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THE
MEMOIRS OF JESUS

BY
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THE MEMOIRS OF JESUS.

“I esteem the Gospels to be thoroughly genuine, for there shines from them the reflected splendor of a sublimity, proceeding from the person of Jesus Christ, of so Divine a kind as only the Divine could ever have manifested upon earth.”—GOETHE.

BETWEEN thirty and forty years after the Crucifixion of Jesus—the exact date it is not possible to ascertain—the apostles and apostolic men perceived the necessity of writing down the memorials of their Master’s life and death. At first the things which He had said and done seemed so vivid in their memory, and the call to be constantly proclaiming them seemed so good a security of their preservation, that written records would appear superfluous.* According to the earliest tradition it was Matthew who took the initia-

*It is necessary to remind ourselves that to publish a book was not so obvious an undertaking in the peasant circles of Galilee or Jerusalem as it is to us. The notes of the Lord’s doings and sayings had, we may surmise, been long put down by the apostles for their private use before any one of them thought of collecting and editing them in a connected form.

tive in compiling memoirs of his Master ; he had preached chiefly to Jews, and when he saw his way to proclaim the gospel amongst people of a different kind he committed the substance of his preaching to paper in the Hebrew language. He wrote out, we need not question, the way in which he was accustomed to preach Christ from the Ancient Scriptures by showing how this and that prophecy had been fulfilled in Him, and he wrote out a number of the Lord's discourses which were imprinted almost word for word on his own memory and on the minds of many others who had seen and heard the Lord. We may surmise that Matthew's preaching had never attempted to set forth a chronological account of the life, nor had it marked very distinctly the occasion or circumstances of each event or discourse. It was such an utterance or series of utterances as one might expect from a fervent disciple who was neither a profound student of the ancient Scriptures nor an accomplished literary workman, but was overwhelmingly charged with the spirit and power of the Lord who had commissioned him to preach. It is generally supposed that our Gospel according to St. Matthew is the Greek version of this

first evangelic narrative. It certainly bears some marks of such an origin as is here suggested.

Our second Gospel had, we may gather from the fragment of Papias quoted by Eusebius, a similar origin. Its author was one who served the Apostle Peter as an interpreter, and jotted down his reminiscences of the Lord's life as he was in the habit of narrating them in his preaching. The interpreter probably translated the Apostle's Aramaic vernacular into the Hellenistic dialect; which was the *lingua franca* of the time.

Our third Gospel sufficiently describes its own origin in its opening sentences; it is a painstaking compilation of the several memoirs and reminiscences of those who had seen and known Jesus, made by one who had enjoyed good opportunities of communication with these earliest witnesses. The fourth Gospel may be left for a later stage in our investigation.

We see, then, what the three Synoptic Gospels are according to their own claims and the assertions made about them by primitive writers. They are, as Justin Martyr generally calls them in his apologetic writings, *Memoirs* of the Lord. They do not profess

to be accurate in a chronological or a historical sense, still less do they lay claim to be divinely guaranteed against error ; nay, they do not even make any pretence to inspiration in any special sense. They present themselves to us as authentic memoirs written, as Justin Martyr says, by the Apostles or their immediate successors.

All the difficulties which have been found in the Gospels during the last half-century of stormy criticism, and all the scepticism which has been excited concerning them, must be attributed to the well-meant endeavors of the Church to represent the Gospels as something more than they claim to be. The evangelists have been represented as the mere amanuenses of the Spirit of God ; their infallibility has been made a point of faith ; to question it has been represented as undermining the Gospel itself. The intention was good ; the idea was that in honoring the writers we should be honoring Him of whom they wrote, and that by artificially surrounding their authority with a mysterious sanction of inspiration we should protect and establish the truth which they deliver. It is as if some ardent Cromwellians, eager to secure the reputation of their hero, had insinuated

the dogma that Carlyle's life of him was infallibly inspired. But the well-meant endeavor has entirely failed of its object. Well meant, no doubt it was, but it was unnecessary, and has proved to be mischievous. For every fault of the narratives, every obscurity, or trivial contradiction, has thus been charged upon the Holy Ghost, and antagonists of the faith, instead of being confronted with the obvious truths contained in the Gospels, have been encouraged to lay hold of the difficulties in them, and to rest their rejection of the whole on their dubiety concerning a part. In our own day a well-known scientific writer has been allowed to draw the attention of multitudes from the essential issues by criticising the possession of the swine at Gadara, and orthodoxy, committed to its great dogma, has felt bound to vindicate the story against the criticism with the desperate feeling that, if one statement in the Gospels is challenged, Christ and His salvation are called in question. Indeed, few dogmas could have been more unfortunate than this dogma about the infallible inspiration of the evangelists. For at last the quiet question is put, even by reverent believers, What proof have you of this infallible inspiration? Do the writers claim

it themselves? No. Do other writers of the New Testament, St. Paul, or St. Peter, claim it for them? No. On what, then, does it rest? And at last the poor and insufficient answer is forced to come out, We have no reason to give except the arbitrary dogma of the Church, and we suppose the dogma was invented as a security for the truth of Jesus.

