.

is only a man, though superior to the rest of men; it also teaches that he is a supernatural being, armed with power to destroy the wicked and vindicate the righteous. Some parts contain no reference to a Messiah, while in others the Messiah "plays a more important rôle than had ever yet been assigned to him." All these ideas find a more or less faithful reflection in the New Testament. Professor Charles states that "the influence of Enoch on the New Testament has been greater than that of all the apocryphal and pseud-apocryphal books taken together."¹ He enumerates more than a hundred passages from the New Testament which, "either in phraseology or idea, directly depend on, or are illustrative of, passages in Enoch." Paul and the author of the book of Revelation, in particular, were well acquainted with Enoch, and used its ideas and phraseology with considerable freedom. And the book of Enoch is but "a fragmentary survival of an entire literature that once circulated in his name."² How much more of this literature was borrowed by the Christian writers we shall never know.

According to this remarkable work, Enoch is translated to heaven without undergoing physical death—a conception which probably formed an element in the Gospel accounts of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The disciples could not bring themselves to think that their Messiah was less worthy of such an honour than the Old Testament saint. He must have overcome death, and gone up to heaven; therefore his resurrection and ascension were facts. At the translation of Enoch the Lord sends darkness on the earth, and the angels come and take Enoch up to the highest heaven, where

¹ Charles, *Book of Enoch*, p. 41.

² *Ibid*, p. 24.

the Lord receives him, and the darkness departs, and there is light, and the people who had seen such things departed to their houses.¹ Can we be sure that some of the Gospel details are not derived from such conceptions as these—conceptions which formed part of the religious consciousness of the age?

The term "Son of Man" as used by Jesus embodied the natural sense of Daniel and the supernatural sense of Enoch; but it assumed a deeper spiritual significance from combination with it of the Isaiah conception of the Servant of Jehovah.² And this change was brought about by political conditions. The book of Enoch was written during a period of terrible national calamities, which compelled the idea of a temporal deliverer to merge itself in the idea of a spiritual Messiah. "Subject to ruthless oppression, the righteous were in sore need of help. As their princes were the leaders in this oppression, the pious were forced to look for aid to God."³ "A great gulf divides the eschatology of the last century B.C. as a whole from that of its predecessor. The hope of an eternal Messianic kingdom on the present earth is all but universally abandoned. The earth as it is is manifestly regarded as wholly unfit for the manifestation of the kingdom. The dualism which had begun to assert itself in the preceding century is therefore now the preponderating dogma. This new attitude compels writers to advance to new conceptions concerning the kingdom."⁴ All these ideas are embodied in the book of Enoch. "The bold and original thinker to whom we owe the Similitudes (chaps. xxxvii. to lxx.) conceived the Messiah as the supernatural Son of Man, who should

¹ Charles, *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, p. 83.

² Charles, *Book of Enoch*, p. 315.

³ Charles, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Eschatology."

⁴ *Ibid.*

enjoy universal dominion, and execute judgment on men and angels.”¹ “Other religious thinkers, returning afresh to the study of the earlier literature, revived, as in the Psalms of Solomon (b.c. 70–40), the expectation of the prophetic Messiah sprung from the house and lineage of David.”² “These very divergent conceptions took such a firm hold of the national consciousness that henceforth the Messiah becomes generally, but not universally, the chief figure in the Messianic kingdom.”³ It seems evident that these divergent ideas are attempted to be combined in the New Testament writings. In conformity with the prevailing practice, the Christian compilers freely appropriated whatever elements in the national thought were best suited to their aims, and concentrated them upon the person of their lost leader. The ideas and aspirations embodied in the current literature were adapted and combined in a new form, which possessed the great practical advantage of having behind it a concrete personality, whose nature retained its human elements while satisfying the ideal of the pious. Thus, in the words of Professor Charles, Christianity furnished “a synthesis of the eschatologies of the race and of the individual,”⁴ a statement which does not imply any striking originality. We are beginning to see that all the materials for the Christian form of the resurrection idea were already in existence before the first Easter dawn.

In view of the popular belief, it was inevitable that this idea should take the form of the bodily resuscitation of Jesus. But it seems equally clear that the more spiritually-minded, and particularly those familiar with the book of Enoch, would be predisposed to favour that

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Eschatology.”

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

conception of a resurrection of the spirit only which was, as many scholars maintain, the original form of the belief. A passage in Enoch clearly expresses this idea: "And your spirits—the spirits) of you who died in righteousness—will live and rejoice and be glad, and their spirits will not perish."¹ Intimations of this idea are discovered by Professor Charles in the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, and it is expressly asserted by Philo, who held that, "as matter is incurably evil, there can be no resurrection of the body. Our present life in the body is death, for the body is the sepulchre of the soul."² There is, we believe, no doubt that Philo's writings, in which the influence of Greek thought was prominent, had a marked influence on Christian theology, especially in regard to the fourth Gospel; and he also did not remain unaffected by the national aspirations which he did not fully share. "The inclusion of the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom, though really foreign to his system, in Philo's eschatology is strong evidence as to the prevalence of these expectations even in Hellenistic Judaism."³ Such expectations must have exerted a far more powerful influence in Judea itself at a time when their causes were in full activity.

In several passages the book of Enoch appears to teach the doctrine of a bodily resurrection: "And in those days will the earth give back those who are treasured up within it, and Sheol also will give back that which it has received, and Hell will give back that which it owes" (li. 1).⁴ "And the righteous one will arise from sleep, will arise and walk in the path of righteousness, and all his path and conversation will be in eternal

¹ Enoch ciii. 4.

² Charles, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Eschatology."

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Cp. Revelation xx. 13.

goodness and grace" (xcii. 3). The second book of Maccabees "puts forward a very definite resurrection of the body."¹ The influence of such materialistic notions is traceable in many parts of the Gospels, as in Matthew's expression, "many bodies of the saints which slept arose," and above all in the forms which the belief in the reappearance of Jesus himself assumed. The persistence of the belief is in no wise remarkable, for it seems impossible to conceive of the soul except in terms which imply material attributes. The early Israelites were unable to form an idea of the soul "without a certain corporeity.....The departed were conceived not only as possessing a soul, but also a shadowy body."² In Revelation xx. 4 the same idea is expressed: "I saw the *souls* of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God." Generally among barbarous tribes the soul is thought of as in some sense material.

The more spiritual view is, however, distinctly expressed in the early uncanonical literature. In the book of Jubilees, written in the first century B.C., we read: "The bones of the righteous shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy." In the Assumption of Moses (B.C. 4—A.D. 30) "the idealisation of Moses leaves no room for a Messiah. The nation of Israel is to be exalted to heaven, whence it shall see the destruction of its enemies in Gehenna. Finally, there seems to be no resurrection of the body, only of the spirit."³ The Wisdom of Solomon (first century B.C.) depicts a theocratic kingdom without a Messiah. The

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Eschatology."

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* There is a reference in this book to a curious tradition that when the body of Moses was buried its spiritual counterpart was seen rising to heaven.

body does not rise again ; it is a mere burden, taken up for a time by the pre-existent soul. It is the soul that is immortal. The fourth book of Maccabees (circ. B.C. 100–A.D. 100) teaches the eternal existence and punishment or reward of all souls, good and bad, but no resurrection of the body. In the Slavonic book of Enoch there is apparently no resurrection of the body ; the righteous are clothed with the garments of God’s glory. The Apocalypse of Baruch (A.D. 50–90) effects a sort of reconciliation of both the opposing views by teaching that the dead will be raised with bodies unchanged, so that they may be recognised, and then that they will be transformed, with a view to unending spiritual existence. They shall be made like the angels, but surpassing them in glory.¹ This book contains many points of contact with the New Testament, though “ they are for the most part insufficient to establish a relation of dependence on either side. The thoughts and expressions in question are explicable from pre-existing literature, or as common-places of the time.”² The work is of value because it “ furnishes us with the historical setting and background of many of the New Testament problems,” and enables us to see that the “ Pauline doctrine of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians xv. 35–50 was not an innovation, but a developed and more spiritual exposition of ideas already current in Judaism.”³ In his scholarly edition of this important work Professor Charles remarks that “ Long before the time of the writers of Baruch the Pharisees were familiar with the idea of the spiritual transformation of the body after the resurrection.”⁴

The Ascension of Isaiah is another work which

¹ Above particulars from Charles, art. “ Eschatology.”

² Charles, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “ Apocalyptic Literature.”

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Apocalypse of Baruch*, p. lxxxii. (note).

helped to render familiar the notion that the supremely righteous man might be translated from a sinful world to the abodes of eternal happiness, the prophet being represented as taken up into the seventh heaven. It is a Jewish writing of early date, the apocalyptic sections being written between A.D. 50 and 80—that is, during the very period when the earliest Christian Gospels came into existence. It is therefore probable that it helped to mould the legend of the ascension of Jesus. This work is written in prophetic form, though describing current events, and is expressly attributed to the prophet Isaiah. It contains many parallelisms, both in thought and expression, with the book of Revelation.

In nearly every one of these old Jewish books (which were freely interpolated by Christians) the privilege of taking part in the resurrection is assumed to be enjoyed by the righteous only. In this respect also the Gospel writers faithfully reproduced the current conception. In Luke xx. 35, 36, Jesus, while inculcating a spiritual aspect of the resurrection, distinctly expresses this view, and Paul appears to favour it; indeed, according to Professor Charles, “the all but universal teaching of the New Testament writers is that the resurrection is the privilege only of those who are spiritually one with Christ.”¹ It is not easy to evade the conclusion that the Christian belief on this subject must have been derived from previously existing non-Christian sources.

As already stated, it is quite impossible for persons belonging to another nation, and to a period contrasting in almost every respect with the times preceding and following the age of Jesus, to appreciate the intense and absorbing nature of the Jewish Messianic hope. “The

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Eschatology.”

two subjects with which Jewish thought and enthusiasm were concerned were the law and the Messianic kingdom.”¹ The Christian Church (though not for some years) broke with the former. The latter it transformed from an earthly to a heavenly kingdom, even in this respect following the lead of Jewish idealists. And with this natural evolution of religious thought there seems to have gone on a development of the sense of individuality. “The Old Testament prophets had concerned themselves chiefly with the position of the righteous as a community, and pointed in the main to the restoration (or resurrection) of Israel as a nation, and to Israel’s ultimate possession of the earth as a reward for righteousness. Later, with the growing claims of the individual and the acknowledgment of these in the religious and intellectual life, the second problem presented itself irresistibly on the notice of religious thinkers, and made it impossible for any conception of the divine rule which did not render adequate satisfaction to the claims of the righteous individual to gain acceptance. Thus, in order to justify the righteousness of God, there was postulated, not only the resurrection of the righteous nation, but also the resurrection of the righteous individual.”² These remarks suggest that the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus was put forward as a vindication of the divine government, a refutation of the doubts which the prevailing wickedness had awakened, as the conception formed by the pious of how God might be expected to reverse the condemnation by men of his Messiah. In those times the transition from what ought

¹ Charles, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “Apocalyptic Literature.” The preaching by Jesus of “The Kingdom” was probably suggested by the national idea of the Messianic Kingdom.

² *Ibid.*

to be to what had been was easily made. *A priori* considerations had greater weight than prosaic facts. The idea that the nation would be raised ended in failure and despair. Perhaps partly for that reason, the idea that the righteous individual had been actually raised met with astonishing success. The failure of the one hope drove the religious mind to seek consolation in the guarantee afforded by the assumed resurrection of Jesus that God still cared for his people, and that the wicked would not be for ever triumphant. The believer did not ask for evidence of the fact, or scrutinise the sense of the terms in which it was proclaimed. The assertion of an event which gratified his aspirations remained uncriticised by reason.

The writers of the Slavonic Enoch show us the downfall of the national hope, the destruction of the national ideal. The apocalyptic author "entertains no hope of arousing his contemporaries to faith and duty by direct personal appeals. His pessimism and want of faith in the present thus naturally led him to pseudonymous authorship, and so he approaches his countrymen with a writing which purports to be the work of some great figure in their history, such as Enoch, Moses, Daniel, or Baruch."¹ But in all the apocalyptic writings the predictions "are mere products of the religious imagination, and vary with each writer. In nearly every case these books claim to be supernatural revelations given to the men by whose names they are designated."²

The substitution of the idea of individual resurrection for that of national resurrection must have meant a great change for the pious Jew. "Never," says Professor Charles, "in Palestinian Judaism down to the Christian

¹ *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Apocalyptic Literature."

² *Ibid.*

era did the doctrine of a merely individual immortality appeal to any but a few isolated thinkers.”¹ In the first century B.C. this doctrine had become powerful, and the interest of the believer centred in his own soul. “The great thought of the Divine Kingdom had been surrendered in despair.”² Is it not evident that Jesus revived this “great thought” in a more spiritual and individualised form, and was it not this idea which sustained his followers under the trial of his crucifixion, filled them with the conviction that he was still alive, and gave them courage to preach the faith he had taught them? More than a century before his time the book of Enoch had developed the conception of an earthly New Jerusalem into a spiritual one in heaven. “From such a view of the future it is obvious that, for the writer, the centre of interest has passed from the material world to the spiritual, and the Messianic kingdom is no longer the goal of the hopes of the righteous. Their faith finds its satisfaction only in a blessed immortality in heaven itself.”³ In short, Jewish piety only believed in a heaven in the clouds when it could no longer believe in a heaven upon earth.

Just in the same way the conception of a suffering Messiah was only framed when the conception of a triumphant king had become no longer possible.

Hitherto we have been considering the Jewish uncanonical writings, because they comprise some, at any rate, of the sources from which the Christian narratives have been derived. It is manifestly important that we should know the true origin of a system which is claimed to constitute a divine revelation. If we find that origin to lie within the normal development of the religious

¹ Art. “Eschatology.”

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

consciousness, there can be no good reason for referring it to any extra-human source. We find no such break, no such difference, between the religious conceptions of Jesus and his earliest followers on the one hand, and the religious conceptions of the pious Jews of his day on the other hand, as would justify the assumption that the former stand apart from the ordinary process of psychological development. This being so, the position of Neander, that we must regard "the whole manifestation of Christ as supernatural before we can believe in his resurrection," becomes logical only if we are prepared to overlook the unsoundness of its premisses. Investigation discloses that the essential ideas, doctrines, and even practices, of Christianity were in existence before Jesus lived; that his followers did not regard him as God; and that, in view of the tendencies of his age and the uncertain date and authorship of the records, we can never be sure that the words put into his mouth were really uttered by him. In the light of the critical researches which Christian scholars themselves have so bravely and honourably made public, we are driven to the conclusion that the "whole manifestation of Christ," instead of being supernatural, is purely natural and human. And this involves the further conclusion that the particular dogmas of the Virgin birth, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, are antecedently incredible, and therefore cannot be established by the meagre and contradictory statements of unknown and ill-informed writers.

The Apocryphal Gospels which were so largely circulated during the first and second centuries have no direct bearing on the doctrine of the resurrection. Being of later date than the Apostolic age, they do not form the sources of the Christian belief, but its products. They

are, nevertheless, full of interest, as exemplifying the gradual accretion of mythical elements round a certain (or, rather, uncertain) nucleus of truth. It should be the task of the apologetic school to show that, while the later development is admittedly legendary, its original source is not. The numerous analogies between the apocryphal and the canonical accounts seem to imply a common origin; and, when we see belief in the supernatural carrying with it the rankest absurdities, we are the more disposed to find that origin in the natural tendency of mankind to superstition.

The Gospel of Nicodemus abounds with exaggerated and impossible stories. Thus the guard of soldiers set to watch the tomb has grown into a small army of five hundred men, who place seals upon the entrance. In the form related by Matthew this tradition has usually been accepted by apologists as historically true; but its origin is unknown, and there is not a particle of evidence in its favour. There is, indeed, a close resemblance between it and the story concerning Joseph of Arimathea contained in the Gospel of Nicodemus. According to the latter account, Joseph is arrested for having interred the body of Jesus; but when the Jews come to his prison to take him away for execution, Joseph is nowhere to be found. "When the day began to break on the Lord's day, the chief priests and the Jews held a council, and sent to bring Joseph out of prison to put him to death; but on opening it they found him not. And they wondered at this, how, when the doors were shut, and the locks secured, and the seals remaining, Joseph was not to be seen."¹ Why is this story disbelieved while a similar incident in the Gospels is held to be true? The

¹ B. Harris Cowper, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 291.

orthodox reply is that "the whole manifestation of Christ was supernatural," which, of course, assumes the point to be proved.

The Gospel of Nicodemus contains a curious legend of the ascension. There are two versions of it; we need only quote the second: "Jesus, whom ye crucified, we have seen in Galilee with his eleven disciples, at the Mount of Olives¹ [*sic*], teaching them, and saying, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel; and whosoever believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but whosoever believeth not shall be condemned.' And, having said this, he ascended to heaven. And we saw, both we and many others of the five hundred who were there."² This seems to point to some confusion between the appearance of the five hundred alluded to by Paul and the ascension recorded by Luke, possibly complicated by some vague tradition of the Pentecost incident. The legend is doubtless long subsequent to the Gospel narrative; but it shows the tenuous and fluctuating character of the belief, and also how readily the early Christians could declare that they had actually seen what they had not seen. Can any reasoning mind attach the slightest value to the alleged evidence of five hundred unknown witnesses to such a miracle when he sees how easily a small picket of soldiers was magnified to a regiment?

The following passage suggests the reflection that "heaven" was simply a convenient expression to account for the disappearance (real or supposed) of the body of Jesus: "Nicodemus said: O children of the people of Jerusalem, the prophet Elijah ascended to the height of heaven with a fiery chariot, and it is not

¹ The locality is given in the first version as Mount Mamilk, a hill south-west of Jerusalem.

² *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 294.

incredible if Jesus also is risen ; for the prophet Elijah was a prefiguration of Jesus, in order that ye should not disbelieve when ye heard that Jesus was risen.”¹ There are so many indications in the New Testament of the persistent manner in which Old Testament types and predictions were assumed to have been fulfilled in Jesus that we cannot fail to perceive the close mental relationship between the authors of the canonical and of the uncanonical writings of Christianity. It seems to us that the first Christians were dimly aware of the weakness of the historical basis for their doctrines, and so were almost forced back upon fanciful interpretations of the Jewish scriptures. In spite, however, of these interpretations being in accord with the tendencies of the ignorant age which produced them, the Jewish nation as a whole never admitted their validity.

In the same Gospel of Nicodemus appears the following extraordinary passage, purporting to have been uttered by Joseph of Arimathea. He says to his accusers, who had apprehended him for his removal of the body of Jesus: “On the evening of the preparation, when ye secured me in prison, I betook myself to prayer all the night, and all the day of the Sabbath. And at midnight I saw the prison-house, that four angels lifted it up, holding it by the four corners. And Jesus entered like lightning, and through fear of him I fell to the ground. Therefore, taking me by the hand, he raised me, saying: Fear not, Joseph. Then he embraced and kissed me, and said: Turn and see who I am. Therefore I turned and looked, and said: Lord, I know not who thou art. He saith, I am Jesus whom thou didst bury the day before yesterday. I said to

¹ *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 295.

him, Show me the sepulchre, and then I will believe. Therefore he took me by the hand, and led me away to the sepulchre, which was open. And when I saw the linen clothes and the napkin, and knew, I said: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, and worshipped him. Then he took me by the hand, the angels also following, and led me to Arimathea, to my house, and saith unto me: Abide here for forty days. For I go unto my disciples, that I may instruct them to preach my resurrection.”¹

Only one or two points in this story need be noticed. We have first that singular disposition to “argue the point” which seems to have been thought necessary on the part of the recipient of a divine manifestation, and which is frequently and carefully recorded in the Bible. Then there is the significant statement that Joseph was convinced of the resurrection of Jesus by beholding the empty tomb, although Jesus in person had just appeared to him and declared his identity. Can it be doubted that similar evidence satisfied the disciples, as indeed seems to be hinted by John? But, whatever theory may be formed of the disappearance of Jesus, the mere fact (assuming it to be such) of the tomb being empty is obviously no evidence whatever that he returned to life. Nor can we avoid the suspicion that the incredulity of the followers of Jesus was “overdone” when we find the incident of “doubting Thomas” thus duplicated. In each narrative the apologetic purpose is manifest. The introduction of the conventional period of forty days should also be noticed.

The *Encyclopædia Biblica* gives the date of the Gospel of Nicodemus as “not earlier than the fourth century,”²

¹ *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 297.

² Art. “Nicodemus.”

but the Christian scholar Tischendorf places it as early as the second century.¹ Whichever view be adopted, the work embodies very ancient traditions.

The myth-making process flourishes in the forgery known as the *Report of Pilate the Governor to Augustus Cæsar*. Here Pilate is made to relate that he himself saw many of the "saints" whose unaccountable resurrection is related by Matthew, and, in addition, reports, with a fine sense of poetic justice, that the opponents of Jesus had been swallowed up in the chasm made by the earthquake.² In another of these vivacious productions, entitled *The Death and Condemnation of Pilate*, the unfortunate Procurator is put to death for having caused the just man Jesus to be crucified, but his last moments are consoled by a vision of Jesus, who forgives him, and his head is received by an angel.³

The following passage relating the appearance to James is given in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* as a citation by Jerome from the Gospel of the Hebrews, of which only fragments have been discovered: "The Lord, after he had given the cloth to the slave of the priest, went to James and appeared to him; for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which he had drunk the cup of the Lord until he should see him rising again from them that sleep; and again, after a little, 'Bring,' says the Lord, 'food and bread,' and immediately, there is added, he brought bread, and blessed and gave to James the Just, and said to him: 'My brother, eat thou bread because the Son of Man is risen again from them that sleep.'" ⁴

There is a tradition of the resurrection embodied in the Gospel of Peter which it may be interesting to

¹ *Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 228.

² *Ibid*, p. 404.

³ *Ibid*, p. 414.