Now, the simple fact seems to be this: the record of Jesus, His Person, His ways, His words, His works, is so marvellous, so unique, so Divine, that it has cast its glory over the recorders. Writings which tell so mighty a tale must themselves be mighty. The vehicle of such a revelation must surely be itself a revelation. This is where the mistake has arisen. But the wisdom of God has decided far otherwise. The greatest revelation of all, the Person and Life and Death of Jesus, the Son of God, requires for its record nothing but the simple witness of those who saw and heard. There is no need of an Isaiah, nor even of a Paul. The splendor of human genius, the interposition of exceptional gifts, would here be out of place, and would obscure rather than illustrate the matter in hand. Let the great Fact—so the wisdom of God seems to say—be simply reflected in the

unimaginative, uncreative minds of a few unlettered men; let their limited intelligence be burdened only with the task of remembering, and let their memories find a way into writing as time goes on, so that the portrait of the Saviour, taken, as it were, unconsciously, may in this artless way pass down to posterity. That portrait shall not be the work of great painters, but rather a photographic impression, drawn by the finger of light on the hearts of those who were exposed to His loveliness, holiness, power, and love.

In taking this view of our Synoptic Gospels, in placing them on the plane of unsophisticated and unreflective historical memoir, we are, it is to be observed, only following such indications as they give themselves. In surrendering the far more imposing dogmatic assumptions which have come down to us by tradition, we not only return from tradition to Scripture, but we quietly slip by all those criticisms and questions which have in recent years been directed, not against the Gospels themselves, but against the theory of the Gospels gradually developed by the Church. But those who slumber in the lethargy of dogmatism start up with a cry. If the evangelists are not divinely inspired, we have lost

our Lord; we know Him only in these records; how shall we be assured that the records are true unless we are first convinced that they are written by God? The answer to this cry of alarm, which it is the object of the present chapter to give, may be summed up in three brief statements, afterwards to be enforced and developed.

First, the Lord is not taken away, but truly presented in authentic contemporary records. Second, the truth of the picture is guaranteed not by the writers, but by the picture itself. Third, the whole gist of the testimony given by these records is that the subject of them is alive and is among His people now, and therefore we are brought to a very plain issue, which is this: if He is alive and active and recognized among us now, how can it be said that His reality rests on the authority of any ancient writers? And if He is not alive and active and recognized among us now, of what avail is a writing, even infallibly inspired, which bears it as its constant burden, that He should live and be with His people to the end of the world?

In a word, the answer to the terrified cry of a disturbed dogmatism is briefly this: the Gospels are a historical witness to a Living

Christ; their revelation consists of the picture which they present of Him; they are verified by Him, not He by them.

First of all, then, let us steadily realize that we claim nothing for the Three Gospels now under consideration, but that they are the honest reports delivered to posterity by those who saw it of the most memorable life ever lived upon earth. There is in them, as all readers who are not hardened against them by dogmatic presuppositions have observed, a simplicity and directness which admit of only one explanation. There is no trace of the art which is constructing a work of the imagination; there are none of the familiar marks of legend; the idea that the stories were the gradual growth of legend had to yield to the hard fact that between the events and the records there was no time for a legend to grow. Never was there a more sober historical document than the Gospel of Luke. Using all the materials which are in his hands, the author sits down to compile as complete a record of the life as he possibly could. The Gospel of Mark—we may well challenge the judgment of every unbiassed mind—is transparently drawn from the life. Let any one sit down in a quiet hour and read

through without stopping this brief harmonious story of the public life lived by Jesus during the three years of His ministry, and the impression cannot be avoided—not only the subject matter, but the very modes of expression, the minute touches of versimilitude, the little flashes of observation that occur only to those who have been present and have seen, confirm it—that this is a faithful tale drawn from the facts themselves. And though Matthew has neither the vividness of Mark, nor the historical manner of Luke, it carries an unmistakable authenticity of its own; it teems with *λόγια*, as Papias called them, the utterances of Jesus, and we may well ask of any critic, How could these discourses have come into existence? Could they be invented by a writer of the calibre of this evangelist? Are they ingenious products of the study and of the literary hack? The question answers itself. The very substance of the first Gospel is the proof that the writer is simply the recorder of what was said and done.