⁴ Art. "Resurrection," sec. 4.

reproduce. This ancient MS., believed to be a product of the second century, was found at Akhmîm, in Egypt, nearly twenty years ago by the French Archæological Mission, but was not published till 1891. The passage is given by Professor Rendel Harris, as follows :—

And in the night, when the Lord's Day was drawing on, as the soldiers were on guard, two and two in each watch, there was a great voice in heaven, and they saw the heavens opened, and two men descend thence with great radiance, and they stood over the tomb. But that stone which had been cast at the door rolled away of itself, and withdrew to one side, and the tomb was opened, and both the young men entered.

When those soldiers saw this, they aroused the centurion and the elders (for they also were present on guard); and as they were relating what they had seen again they behold three men coming out of the tomb, and two of them were supporting the third, and a cross was following them: and the heads of the two men reached to the heaven, but the head of Him who was being led along 'by them was higher than the heavens. And they heard a voice from heaven which said, Hast thou preached to them that are asleep? And a response was heard from the cross, Yea.

After these circumstances have been related to Pilate, who orders the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing, the women arrive at the sepulchre.

And they came there, and found the sepulchre opened; and, drawing near thither, they stooped down, and they see a young man sitting in the midst of the sepulchre, beautiful and clad in a most dazzling robe, who said to them: "Wherefore are ye come? Whom do ye seek? Is it the one who was crucified? He is risen and gone; and, if ye do not believe, stoop down and see the place where he was laid; for he is not here; for he is risen, and has gone to the place from whence he was sent."

Then the women fled away in fear.

And it was the last day of the feast of unleavened

bread, and many people were returning [from the city] to their homes, the feast being ended. But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and grieved; and each of us, in grief at what had happened, withdrew to his house. But I, Simon Peter, and Andrew, my brother, took our nets, and departed to the sea, and there was with us also Levi, the son of Alphæus, whom the Lord.....¹

At this point the fragment comes to an end, the remainder having been lost. It is unnecessary to dwell on its variations from the New Testament accounts; but the reader will again observe that the mere sight of the empty tomb is given as a convincing argument for the resurrection, and also that the account purports to be a first-hand declaration by the Apostles themselves. Professor Harris considers that all the four canonical Gospels were utilised by the author; and this was probably the case, though it is evident that, following the practice of the time, he used his materials with a freedom which is not consistent with their having been regarded as divinely inspired. Referring to the curious notion that the cross itself uttered words, Professor Harris states that this is an allusion to "the legendary doctrine that when Christ descended to Hades he took the cross with him; thus the preaching in question was a preaching of the cross."² He also points out that the idea that Jesus preached to "the spirits in prison" (1 Peter iii. 19) was "a very popular second-century doctrine."³ The fragment is considered to bear numerous traces of a Docetic origin, and Professor Harris freely admits the very early and widespread prevalence of this heresy.

We need not direct attention to the incident that at the death of Jesus, as related in this Gospel, he cries

¹ Professor J. Rendel Harris, *A Popular Account of the Newly-Recovered Gospel of Peter* (1893), pp. 50-56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

out: “ ‘ My Power, my Power, hast thou forsaken me ? ’ ¹
And when he had said this he was taken up.” The reference to the *twelve* disciples again reminds us of the unsettled state of the Gospel tradition. It will be noticed that the authorship is expressly attributed to the Apostle himself. No one contends that the Gospel accounts were copied from these legends. Doubtless it was the other way. But the point is this—the Apocryphal Gospels merely carry further a process of myth-making of which clear traces are discernible in the New Testament itself. Essentially, both are products of a common tradition, the precise nature and origin of which no one has ascertained.

Substantial grounds have now been shown for holding that the conception of a Messiah which forms the clue to the resurrection-belief was a purely natural one, brought about by prior religious and political conditions. Like all other religious ideas, it passed through a slow process of development. It was first a national aspiration of a temporal and earthly nature, kindled into warmth by suffering and wrong. In the course of time the Messiah came to be conceived of as an individual, an ideal person, partaking of both divine and human qualities. The temporal deliverer was thought to have been found in Judas Maccabæus, but after his death the pious Jews took refuge from earthly ills in the dream of a happier life in heaven. To the disciples of Jesus this idea of the Messiah furnished a powerful inspiration. If at first they hoped that he would have redeemed Israel from oppression, they shortly perceived that such a thought conflicted with the spirit of his teaching, and they were compelled either to abandon their fidelity to

¹ This appears to tone down the expression of God-forsakenness, and thus shows a dogmatic tendency.

him, or to regard him as a saviour from sin and the victor over death. It was supposed that God could not suffer his Messiah to see corruption—that Jesus must have transcended, and therefore *did* transcend, the law of death, and go before them into heaven, there to prepare places for those who loved him.

In the light of these ideas the growth of the belief that Jesus rose from the dead becomes intelligible. The vague, scanty, and unconfirmed accounts in the Gospels are precisely such as would result from the action of earnestly religious, but ignorant and superstitious, minds upon the materials before them. The first believers did not explain or define the terms of their announcement, and thus, a generation or two later, the original facts were insensibly mingled with elements purely traditional and of unknown origin.

It is not surprising that the vast majority of the Jewish nation rejected the prophet of Nazareth. He did not fulfil their expectations of a temporal saviour; he overturned many of their cherished prepossessions, and, indeed, does not appear to have made the precise nature of his mission clear to them. On the other hand, the perception of the higher truth and purity of the idea of a suffering Messiah, and of the spiritual aspect of his triumph over death, blinded the small body of his adherents to the necessity of strict examination of the evidence for the historical event, and of precise accuracy in proclaiming it. In the prevailing materialism the thought of a risen saviour was a great and glorious inspiration, which constrained them to preach "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Their invincible belief that he had ascended into heaven was the surest evidence that he had risen from the dead. This spiritual belief enshrines the idea of his bodily reappearance.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONIES IN SUPPORT OF THE VISION HYPOTHESIS

It has already been noted that there exists among Christian scholars a growing tendency to explain the belief in the resurrection by the theory of subjective impressions. If the New Testament supplies, in the visions, the Messianic expectations, and the bias towards supernaturalism of its writers and characters, a reasonable basis for a subjective explanation, that is as much as we can fairly expect.

In the present chapter we shall adduce a few (out of many) testimonies in support of the subjective theory from the writings of authors whose prepossessions and interests would seem to lead them in an opposite direction, and whose candour is, for that reason, above suspicion.

In his *Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* Dr. Davidson asks :—

Was the structure of flesh and blood existing at death essential to personal identity in heaven? Was not the living spirit the person? A miracle should not be hastily assumed.....The absence of clear testimony, the incongruity of the Gospel narratives, the body of flesh and blood presupposed in some passages compared with the ethereal body implied in others, throw doubt over the whole.....If we consider that the appearance of Jesus to Paul on his journey to Damascus was an *inner* revelation, as the Apostle himself states (Gal. i. 16),¹ and that he

¹ Many apologists deny that this passage relates to the Damascus incident. If that is so, Paul never alludes to Luke's accounts at all.

puts it in the same category with all other appearances, including those in the Gospels, we are led to assign the character of inward visions to all the manifestations of Christ after his death, to whomsoever they were made. The difficulties against the physical reanimation of the crucified one overbalance those on the other side, and can only be resolved by assuming a miracle.....The vision theory is the only one that explains most of the phenomena, though it does not account for all. Objections to it there are, which Keim has advanced with his usual acuteness. Admitting, as he does, the mythical character of the narratives, he declares his inability to arrive at an incontestable result. But is such a result attainable? The subject hardly admits of it. If a sanguine temperament, an excited imagination, a state of mind ready to confuse objective and subjective, a tendency to see visions, a facile metamorphosis of fancy into fact—if these psychological phenomena are insufficient to account for the belief which spread from Mary Magdalene to the circle of her friends and took full possession of them, we cannot explain it. The vision theory is the most probable solution. We reject the idea that the manifestation was a *real, objective* appearance of Christ's spirit from the unseen sphere.¹

While agreeing with Dr. Davidson that the question "hardly admits" of complete solution, we would point out that this *impasse* results less from the nature of the subject than from the imperfect character of the New Testament records. The presumption against miracle is, however, so strong, while the naturalistic explanation goes so far towards removing the perplexing features of the case, that no unbiassed inquirer acquainted with the facts can long hesitate as to which view he should prefer.

The influence on the resurrection belief of supposed predictions in the Old Testament is thus referred to by Dr. Orello Cone :—

Since no proof could be more effective for a Jew than

¹ Davidson's *Introduction*, vol. ii., pp. 365-67.

that derived from his sacred books, passages were found in the Old Testament which, when treated by the methods of interpretation then in vogue, could easily be made to yield the desired confirmation. The predominant tendency to establish this doctrine distinguishes the first Gospel, which shows an extensive perversion of Old Testament texts in this interest, and, in the discourse of Peter in the Acts, passages from Psalms xvi. and cx. are very arbitrarily forced into the service of the demonstration in question by a method which, if admitted to be valid, would put an end to the rational interpretation of ancient writings.¹.....The strength of this tendency is shown by the fact that, in this discourse of Peter, he does not appear to be willing to leave the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus to rest upon the testimony of witnesses, but seeks to support them by an unwarrantable exegesis of words supposed to have been written by the "patriarch" and "prophet" David. The significance of this procedure is manifest when we consider that the appeal to the Old Testament shows the conviction that the Resurrection and Ascension were a necessity from the Messiahship of Jesus and the fulfilment of a divine decree and fore-ordination.²

With regard to the conversion of Paul, Dr. Cone remarks that "every materialistic construction of the event is excluded by the words 'to reveal His Son *in me*,' which may be cited as Paul's own application of it."³ And he arrives at the conclusion that "the conversion of Paul does not appear inexplicable from the psychological point of view, when it is considered that Judaism contains theological ideas which, to a logical mind, facilitated the transition to Christianity."⁴

The Rev. G. L. Cary considers that there are features in the Emmaus story "which are best ascribed to the reflective imagination of a later time." It was felt by

¹ *The Gospel and its Interpretations*, pp. 141-42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

the disciples to be "necessary that the temporary defeat of their master should be shown to be in accordance with the teachings of prophecy"; that their conceptions of "the coming one" had been erroneous, and that they should have known that the Scriptures had spoken of a suffering as well as a conquering Messiah."¹ This writer regards Luke's account of the ascension as of doubtful genuineness, especially as it is omitted from many good manuscripts. He also points out that Matthew and Mark, who best embody the Apostolic tradition, say least about the resurrection. The latter Gospel is supposed to have been derived from the teaching of Peter, yet of the resurrection Peter says nothing! And Luke expressly gives him as a witness of the event. It is a very significant fact that it is the late compilers who give the most complete accounts of it.²

Mr. Cary regards the visions of angels at the resurrection as standing on the same plane as those of the birth stories.³ In each case the Gospel authors do not hesitate to put spoken words into the mouths of beings whose existence is purely hypothetical. Were they likely to refrain from doing so in the case of Jesus? Further, Mr. Cary considers that the accounts of sudden appearances, at one moment bodily, at the next ghost-like, show "an utter absence of truly historical conditions."⁴ To the objection that the disciples trusted their senses he rejoins: "This answer confuses two very different things—the real testimony of the senses and the inferences drawn from them."⁵ Men in that age, of the Jewish nation, and untrained to habits of careful observation, were incapable of drawing this necessary distinction.