Indeed the authenticity of these unsophisticated biographies would never have been challenged if we had not asserted of them that they are something more than they are. They

would have stood on the same unquestioned footing as the other biographical notices which have come down to us from antiquity, if we would have left them occupy that ground, and they would have delivered their witness to Him of whom they speak without distracting any attention from Him to themselves; they would have remained in their joyful self-effacement, anonymous, unpretentious, pointing with simple unanimity of heart to Him. Nothing better could be wished for them than that they might come to us afresh, among the writings of Josephus and Philo, or side by side with Seneca and Suetonius, asking us simply to examine them as writings of antiquity; and immediately the surpassing splendor of their contents would take captive this present age, as it did that Second Century in which they first became widely known.

But it may be said, apart from all extravagant claims which have been made for the verbal and infallible inspiration of the writings, the miraculous element in them would have ensured their rejection by modern scientific minds. Is this, however, quite so certain as it seems? When a scientifically trained man is asked in a bare and bald way to accept a miracle like that of feeding the Five

Thousand on the ground that a document is divinely inspired, it is quite possible that he may inquire very severely into the inspiration of the document, and when it appears that the belief in its inspiration rests only on an unsupported dogma, may impatiently push aside the document and the miracle which it records. But supposing he is asked to take up these biographical documents and to form a fair conception of the Person described in them, to piece together His teaching, His conduct, the effect of His work, His influence in subsequent history, and then to consider whether He is not Himself a Supernatural Fact, a Being who in His uniqueness presents Himself as a revelation of God, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that our scientific man, supposing him to be perfectly candid and logical, will dismiss the miracles in that summary way; it is not impossible that he may regard the miracles, in the light of the Person, not only as probable, but as inevitable.

The settled *à priori* conviction that a supernatural manifestation of God to His creatures is impossible cannot of course be met by any argument or any proof. If a man has once accepted it as an axiom his mind is no longer open to any processes of reasoning, and even

tangible facts presented to him as proof would only be thrust aside as illusions. It is a condition of mind parallel to that of one who has set his heart against his own child, and is further exasperated by every attempt at reconciliation, interpreting every advance of affection or desire as an added proof of perversity, and a new ground of displeasure. But the point to be remembered is this, that where the scientific mind is still open and not committed to this irrational prejudice, the most probable way of convincing it is to present these records of the life of Jesus simply as records, on the ground of their admitted authenticity of date and scope and authorship, claiming for them nothing more than they claim for themselves, and then to leave the story to produce its own effect. Immediately the candid and logical mind is struck by the Person presented in the records. Following out the influence of the life in the history of the world, he feels the necessity of explaining the results which flowed from a cause so apparently simple. And as he comes to grapple seriously with the problem he is led to admit the supernaturalness of Jesus, and incidentally the possibility of His miraculous works and His Resurrection, in order to escape the

hopeless mental predicament in which he must be landed if he denies them.

But while we may fearlessly contend for the authenticity and historical veracity of these three memoirs, it is obvious to any reader who carefully compares them with one another that they are subject to many of the infirmities which are incident to all human compositions and to all human testimony. Even in so vital a matter as the Beatitudes of the Kingdom the first and third evangelists give decidedly different versions. In describing the cure of a blind man at Jericho one account represents the single blind man as two. The very inscription on the Cross is differently worded by the different writers. And, when we come to the records of the Resurrection, every careful student is aware how difficult it is to piece the several versions together into anything like a consistent narrative. But when we have frankly admitted and firmly grasped the fact that these are memoirs, such recollections of the events as would be current among the disciples of the first and second generation after Jesus, these marks of ordinary biographical and historical writings will occasion the believer no difficulty, and will not allow the unbeliever to

question the substantial truth of the record as a whole. Here is an illustration ready to hand. Archibald Forbes, the great war correspondent, who was present at the battle of Sedan on September 1 and 2, 1870, mentions how completely at variance the several accounts of the battle are. After the lapse of twenty-two years it is impossible to determine with accuracy innumerable points of detail. The eye-witnesses, the official reports, the notes of correspondents, disagree. The order of events, the precise time of the several incidents, the exact number of people present on a given occasion, cannot be determined. And yet what person would be foolish enough to question the historic fact of Sedan because of these divergent testimonies? The battle was fought; the German Empire of to-day, and the sore feeling in France about Alsace and Lorraine, are witnesses which would outweigh a thousand discrepancies in the narrative. And so it is with the accounts of the Resurrection. The great fact is not disturbed by the somewhat incoherent description of its incidents. The power of the Risen One; the world transformed by His influence; myriads of living persons who are conscious of being risen

with Christ through faith in His resurrection which happened centuries ago, would outweigh many more difficulties than are actually found in the narrative.