¹ *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. 321.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁴ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

“To speak of a supernatural body,” says Mr. Cary, “is to use language quite devoid of intelligible meaning. Paul’s language cannot be reconciled with passages in the Gospels representing Jesus as living again under ordinary human conditions.”¹

M. Albert Réville remarks: “It appears that there circulated in the primitive communities numerous traditions, very little coherent and very little in harmony, concerning the appearances of Jesus after his death. There is a tendency common to them all to dismiss from the mind of the reader the notion that it would be possible to believe in subjective appearances without material reality—in one word, internal visions of an ecstatic nature. But this the various narratives endeavour to do, even while containing details which we believe leave no room for any other explanation.”²

Some of the objections to the Vision Theory are thus dealt with by the eminent French theologian. It is said that such a view is inconsistent with the prostration of the disciples. But “no one can say, when there are favourable circumstances, if a profound discouragement will not be followed after a short interval by a return of confidence, ardour, and faith, all the more intense that one reproaches himself as a coward or traitor for having yielded for a time to the temptations of despair. We believe that the impression left by Jesus upon the consciousness of his disciples was too profound not to reawaken sooner or later, after the first season of stupor, their original love and enthusiasm. Here was the empty tomb, the declarations of the pious women, less downcast than the men; the remembrance thus refreshed by them of the intention expressed by Jesus of uniting them

¹ *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. 330.

² “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *New World*, 1894, p. 509.

again near him in Galilee—and such were the stimulants that hastened the revival. Exaltation succeeded to discouragement, and exaltation engendered ecstasy.”¹

“It is said that the Apostles were simple, prosaic men, very unlikely to have become a prey to ecstatic visions. But were vision and ecstasy foreign to the state of mind of the first disciples? What, then, was the scene of the Transfiguration, the walking on the lake by night, the Pentecostal scene and the tongues, the vision of Peter about Cornelius, and Paul’s experiences?

“It is said that visions are not shared by many people at once. But this fails to recognise the contagious nature of ecstasy, and its different forms among those animated by the same disposition. The persecuted French Protestants gathered in the mountains, and heard the songs of angels. Many of these collective visions are known. No specialist will contradict us when we lay it down as a fact that, if circumstances are favourable to its communication, vision may be shared by an indefinite number of persons at the same time.”²

“There is one characteristic of the appearances of Jesus which comes within collective visions—the gradual character of several of these apparitions, which are not evident to all from the first, and which only slowly take possession of all present”³ (Matt. xxviii. 17, Luke xxiv. 41, John xxi. 7–12). Some hardy apologists may deny that the circumstances were favourable to the production of visions. We assert that they were so in a most unusual degree, and we think the New Testament itself affords conclusive evidence on this point. And it must be remembered that we have to investigate the accounts in the absence of their original nucleus. Late compilations

¹ “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *New World*, 1894, p. 525.

² *Ibid.*, p. 526.

³ *Ibid.*

like the Gospels never escape from the moulding influence of materialistic traditions, and in the first century belief in the supernatural dominated almost every mind. M. Réville states: "To our mind, the early belief in the resurrection was much more the result than the foundation of the faith of the disciples, which had revived in great intensity."¹

Referring to those apologists who attempt to demonstrate the resurrection "as the most certain of all historical events," and who treat it as proving the divinity of Jesus, a Christian defender of the doctrine remarks that "on every ground the attempt must fail." "Though a fact, it was different from all other facts, in that its real significance lay in its spiritual content; and, apart from that content, the fact remains no Christian fact at all.....A man will not be able to accept this most mysterious of all supernatural manifestations if he has not first been led up, as the disciples were, to find the supernatural in the life and person of Jesus; to find it, that is, in the form in which it can be verified by human experience."² It is, in fact, the "miracle of Christ's holiness" which "alone gives reality and intelligibility to the exceptional miracle of the resurrection."³ This is the primitive fallacy that the holy man is the favourite of the gods, and rises superior to the law of death.

In our own times psychological experiences analogous to those related in the Gospels have taken place with considerable frequency. The Rev. C. E. Beeby, in discussing the resurrection, mentions the following:—"The late Mr. C. H. Spurgeon relates how he once had a similar experience" to that of Paul. "While crossing

¹ "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *New World*, 1894, p. 499.

² D. W. Forrest, *The Christ of History and Experience*, p. 157.

³ *Ibid*, p. 158.

a common near Chesterton to keep a preaching engagement, 'I was startled,' he says, 'by what seemed a loud voice, but which may have been a singular illusion; whichever it was, the impression was vivid to an intense degree. I seemed very distinctly to hear the words: 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.' Now, St. Paul's experience was no different. He heard a voice. That to him was seeing Jesus, and being convinced of his resurrection."¹ We perceive that, in the case of even so pronounced a believer in supernatural religion as Mr. Spurgeon, the influence of modern ideas prevented him from positively assigning an objective cause for the phenomenon. We cannot assume that such an influence would operate upon the first disciples of Jesus or on the Apostle Paul.

From the *Birmingham Daily Post* of February 13th, 1893, Mr. Beeby extracts an account of a vision which occurred at Dörrregrund, in Bohemia, in the preceding autumn. A lady appeared to a peasant girl, disappeared, came again a few days later, and made arrangements for subsequent meetings. "The reports of these visions soon spread, and were believed by thousands of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The last vision which occurred took place, it is said, in the presence of no less than five thousand persons. They were profoundly thrilled by what they saw."² Here the mythical five hundred witnesses mentioned by Paul are multiplied tenfold, with far greater facilities for ascertaining who they were and the nature of their testimony. On apologetic grounds, therefore, we ought at once to accept this modern miracle (presumably an appearance of the Virgin Mary), unless some authoritative contradiction had at once been placed on record.

¹ *Creed and Life*, p. 78.

² *Ibid*, p. 79.

A still more remarkable instance is that of an actress whose conversion is related in the *Birmingham Daily Mail* of March 2nd, 1897. She was an occasional attendant at services of the Salvation Army, and informed a reporter that "It was on the night of the 6th of last January I was in the meeting, when I felt something touch me. Thinking it was someone wanting to pass, I looked up with the intention of moving, when, right in front of me, I saw the figure of the Saviour as distinctly and plainly as I see you now. I got up, and went to the penitent-form. Something led me, and the feeling was such a peculiar one that I cannot describe it; but the presence has never left me."¹ Now, if this were a scientifically accurate statement of an objective fact, it would be better evidence for the resurrection than anything in the Gospels. But it clearly falls within the category of those subjective and emotional phenomena which are so frequently observed in connection with the religious impulse, and there is no good reason for doubting that the New Testament manifestations were of the same order. "How could the evangelist, always assuming that he was not a modern psychologist or philosopher, set down the story as related to him in other terms than those in which he has done it?"²

"Colonel Gardiner saw a vision of Christ, which he never doubted was external to his mind; and that vision changed the whole course of his life, turning him from a soldier, given over to licentiousness, into a Protestant saint. Whether the figure of Christ was external or not, to my mind, is unimportant. It is the spiritual revelation which is primary and convincing. The spiritual world is the real world to me."³

¹ *Creed and Life*, p. 83.

² *Ibid*, p. 82.

³ *Ibid*, p. 83.

The same writer considers the account in the third Gospel of the journey to Emmaus "conclusive as a psychological explanation of the events recorded..... The story of the temptation is clearly a dramatic representation, as in the physical world, of the inner spiritual struggle. And why not understand the story of the resurrection in the same way? What the compiler wishes to impress upon the readers is the vivid consciousness of the disciples that Jesus was alive, and the strong assurance they had of his real presence in their midst, according to promise. This revelation of Jesus to the disciples (however spiritually discerned, as Westcott says), when related to others and set down in writing, must necessarily take the form of an event occurring in the physical world, and be expressed in the language of the senses."¹

While thus fervently believing in the resurrection as a fact of spiritual life, Mr. Beeby clearly discerns the inadequacy of the historical evidence. "The grounds of belief in the resurrection of Jesus, as commonly set forth, are absolutely worthless."²

Ewald powerfully states the subjective aspect of the resurrection belief, though in lumbering and involved language. He points out that it was only those who had beheld Jesus "truly in his terrestrial form" who "saw him again in his spiritual form."³ This was a psychological consequence of their previous mental and emotional state. "If the Invisible himself in former days became visible to the prophets and saints of the Old Testament in the fervour of their devotion, and their eye in the rapture, even with greatest vividness, beheld all things that were at other times beyond mortal ken,

¹ *Creed and Life*, p. 81.

² *Ibid*, p. 74.

³ *History of Israel*, vol. vii., pp. 57-58.

how can we maintain that, to the agonising prayer of these disciples, that Being whose terrestrial image had just before shone so clearly before them could never appear and come before their longing eyes with irresistible power?

“It was, moreover, an ancient and quite natural belief that the spirit, on its separation from the body, still moved for a time as between heaven and earth before it entered completely into its rest;¹ that the immortal counterpart of the body could therefore more easily appear during this period. And it is impossible not to see that this belief plays its part in a suitably exalted manner in the case of these appearances of Christ.

“We cannot maintain that all this was the means of giving rise to the belief in Christ’s resurrection; but it might be facilitated thereby, and made so natural that even the slightest impulse from another quarter could quickly call it into existence.”²

This impulse Ewald considers was probably supplied by the discovery that the sepulchre was empty. “How great must have been the astonishment of the women and of the two disciples, Peter and John, who arrived shortly after them, when they found the stone rolled away and the vault open; within, however, no corpse, but only the grave-clothes of a buried person, as if he had left the place! And what was to be done when, after repeated searches, they still could not find him? The only thing possible was that which actually occurred: further search of the agonising soul,³ further reflection

¹ Jewish traditions held that the soul remained adjacent to the body for three days, and then entered the unseen world. Does this idea enter into the conception of the three days between the death and resurrection of Jesus?

² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

³ This search (if it really took place) must have materially aided the production of visions.

under the most intense suspense of living desire, the reflection that he had promised to reveal himself to them again, and, above all, the intrinsic power of the truth itself; and then he whose bodily image was so well known to them, whom they had known as the Son of God and immortal Lord, actually presented himself to their sight in his new and glorified life; and as they had thus seen him again, and believed in this his utmost power over death, it must then have been as if the flash of an unseen, celestial light darted through their heart. He whose death they had heard of, and in whose death they might find it so hard to believe, by whom they supposed themselves forsaken, and whose greatness and glory had suddenly become so enigmatical to them, but who they had long ago begun to feel might be the incomparable and purely celestial Messiah—him they now, on the contrary, actually saw once more before their eyes as the celestial Messiah, in order to give them, as victorious over death, that certainty and power which they could not of themselves find.....Never before had such rapture followed immediately the most yearning desire of the spirit, such pure and spiritual joy the profoundest sorrow.....It was soon believed that words from the lips of the glorified one, similar to those which he had once spoken in the flesh, and yet much loftier than those uttered then, had been quite plainly heard.”¹

Anyone can well understand that in an age when a spiritual appearance was not expressly distinguished from a physical appearance the mere announcement that Jesus had been “seen” would not be qualified by the explanation “as a spirit.” The majority of hearers would at once infer a bodily appearance, and in that

¹ *History of Israel*, pp. 62-63.

light tradition would shape the written accounts. "The recognition of the risen Christ, which was at first purely spiritual, gradually sought and found support in a physical seeing and kindred reflections."¹ It should be added that this spiritual sense of the word "seen" is expressly attributed to Jesus himself in John xiv. 9: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

We must not forget that in the first century, as in all other epochs, there were two classes of minds at work, each helping to form and mould the Christian tradition. The literature of the age clearly shows that in the midst of a debasing materialism many minds vividly apprehended the spiritual idea that lay behind the resurrection belief. In the exaltation produced by the personality of Jesus the thought that, despite his death, he was spiritually present with them must have made itself felt with a force that we cannot altogether realise. This was the power that animated the hearts of the disciples, caused the fountain of their faith to spring into new life, and inspired them to carry on the work of Jesus. In their dead master they at length saw, not the worldly conqueror invoked by a despairing people, but the heavenly Messiah seated on the right hand of God, and sending his peace and joy into the hearts of his little flock. Of this idea there are the clearest traces in that wonderful book, the Fourth Gospel, written a hundred years later. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth";² "the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things";³ "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him,

¹ *History of Israel*, p. 68.

² John xiv. 16-17.

³ John xiv. 26.

and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”¹ In this last passage we see that the presence of the Father, which must of necessity have been understood in a spiritual sense, is promised equally with that of Jesus himself, so that the latter cannot relate to a supposed post-resurrection return in physical form. The whole of this part of John, indeed, seems evidently intended to embody the final and farewell words of Jesus. Its historical accuracy is, of course, more than doubtful, and, in view of its late origin and dogmatic tendency, the conclusion is almost unavoidable that the nebulous promise of the Comforter simply embodies the idea of the continued spiritual presence of Jesus, and must be regarded as merely the form in which the faith of the disciples found compensation for his disappearance. It is not surprising that some confusion of thought existed with regard to the “Comforter” when we find Jesus promising at one moment to come himself (John xiv. 18, 28), and at another moment to send someone else in his place (John xvi. 7). It may be added that the disciples seem to have fully expected that they would share the glory of their master: “The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them, that they may be one even as we are one.”² Did this idea afford them no joy, no spiritual consolation?

Orthodox writers, who, of course, maintain that the promise of the Comforter was really given by Jesus, hold also that it was fulfilled when the disciples were gathered together at the feast of Pentecost. Of this we shall say nothing further than that Professor Ewald contends that it was, “after all, only a purely inward and spiritual experience.”³

¹ John xiv. 23.

² John xvii. 22.

³ *History of Israel*, vol. vii., p. 88.

In a sermon on the resurrection, Canon Henson regards it solely as a fact of the religious consciousness. Referring to the conversion of Paul, he says: "The Apostle, in classing his own vision of the risen Saviour on the road to Damascus with the other Christophanies, allows us to conclude that in all the appearances there was nothing of the nature of a resuscitated body, which could be touched, held, handled, and could certify its frankly physical character by eating and drinking, but always the vision of the Christ in glory, flashing wondrously on the spiritual eyesight, and coming and going through all material barriers in the perfect liberty of supra-physical life. It seems plain, to my thinking, that, with the Pauline list of Christophanies before us, we are justified in thinking that the earliest statements of the Apostles on the Resurrection emphasised the glorified life of the Crucified Lord, and made no mention of those materialistic details which were gradually built up into the narratives which have sunk so deeply into the mind of Christendom."¹ He thus accounts for these materialistic details: "The Apostolic Church may be compared to a child striving to describe some astonishing experience. The childish vocabulary is too limited, the childish intelligence is too undeveloped, to dispense with the aid of the childish imagination; and the story which the child succeeds in telling certifies by its embellishment the great impression made on the childish mind."²

Dr. Percy Gardner, in his Jowett Lectures, expresses the following opinion:—

It seems to me that amid existing intellectual conditions the wisest plan by far is to regard the spiritual presence of Christ in His Church as the essential fact,

¹ *The Value of the Bible, and Other Sermons*, pp. 204-5.

² *Ibid*, p. 208; see *ante*, p. 24.

and the tales of the corporeal resurrection as results of the experience of Christians—results moulded by the beliefs of the time as to the nature of spirit and its relations to a material body. The view, often held, that it was in a changed and spiritual body that Jesus appeared to His followers—such a body as Paul speaks of in his Corinthian Epistle—is quite untenable.¹

The following quotation from the same writer may be added: “The tale of the physical resurrection of Jesus belongs evidently to the same circle of thought as that of the miraculous birth. This tale also shows a love of the marvellous, is deeply tinged with materialism, and rests on a historical substraction which falls to pieces on a careful examination.”²

The Dean of Ripon, two or three years ago, admitted that “the Resurrection was not a return to the material conditions of this life, but a manifestation of the spiritual state and the spiritual life.”

In his larger work, *Exploratio Evangelica*, Dr. Gardner argues against the “radical materialism of the orthodox view,” and implies, as we have maintained, that the supposed re-appearances of Jesus were similar to that continued spiritual presence which is held to be a fact of Christian experience.³

As the result of a careful attempt to discover in the Synoptic Gospels the common basis on which they were elaborated, Dr. E. A. Abbott arrives at the conclusion that “the original tradition which is common to the first three Gospels contains no record of any appearance of Jesus to the disciples, nor even a statement that the sepulchre was found empty.”⁴ If this startling verdict is correct, it follows that we have no genuinely scriptural

¹ *A Historic View of the New Testament*, p. 166.

² *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 255.

³ *Ibid*, p. 261.

⁴ *Through Nature to Christ*, p. 373.

accounts of the resurrection beyond the statements of the Fourth Gospel and those of the Apostle Paul—the first forming part of a doctrinal and apologetic treatise; the second tending, in the opinion of many Christian scholars, to favour the theory that the belief originated in subjective experiences.

We have thought it worth while to give these quotations at some length because the ideas they represent seldom meet with sympathy from avowedly apologetic writers, who, as a rule, either quibble about points of minor importance or misrepresent the most weighty arguments of their opponents.

An ingenious expositor of the spiritual teaching of Jesus, in dealing with the resurrection and ascension, contents himself with saying: "He went into the Beyond, into which we have all to go.....He went, like all other human spirits that have for this present world died, into regions yet hidden from us, which he, in his prophetic insight, had looked forward to as other 'mansions' of his Father. That in these mansions his spirit rose again into active personal life is the fact on which we must lay hold."¹

Of the theory of a physical resurrection of human beings the late Rev. A. W. Momerie, an earnest believer in immortality, wrote: "It is a travesty, a burlesque, of the Scriptural doctrine of Immortality."² "The Resurrection is a rising *not of, but from, the flesh.*"³ "The dissolution of the body is the resurrection of the soul. Physical death is spiritual birth."⁴ This was taught by Philo before the time of Jesus.

¹ Rev. Alex. Robinson, *A Study of the Saviour in the Newer Light*, p. 341.

² *Immortality, and Other Sermons*, p. 83.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

The American theologian Dr. Newman Smyth holds a somewhat ambiguous position concerning the resurrection. It was "part of the appointed order of nature," yet a miraculous process, which was "to the disciples the pledge of full, rounded, complete personal existence after death. The next life is, in every thread of it, continuous with this; and the whole life passes on into the glory of the celestial."¹ The body of Jesus which rose was transformed into a "spiritual body"; "the Lord who left the tomb entered heaven in the glory of the celestial body."² These mystical assumptions rest on the authority of the Apostle Paul, and presumably should be received without a particle of evidence.

Referring to the ascension, Dr. A. Sabatier asks: "Are we to picture it to ourselves as a real, material ascension in the outer space? If Jesus went up in that way, where did he stop? Where was it possible for him to meet with God, even if he had passed through all physical space up to infinity? Here, again, although affirming the spiritual and moral glorification of Christ in God, I doubt whether any enlightened Christian can represent to himself the ascension of Christ exactly in the same way as Luke did when he wrote the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles."³

The German theologian Keim, who has produced a Life of Jesus in six volumes, rejects the vision theory in its ordinary form, because he thinks he has a better explanation to offer. The latter, however, he supports only by a few bare assertions, while the rejected hypothesis is discussed with so much insight and sympathy as to make the reader think the critic favours it until his own view is suddenly announced. Thus,

¹ *Old Faiths in New Light*, pp. 158, 159.

² *Ibid*, p. 159.

³ *The Vitality of Christian Dogmas*, pp. 64-65.

according to Keim, the incident of doubting Thomas is an arbitrary introduction of the Evangelist.¹ Paul “determinedly excludes” the speaking and eating of Jesus.² The Apostle could better have established the divine authority of his mission if he could have referred to a commission given to him in words. Yet he merely says, “I have *seen* Jesus.”³ We may add the reminder that Paul himself never explains when, where, or under what circumstances he had seen Jesus. Again, the Emmaus incident Keim pronounces to be unhistorical.⁴ He states that “the whole history of the Apostolic time is rich in appearances due to excited nerves; it is full of visions and ecstasies.”⁵ In the book of Acts, for example, Peter, Paul, Philip, Stephen, Ananias, and Cornelius, all experience visions. “While Paul and Peter and James exhibited a sober habit of contemplation, extravagance nevertheless prevailed at the same time.”⁶ It cannot be properly objected that they distinguished between visions and real events. “On the contrary, both in the Old Testament and to Paul that which was seen in visions passed as reality, and not merely as non-material mental reality, but as something sensibly perceptible, yet super-material, and which sometimes descended to a man upon earth, and at others was manifested to him when caught up into heaven. Though Paul might on his own part distinguish the super-material which he saw in a vision of the night or with his eyes by day, or with his spirit when transported out of his body into heaven, who can guarantee the specific difference of what was perceived, and who does not detect the mistake when Paul postulates, for the

¹ *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. vi., p. 288.

³ *Ibid*, p. 291.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 294.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 337.

² *Ibid*, p. 290.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 336.

processes of his own inner life, a real transference to heaven—a sort of preliminary ascension? Can we establish a remote possibility that what was seen by the eye on the journey to Damascus had a firmer, more objective, more materially real ground than what was seen in his ascension to heaven, or in the visions of the night?"¹ It was, in fact, Keim states, "simply the impossible, materialistic, Jewish, primarily the Persian-Gentile dogmatic of the resurrection doctrine, afterwards inherited by primitive Christianity, that created the picture of the risen Jesus, and that transformed the still intelligible cry, 'The Lord lives, the Lord has revived, we have seen the Lord,' into the dogma, 'The Lord has risen with his body out of the grave.'"²

Referring to the difficulty which the disciples felt in believing that Jesus was utterly dead, Keim illustrates it by the following examples: "After the death of Rabbi Judas the hero, in Sepphoris, near Nazara, the citizens of that place swore: 'Whoever shall say to us that the Rabbi is dead, we will put him to death.' And, after the death of Mohammed, Abubekr and Omar prepared the sword for the heads of those who denied that the prophet lived. Of Aristeus, the ancient Greek poet, and a man of miraculous adventures, it is related not merely that the civic announcement of his death was strongly denied in the neighbouring district where he had been seen and spoken with, but also that he was not to be found either alive or dead in the house where he died."³ Keim also recognises the wonderful power with which religious ecstasy is diffused, even among those who do not at first participate in it.⁴

¹ *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. vi., p. 338.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 344. This bears directly on the supposed effect of the non-production of the body of Jesus, on which some apologists are so dogmatic.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

One would have thought that to such a reasoner the vision theory could present no insurmountable difficulty. Keim's own view, however, is that the appearance of Jesus, although spiritual, was objectively real. He holds "the conviction that it was Jesus and no other who, as dead yet risen again, as celestially glorified even if not risen, vouchsafed visions to his disciples, revealed himself to his community."¹ He believes in "a spiritual influence of Jesus, who continued to live on in a higher form of existence—an influence which, according to the law of eccentric projection of overpowering soul-impressions, embodied itself in ocular visions."² "All evidence goes to prove that the belief in the Messiah would have died out without the living Jesus." That he still lived the disciples evidently believed. Would not their belief have had the same effect as a few isolated spectral manifestations? The reality of apparitions is frequently believed on very doubtful grounds. The inquirer must decide for himself whether a real spiritual appearance of Jesus was in that age more probable than an erroneous belief in it.

"The evidence," says Keim, "that Jesus was alive, the telegram from heaven, was necessary after an earthly downfall which was unexampled, and which, in the childhood of the race, would be convincing; the evidence that he was alive was, therefore, given by his own impulsion and by the will of God."³ The evidence was "necessary." It is not, we think, an unfair conjecture that this strongly-felt necessity created, or helped to create, the idea that it had been supplied; if by subjective impressions, the necessity also existed for their being translated into objective realities.

¹ *Jesus of Nazara*, p. 360.

² *Ibid*, p. 361.

³ *Ibid*, p. 364.

Keim's view has not met with general acceptance by either orthodox or advanced theologians. It has a closer affinity with the vision theory than with the traditional view. Spirit-manifestations are themselves so debatable, so intimately connected with morbid psychological conditions, that Keim may perhaps be claimed as logically a supporter of the view which is now so commonly held by the advanced schools of theology.¹ Obvious difficulties in the "telegram from heaven" theory present themselves. It assumes that heaven is a place, God a person, that a "spirit" can possess conscious existence apart from bodily conditions, that Jesus was a divine being and held direct relations of some undefined sort with his followers after his death—all which matters are, we will not say false, but doubtful.

As we are dealing with the subject of visions, it may be well to quote a passage or two from the work of a specialist in that department. Professor William James says: "There is one form of sensory automatism which possibly deserves special notice on account of its frequency. I refer to hallucinatory or pseudo-hallucinatory luminous phenomena. St. Paul's blinding heavenly vision seems to have been a phenomenon of this sort; so does Constantine's cross in the sky..... President Finney writes: 'All at once the glory of God shone upon and round about me in a manner almost marvellous.....A light perfectly ineffable shone in my soul that almost prostrated me on the ground..... This light seemed like the brightness of the sun in every direction. It was too intense for the eyes.....I think I

¹ His objections to it would perhaps be removed if the facts had been fully recorded. One of his points is that the disciples were in a frame of mind too calm to admit of visions. Where is the evidence of this? Only in accounts written long afterwards. It was perfectly natural for the Evangelists to write calmly after the lapse of half a century.

knew something then, by actual experience, of that light that prostrated Paul on the way to Damascus. It was surely a light such as I could not have endured long (*Memoirs of President Finney*).”¹

Another account is still more striking: “There was no fire and no light in the room; nevertheless, it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterwards, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary, it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet.....It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect (*Finney’s Memoirs*).”²

These strange experiences are ascribed by Professor James to their subjects “having a large subliminal region involving nervous excitability.” This peculiarity has been exhibited by human beings in all ages, and in the first century it would seem to have been frequently manifested. If mental states could have then been carefully analysed, we might never have heard of the resurrection of Jesus, or required a “telegram from heaven” to explain it.

¹ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 251-52.

² *Ibid*, p. 255.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE trouble with Christians is that they do not understand the Bible. In its interpretation they customarily ignore all such qualifications as are necessary for a European mind to understand the Asiatic temperament; they leave severely alone all questions relating to the doubtful date and authorship of the New Testament writings, and in particular the well-known practice of the first century to attribute anonymous works to traditional authors; and they treat as literally accurate the numerous passages in which facts are unconsciously distorted by figurative modes of expression. They take symbol for reality, poetry for fact, legend and allegory for history, dreams and visions for divine communications; they personify abstractions, and, generally, apply inappropriate methods to fluctuating and imaginative traditions.

Metaphorical language is often capable of more than one interpretation. In *God and the Bible* Matthew Arnold has pointed out the errors that may arise from undue literalism. Jesus, he thinks, did predict his resurrection, but only in a spiritual sense. The words in John xx. 9, "as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead," supply "irrefragable proof that the sayings of Jesus about his Resurrection cannot originally have been just what our Gospels report; that these sayings, as they now come to us, must have been somewhat moulded and accentuated by the belief in the

Resurrection." In like manner the phrase "and the third day I shall be perfected," which is a reminiscence of the prophet Hosea, is in other places given "the third day I shall rise again." "Here," says Arnold, "we lay our finger, almost certainly, upon the veritable foundation for the belief that Jesus had himself announced he would rise from the dead on the third day.....Inevitably the disciples materialised it all, wrested it all into a prophesying of bodily re-appearance and miracle. And they did the like also with the words: 'I go to the Father; I go away and come again to you; a little while and ye see me not, and again a little while and ye shall see me.' To these words the disciples gave a turn, they placed them in a connection to suit the belief which alone, after the death of Jesus, could reassure and console them—the belief in his speedy resuscitation and bodily re-appearance on earth, his temporary re-withdrawal and ascension into heaven, to be followed soon by his triumphal bodily advent to avenge and judge.

"It could not but be so. *It was written that in his name should be preached to all nations repentance unto remission of sins.....*The genuine promise of Jesus was the promise of a spiritual resurrection; and this promise his disciples misapprehended, misconnected, and obscured. Only on this supposition is even their own version of the history intelligible."¹ As we have suggested, the existence of this tendency to misunderstanding seems to be shown by the confusion between the promise of the Comforter and the promise of a personal return. The repeated promise of the latter does not harmonise with the words: "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," which imply only a

¹ *God and the Bible*, p. 181.

spiritual presence, to which physical absence was a condition precedent.

After all, however, the misconception is probably chargeable against the later Gospel-compilers rather than against the personal companions of Jesus. What proof have we that the Apostles did not interpret the Messianic anticipations of Jesus in the fluid and poetic senses in which they were evidently announced? And what proof have we that events were not made to correspond with supposed predictions of them?

It is to the modern inquirer a defect in the so-called evidence for the resurrection that it rests on authority, and on authority alone. That is, we are asked to believe that a particular person rose from the dead on the mere statements, and far from explicit statements, of men who were totally incompetent judges, and not one of whom even claims to be an eye-witness.

Now, authority may be a good principle as long as there is nothing safer to be had. But what if the authority be mistaken? To be valid authority must be infallible, and to be infallible no human authority can, without presumption, claim. We have to see that authority rests on fact and reason, and to ascertain this the evidence must be examined. A good and pious man tells us that Jesus rose from the dead. Does he know this? No. He believes it. His belief is based, not on personal knowledge, but on the similar belief of others. Does he know these others? No. Who were they? Did they claim to know, or merely to believe? If so, on what evidence did *they* believe? Is the whole of the evidence they had available for us? If not, why not? If it is available, we may estimate it quite differently from them. If it is not available, we cannot be asked to believe as they did.

Thus, not even an infallible authority can relieve us from the labour of investigation. The infallibility has to be proved. And even a perfect authority would have its disadvantages. Personal investigation is the surest way known to us of arriving at truth. The acquirement of knowledge, the culture of the faculties, is the wise, the natural, the only way by which we can perceive the true relations of things. On the other hand, reliance upon authority naturally tends to the disuse and consequent degradation of thought. Men accustomed to bow before authority become disinclined and unable to examine its claims, submissive to its decrees, and prone to think them final. Authority is valuable only as its bases are capable of verification. In religious teaching it affords but a provisional resting-place. "Its chief use is to guide *action*, and assist the formation of habits, before the judgment is ripe. As applied to mere *opinion*, its sole function is to guide inquiry."¹ The authority of truth itself, so far as known, must always be paramount to that of its individual interpreters. Has not the world had enough of authority in religion?

Like everything else, theology is subject to the laws of evolution. The extent to which the dogma of the resurrection has shifted from a physical fact to a spiritual experience may be seen by comparing the official doctrine of the Church of England with the present belief of its cultured adherents. Of the Thirty-nine Articles the fourth bluntly declares that "Christ did truly rise again from death, and take again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all

¹ F. W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*, p. 137.

men at the last day." A similar view is unflinchingly held by Bishop Pearson, while even a learned writer of our own time can assert that the resurrection was "a reanimation of the dead body of Jesus by a return of his soul from the spirit-world and a rising of body and soul from the grave to a new life."¹ The materialism of the orthodox doctrine must appear distressingly crude to the author of *Philochristus*, who writes: "The essence of the resurrection of Christ is that His Spirit should have really triumphed over death, and not that his body should have risen from the grave."²

Equally noticeable is the fact that, whereas the Gospel accounts were once relied upon as sufficient and accurate, the main effort of modern apologists is directed to establish the belief of Paul as a satisfactory foundation for ours. This change of front indicates that the weakness of the Gospel evidence has become more perceptible to its defenders. It is to Paul's teaching that we owe that notion of a "spiritual body" which is thought to reconcile the strange contradictions of the Evangelists. This conception is somewhat crudely embodied in the following words of the late Dr. Harold Browne, Bishop of Winchester: "We must therefore conclude that, though Christ rose with the same body in which he died, and that body neither did nor shall cease to be a human body, still it acquired, either at his resurrection or at his ascension, the qualities and attributes of a spiritual as distinguished by the Apostle from a natural body, of an incorruptible as distinguished from a corruptible body."³

Such a conclusion, unintelligible in itself, and disputed

¹ Dr. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. i., p. 175.

² Dr. E. A. Abbott, *The Kernel and the Husk*, p. 247.

³ *Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 107.

as it is by many Christian scholars, justifies our argument that the "spiritual body" is a doctrinal necessity rather than a fact of experience. Evidently the assertion that Jesus "rose with the same body in which he died" is made merely because certain Gospel statements imply it; while the assumption that his body gradually or suddenly¹ underwent some indefinable change is made merely because certain other Gospel statements indicate that the appearances of Jesus were non-material. How a body can continue to be a human body when it no longer possesses the attributes of a human body is for the apologist to explain. Nor is it quite correct to say that the Apostle really "distinguishes" between a corruptible and an incorruptible body. He merely asserts their existence, without defining in what respect they differ. We have no experience of an incorruptible human body. It is manifest that the Bishop of Winchester had not the slightest idea of the time at which the attributes of a spiritual body were "acquired," or the nature of the supposed change. The New Testament writers imagined that this mysterious change could take effect during a person's earthly life. The transfiguration myth implies it, and the Apostle Paul boldly asserts it, though it turned out that he was mistaken.² Dr. Browne postulates unknown qualities superadded by unknown means to a dead body at an unknown time, and that on the authority of unknown informants, who contradict one another with entire unconcern.

It has been shown that the first century was pre-eminently a time of abnormal religious conditions. A great wave of religious emotion swept over Judea, of

¹ On this point the usual divergences prevail, Weiss and Martensen, for example, taking exactly opposite views.

² 1 Cor. xv. 52.

which the Christian cult formed only one manifestation. The evidence of writings emanating from that age is throughout tainted with superstition and error. Consider one feature only—the implicit belief in angelic appearances. Angels look very pretty in pictures; but we require some better evidence for their real existence than artistic fancy. Nowadays we get along very well without angels; modern knowledge has banished them, along with the demons who were thought by Jesus to cause diseases. To the Gospel writers angels were manifestly real beings. They are represented as visible to the naked eye, and as repeatedly uttering words in a particular human dialect.¹ However firmly we may hold to the good faith of the Gospel writers, we are compelled to admit that this belief of theirs was, in an objective sense, erroneous.

In discussing the resurrection we have to consider not merely the alleged event, but its causes. The apologist insists upon a miracle. Obviously a miracle assumes the interposition of a personal deity. In order, then, to prove the reality of the event, we must prove also the reality and operation of the only cause which could produce the event. There are, indeed, at least five postulates concerning which the apologist may fairly be called upon for proof. In the case of such a miracle as a dead man returning to life, assumptions and inferences must be pronounced utterly insufficient. What should be, not taken for granted, but proved, are these five points:—

- (1) The existence of an efficient cause of the miracle.
- (2) That this cause actually operated.

¹ A similar power of vocal utterance is several times attributed to devils, whose real existence no enlightened person can admit (see Matt. viii. 31; Mark iii. 11, etc.). Even orthodoxy must perceive the anachronism of attributing to devils belief in the divinity of Jesus before it had been arrived at by his own disciples.

(3) That the death of Jesus should be clearly ascertained.

(4) That his body was seen to leave the tomb alive.

(5) That his body floated away into the sky.

It is not necessary to elaborate these points in detail. With regard to the first, setting aside all the philosophical difficulties involved, it is to us inconceivable that, if God intervened to work a miracle, he would not have ensured the records of his action being faithfully and sufficiently transmitted for the benefit of all whom they might concern. As the matter stands, these records are in such a state that they arouse endless perplexities among those who desire to know the truth. That any infraction of the law of death took place in the case of Jesus cannot for a moment be admitted. It is not only that the evidence is meagre, indirect, contradictory, and emanates from credulous sources. We cannot get away from the fact that the conception of universal law constitutes by its very nature a presumption against miracle which no testimony whatever can set aside. Such a conception could not have been formed by the Evangelists.

That Jesus actually died on the cross seems, on the whole, probable, though it is far from proved by the Gospel statements. Strong though the objections to the Swoon Theory are, they might not prove insurmountable if the facts were fully known, and that view is preferable to the untenable supposition of a miraculous return to life. The difficulties of the Reanimation Theory lie in its incompatibility with the only accounts we have of the events; but, as the truth of these accounts is an unknown quantity, they cannot be held to refute any particular view. What the Gospel narratives omit may be so material, what they relate may be so modified

by tradition, that we should hesitate to assert the falsity of the supposition that Jesus revived after his crucifixion, retired to Galilee, and died in an obscurity which neither the Evangelists nor anyone else was able to penetrate.¹

That any human being saw the body of Jesus rise from the tomb is nowhere stated in the New Testament. The accounts to that effect in some of the apocryphal Gospels are universally admitted to be legendary. Evidence of identity, therefore, we do not possess.

That the body of Jesus, whether "glorified" or not, went up into the airless space by which the earth is surrounded is quite incredible. Persons who imagined that "heaven" was a locality a little way beyond the clouds found no difficulty at all in believing that the ascension actually took place. This consideration alone shows the wide difference between their point of view and ours. In the light of modern knowledge it may fairly be termed surprising that apologetic writers are still content to adopt the standpoint of a bygone and credulous epoch, and to believe in such a miracle on practically no evidence whatever. We hold that the ascension is nothing more than a pious fiction, framed in order to account for that disappearance of the body of

¹ A recent writer, Mr. P. E. Vizard, has shown that the Swoon Theory is not so baseless as is commonly supposed (*The Resurrection of Jesus: A Plea for the Reanimation Theory*, 1906). In early times the actuality of the death of Jesus was frequently disputed. Farrar mentions that the early Fathers all appeal to the spear-thrust as proof of death. They would not have done this had the death been universally admitted; and, of course, the spear-thrust is itself doubtful. Mr. Nesbit's *Christ, Christians, and Christianity* also argues with some cogency for the Reanimation Theory, and, so far as we are aware, he is the only writer who contends that Paul met Jesus in the flesh after the latter's supposed death, and received his "revelations" from him by word of mouth. Paul, it is true, says that he had "known Christ after the flesh"; but this appears to imply merely that he had formerly held sensuous views regarding the nature of the kingdom.

Jesus which the dogmatist is no more able than the unbeliever to explain with any approach to certainty.

One important feature in the resurrection narratives is usually quite ignored by their defenders. Where was Jesus during the intervals between his appearances? If he went about with a semi-physical body, he must have been perceptible to the senses of other persons than his followers. There is no record that anyone else saw him. If he continued to teach his disciples for several weeks, it is simply incredible that, with far stronger reasons than before for the preservation of the teaching given during that period, it should have been utterly lost. The inference is that the ascription of the forty days' supernatural tuition in "the things concerning the kingdom of God" is nothing more than a product of pious and ignorant imagination.

As to the duration of Jesus' supposed sojourn on earth after his death the greatest latitude of opinion prevailed in the early Church. According to Irenæus, the Valentinians believed that Jesus remained on earth for a year and a half. The Ascension of Isaiah puts the period at about the same—545 days; while the *Pistis Sophia* assumes it as prolonged to eleven years.¹ These curious discrepancies in the tradition make it rationally impossible to accept any part of it, even that embodied in the Gospels, as bearing the impress of historic truth.

We have throughout proceeded on the recognised principle that an alleged fact of history must be elucidated by critical methods. This question of the resurrection is not one to be settled merely by a quibbling textual criticism of doubtful copies of non-

¹ Nesbit, *Christ, Christians, and Christianity*, p. 300. It has even been held by a German writer, J. A. Brennecke, that Jesus remained on earth in bodily form for twenty-seven years.

existent books. Evidence is something more than this. Evidence includes the experience of those untold millions to whose senses no such phenomenon has ever been presented. Evidence means also an intelligent perception of that continuity of natural processes which this larger experience has furnished. And that evidence must be viewed, not in the luminous haze of mystical aspiration, but in the clear sunlight of unclouded reason. All historical facts must be established by historical methods.

Strauss has well summed up the inadequacy of the New Testament accounts :—

The various evangelical writers only agree as to a few of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection ; the designation of the locality in one excludes the appearances narrated by the rest ; the determination of time in another leaves no space for the narratives of his fellow Evangelists ; the enumeration of a third is given without any regard to the events reported by his predecessors ; lastly, among several appearances recounted by various narrators, each claims to be the last, and yet has nothing in common with the others. Hence nothing but wilful blindness can prevent the perception that no one of the narrators knew and presupposed what another records ; that each again had heard a different account of the matter ; and that, consequently, at an early period there were current only uncertain and very varied reports concerning the appearances of the risen Jesus.¹

On the positive side we maintain that the evidence—even the evidence of the New Testament alone—strongly favours the presumption that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus arose in subjective impressions. Of the true nature of these impressions we have not been

¹ *Life of Jesus*, p. 727.

sufficiently informed to justify any dogmatic pronouncement ; but the evidence that they were experienced is, in any case, complete enough to bar assent to the supposition of a miraculous variation of natural law. Taken in conjunction with the unanswerable negative criticism, and bearing in mind that the strong but limited Messianic prepossessions of the first Christians formed an important element in the case, the Vision Theory may be said to afford the most probable and satisfactory solution of the problem. It should always be recognised, however, that any theory we may adopt cannot be other than tentative, and should never be allowed to blind us to the imperfections of the historical evidence.

In the language of the New Testament we have found many obvious indications that the point of view of the writers was essentially different from our own, and that their statements, therefore, cannot be interpreted without reference to the mental environment in which they were made. The extent to which symbolical language is employed in the Christian records is little suspected by those whom custom has made familiar with its phraseology. That spiritual relations are commonly expressed in terms of material facts it needs but the merest glance at the Fourth Gospel to perceive. Such words as "bread," "water," "flesh," "leaven," "blood," "vine," "sheep," are said to have been persistently and without explanation used by Jesus, in spite of frequent misapprehension on the part not only of hostile Jews, but of his own sympathetic followers. It would not be surprising to find the terms "resurrection" and "ascension" used in a similarly undefined spiritual sense. John's slip, in his third chapter, we have already noticed ; and in the account of the raising of Lazarus we meet the expression : "I am the resurrection and

the life"—a phrase which plainly emphasises that spiritual aspect of the raising from the dead of which the disciples are sometimes said to have been ignorant.

An undoubted clue to the genesis of the resurrection belief has been discovered in those apocryphal writings with which the first century was, one might say, flooded. With Jews and Christians these were equally popular, and it is clear that religious conceptions evolved by the former were freely appropriated by the latter. Contrary to the literary customs of modern times, it was a well-recognised practice for works to be composed and issued in the names of saints and heroes who had died long before. No sense of impropriety was felt in doing this; on the contrary, the supposed author was thought to be honoured by propagating in his name the opinions which the current tradition attributed to him. Almost every one of the Apostles had a Gospel fathered upon him at some time or another. The unique religious conditions of the first Christian century and its predecessor must, in fact, be duly considered before we have a right to frame any theory of the origin of the Christian faith.

Nor can we disregard the unquestionable fact that the Gospel writers put into the mouth of Jesus expressions which there is good reason to suppose that he never uttered. Even if this conclusion is demurred to, it seems impossible for any candid controversialist to deny that the late appearance and dubious authorship of the Gospels render their literal accuracy highly problematical. This matter can easily be brought to the test. Is it possible that Jesus spoke of his ascension *as a past event* long before its supposed occurrence, or that he referred to the martyrdom of Zacharias as a fact of past history nearly forty years before it happened? Could he, while John the Baptist was still alive, have said that

from the days of John “*until now*” the kingdom of heaven suffered violence? Is it reasonably credible that those long discourses in the Fourth Gospel which are thought to convey the finest spiritual teaching of Jesus were really spoken, when the other three Evangelists give not the faintest inkling of even their general purport? Did Jesus give to his disciples a power to raise the dead which they did not exercise? Did he actually term “children of the devil” those Jews “who believed on him”? Is it true that he deliberately made his public teaching obscure in order that his hearers might *not* be converted? Did he tell his simple-minded peasant followers that they should sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel?

It is useless to multiply instances; enough has been said to show that the Gospel writers frequently blundered. To use their careless and contradictory statements as evidence for a miraculous variation of the laws of nature is the height of presumption and the triumph of unreason.

The extraordinary degree in which the New Testament writers were determined towards belief in the resurrection of Jesus by their strange methods of interpreting the Jewish scriptures must be obvious to every reader of the Gospels and Book of Acts. Both directly and indirectly, the formation of the belief seems to have been facilitated by these methods—in the first case by finding definite predictions where none existed; in the second by assuming that, as a spiritual Messiah, Jesus was a being of greater glory than the prophets of old whom he superseded. According to the Gospel statements, the Apostles had, previously to the death of Jesus, formed the conception that he was the Messiah. As a worldly ideal this conception was put an end to by his crucifixion.

Thrown back upon a spiritual interpretation of his mission, they found, in the idea that he was the heavenly Messiah foreshadowed by the Book of Enoch, the source of their revived faith and zeal. And, as the legends of the transfiguration and ascension indicate, it was *as the heavenly Messiah* that the disciples believed Jesus to have appeared. The nature of the appearances was determined by the nature of the ideas they had already formed, and in accordance with these preconceptions the facts were moulded. The mind of the age habitually translated psychological processes into external events, and in that sense the visions were the "product of the mental condition of the seers." A few observations by M. Renan may be useful in showing how the resurrection belief came to be formed:—

Jesus, although constantly speaking of resurrection and of the new life, had never said quite distinctly that he would rise again in his flesh.....Several remarks recalled of the Master—those, above all, in which he had foretold his future advent—might be interpreted in the sense that he would come forth from the tomb. Such a belief was, moreover, so natural that the disciples' faith would have sufficed to create it in all completeness. The great prophets, Enoch and Elijah, had not known death. People were even beginning to believe that the patriarchs and chief men of the ancient law were not really dead, and that their bodies were in their sepulchres at Hebron living and animated.....To admit that death could be victorious over Jesus, over him who came to destroy its empire, was the pitch of absurdity. The very idea that he was capable of suffering had formerly revolted his disciples. They had, then, no choice between despair and a heroic affirmation. A shrewd man might have predicted from the Saturday that Jesus would live again.¹

With the pious of those days visions were frequent.²

¹ *The Apostles*, Hutchison's translation, 6d. ed., pp. 33, 34.

² At a later date Tertullian remarked that the greater number of converts came to the knowledge of God by means of visions.

Who shall say that the tragic death of their Master was not the event that called the sub-conscious self of the disciples into warmth and activity? Faith, not sight, is the keynote of the Fourth Gospel. To the pious mind death *is* resurrection, because the soul is then freed from fleshly shackles to rise into the higher life of heaven, though whether "heaven" is a locality or a condition no one seems to know.¹ Nor did Jesus, though he is said to have come from heaven, throw much light on the obscurity. "A singular feeling began to come to light; all hesitation seemed a lack of loyalty and love; men felt ashamed to hang back; the desire to see was forbidden. The saying, 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,' summed up the situation. It was held more generous to believe without proof. True-hearted friends did not wish they had had a vision, even as, later, St. Louis refused to witness an ecclesiastical miracle, that he might not be robbed of the merit of faith."² Renan's expressions are, perhaps, here and there open to objection; but his explanation is not wholly fanciful. It has been verified in the experience of thousands. The mystic rises superior to the trammels of the physical senses. Such a view is really in harmony with that symbolical method, that spiritual teaching, recorded of Jesus which seems to bear the clearest impress of his personality. The question whether the whole of the Gospel records constitute a synthesis of current ethical and religious teachings attributed to a purely ideal figure is one that cannot be discussed here.

If the conclusion of many modern critics is just, that the resurrection belief arose in Galilee, that is a further

¹ As Luke xx. shows, Jesus unquestionably used the term "resurrection" in this purer spiritual sense.

² Renan, *The Apostles*, p. 39.

point in favour of the subjective explanation. At the apprehension of Jesus his disciples "forsook him and fled." Several expressions in the Gospels favour the presumption that it was to their native province that the disciples made their way. There, amid the old familiar surroundings, in its quiet fields and green valleys, their minds must have dwelt on the spiritual teaching of Jesus, grasped for the first time its deeper significance, and pondered upon its fulfilment of their scriptural ideals. External scenes often powerfully assist in the revival of past associations; and it would be but natural if the former communion of spirit, the idea of the Master's continued presence, gave rise to visions of his bodily form on the mountain slopes or the lake shores where he had taught them the parables of the kingdom.

The evidence we have examined forces upon us the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus as a physical event never happened. But the reasons why it was believed to have happened can be approximately known, and are partially revealed by the Christian scriptures themselves. As these documents are the product of a later generation, it is impossible to be sure that the exact words of either Jesus or his original followers have come down to us, while the negative presumption is overpowering. If Jesus was far greater than his reporters, misunderstandings were inevitable, and we cannot suppose that these were removed by the supernatural agency in which they so firmly believed. We, in fact, have to contemplate Jesus "through the medium of modes of conception vitally opposed to the spirit of his teaching." To the resurrection, in fact, we have not a single trustworthy witness. Even Paul cannot be accepted as such, because he arrived at his belief by processes which were independent of, and in some

respects opposed to, those of the older Apostles. Evidently the great religious reformation of the first century took various forms. The significant reference to Apollos in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts confirms this view. Twenty years after the death of Jesus this man, an ardent preacher of the new faith, had not been baptised into it, and knew only "the baptism of John." He probably knew very little of the career of Jesus, and may never have heard of such an event as the resurrection. Yet he was "mighty in the scriptures" (that is, of course, the Jewish scriptures), and from those ambiguous oracles proved "that Jesus was the Christ." As he was "born in Alexandria," we cannot suppose that he was unaffected by the speculations then common in that city. And it should be noted that when, in the next chapter of Acts, Paul arrives for the first time at Ephesus, he meets there with "certain disciples" who had never heard of the "Holy Ghost." These also knew only of "the baptism of John." If the disciples of the Baptist were so widely spread as this implies, it is clear that an important religious movement parallel with Christianity must have been long in progress, that there were at least two partially independent "streams of Messianic faith."¹ And the facility with which Paul made his Ephesian converts suggests that this movement had a good deal to do with his success.

The resurrection faith illustrates on a great scale a persistent tendency of human nature. That is the chief reason of its prolonged survival. It pathetically embodies the nobler as well as the inferior religious emotions. With all its sins and failures, humanity has a passionate faith in the never-dying power of purity and goodness.

¹ Martineau, *Studies of Christianity*, p. 424.

And its craving for the marvellous is gratified by the thought that the wonderful peasant of Galilee has revealed to man a glorious and illimitable life beyond the tomb.

Yet this tendency has not been concentrated upon the figure of Jesus alone. To the devotee of old the object of his worship could not die, and pass like other men through Death's unrelenting portals. The subjective yearning for what ought to be animates the pious Hindoo who holds that Chrishna lives again in repeated avatars. With the Greeks and Syrians Adonis blooms again in fresher life. The Egyptian Osiris treads once more the happy fields. To the Romans Romulus, ere ascending to heaven, is for a time restored, and during a country walk converses with a friend.¹ The life of Gautama Buddha exhibits many striking analogies with that of Jesus, and after his death similar legends clustered round his memory, and the same deifying process went on. It may be that all these myths are survivals of primitive nature-cults, and certain features of the Gospel story, especially the accounts of the birth and death of Jesus and the traditional dates of those events, suggest the influence of earlier pagan concepts.²

Nor are such myths confined to any Eastern people. "In every part of the world, and among peoples in every stage of civilisation or barbarism, we find legends relating how some national hero or sage, at the end of his earthly career, is transported to some supernatural abode without having tasted of death. The story often concludes with a prophecy that the vanished hero shall

¹ For a parallel to the Emmaus story see Plutarch's life of Romulus.

² For information on these subjects the reader is referred to Mr. J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs* and *Christianity and Mythology*.

some day come again to establish a reign of righteousness and prosperity among his people. This myth, in one form or another, exists among the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Persians, Germans, Franks, Irish, Welsh, Cornish, Bretons, Danes, Finns, Aztecs, Algonquins, Hurons, and many other nations, both civilised and savage.”¹ Thus King Arthur reposes in

the island-valley of Avilion,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly—

whence he was expected to return in majesty. Or, according to the Cornish legend, he hovers, in the shape of a raven, about the storm-beaten rocks of Tintagel till the day of judgment. Barbarossa sleeps in his mountain cave, and Charlemagne among his priceless treasures, until the time of their awakening in renewed glory. Olger Danske lies in an enchanted cavern till the time of his country's sore need, when he will reappear and vanquish her enemies. It was even believed that this hero was seen fighting against the English at the Battle of Copenhagen. A similar devotion has been lavished on worthless objects, such as Nero in the ancient world, and the Duke of Monmouth in the modern.

Far into the nineteenth century such beliefs have held their ground. “Long after Bonaparte had been dead and buried.....the veterans of the *grande armée* continued to believe that their Emperor was still alive, and would return some day to lead on the French eagles again to victory.” An old soldier in a provincial town firmly held this belief, and, on its becoming known that a

¹ C. S. Boswell, *Myths of the Great Departed* (*Gentleman's Magazine*, November, 1889).

relative of Napoleon who strikingly resembled him was to enter the town one night at the head of some troops, a party of young men determined to play a trick on the veteran. He was told of the expected arrival, and placed on duty at the gate of the town awaiting the appointed hour. "It came, the sound of drums approached, the troops entered the place, and at their head rode one whose calm face and clear-cut features awakened in the old soldier's mind memories of the glorious past. In an agony of joy he exclaimed '*C'est lui!*'—he dropped his musket, threw up his arms, and with a cry of '*Vive l'Empereur!*' fell dead."¹

No one supposes that the existence of such myths alone disproves the resurrection of Jesus. What they do show is the strength and persistence of the myth-making faculty, of imagination giving "to airy nothing a local habitation and a name"; they show how reluctant men are to realise that the dead hero is for ever gone. We cannot suppose that they have no analogy with the faith that Jesus also returned to life, or that this same tendency did not help to mould that faith into a concrete and materialised doctrine.

The resurrection belief is strong because it fulfils a spiritual necessity, because it ministers to human weakness. Men dread those terrors of death and the future which Christian theology has mainly created, and fondly imagine that Jesus has for ever removed them. He rose from the dead—that is thought to be the divine answer to the cry of the weary heart for aid and comfort. He has ascended into heaven—that responds to the yearning of the spirit, and assures it of a conscious immortality of bliss. But the seeker after truth cannot find consolation

¹ C. S. Boswell.

in hopes which reason pronounces fallacious. If men insist that Jesus rose because he was deity incarnate, his resurrection can be no pledge of theirs. If he saw not corruption, we know that our bodies dissolve into those earthly elements from which they mysteriously came. To the modern Christian his own resurrection means the continued life of the spirit after death. Why should he be so reluctant to adopt the same conception in the case of Jesus? The Jew of old hoped from age to age for a deliverer from oppression who never appeared. If the Christian looks for the return of his Saviour in bodily form, will he, too, not hope in vain?

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