We may regard with a certain detachment of feeling the fierce discussions about points of detail in the Gospels. It is quite possible we may say that St. Luke, for example, may have made a blunder about the date of Quirinius' procuratorship of Syria,* and have supposed that, because he was commissioner for the enrolment of names in the year when

* Mommsen (*Res gestæ Augusti*, 125) indulges in a sneer at the theologians who try to show that this census took place at all in the year 4 B.C. And for this a recent writer in France, Pere Didon, takes him to task (see *Jesus Christ*, App. A., p. 817); but this brilliant Catholic author furnishes fresh material for the historian's sarcasm when he tries to show the clause in Luke ii. 1, meant, "When Quirinius was the special commissioner for the enrolment in Syria." No doubt, as Meyer shows in his commentary on the passage, that is the actual fact, but that is not what St. Luke says. He says that the enrolment was made while Quirinius was the *præses* of Syria; and that position he did not hold till ten years afterwards. It is the perversity of the false dogmatism on the subject of inspiration which leads even a candid mind like Pere Didon to rescue the historical accuracy of Luke by maintaining that his words, which say one thing, distinctly mean another. On this method of interpretation all writers are infallible. If one attributes an event of 1834 to Queen Victoria's reign, it may be justified as meaning that it means the fifteenth year of her age, though King William was on the throne.

Q. Sentius Saturninus was the *præses* of Syria, he was already *præses* himself, though history shows us that he did not occupy that position until ten years later, viz., 6-11 A.D. The birth of our Lord at the time of that enrolment is not discredited because an author, writing half a century later, had forgotten, or had no document at hand to show, that Quirinius was not at the time Augustus' *legatus* for the government of Syria, but only his agent for the holding of a provincial census. The idea that the Holy Ghost would supply a writer with an accurate chronology, and would make careful historical research unnecessary, or correct the errors where the research had been insufficient, is one entirely imported into the question by irresponsible dreamers. The preface of St. Luke's own Gospel shows that he never entertained such an idea; and we may surmise that if he himself were confronted with the facts which are known to us, and asked to explain his statement, "this enrolment was made when Quirinius was governor of Syria," he would say at once, "I made a mistake; of course his *præsidium* of Syria did not begin till ten years later."

But we may pass now to the second point

which may be advanced to reassure the trembling believer who thinks that we are taking away his Lord because we have no ground for asserting that the evangelists are infallible. The truth of the picture is guaranteed not by the writers who depict the life of Jesus, but by the picture itself. A few flaws in the plate or in the printing of the cartes do not affect the image which the light draws in a photograph. No fallibility of the witnesses, no infirmity of their memory or of their pen, can materially affect the picture which, as it seems almost involuntarily, they present of their Lord. Their simplicity, their artlessness—nay, we might almost say their rusticity, against which clever critics have frequently railed, are themselves the guarantee that they are simply telling what they saw and handled. They could not have invented, for it is all they can do to imperfectly depict, that Person, His matchless beauty and goodness, and the power which breathed from His word and work. The supreme value of these very humble witnesses is that with all their minor divergences, and with all their obvious limitations of understanding and expression, they do put us at a point of view from which we can with unclouded eyes see Jesus, as He

came and passed through the few brief years of His earthly life. Thanks to them and to God's Spirit, working through them, impelling them to write and quickening their memory, we find ourselves at small disadvantage as compared with those who saw with their eyes and heard with their ears Jesus in the flesh.

Now it is this Person, the *tout ensemble* of His life and character, which is the great Revelation of God. It is this Person who, patiently studied and understood, seems to step out of the simple pages and approach the reader with a majesty which commands, and a tenderness which allures, all but the hardest and most corrupt of human hearts. Men brought up like John Stuart Mill in a traditional contempt for the religion of Jesus have even in a time of most unimaginative materialism been arrested by the Person in these Gospels and constrained to say that they could think of no better rule of life than so to act as would win the approval of Jesus. Light-hearted *litterateurs* like Ernest Renan have, along the lines of simple historical inquiry, met the Person in these Gospels and been compelled to utter a cry of admiration and love, and to sing His praises in prose,

which owing to the subject seems to rise into verse, with an ardour which would evidently pass into faith but for the arbitrary presupposition in the mind of the investigator that whatever in the great Person is Divine and therefore saving, must be quietly put aside as incredible. And men who have not been poisoned by the baseless dogma of Science that the Supernatural does not exist, and therefore all that is supernatural in Jesus is fiction, men who with open heart have submitted themselves to the impression which the Person of the Gospels makes have found themselves obliged to exclaim with one or another of the disciples in the record, now, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" now, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;" now, "Lord, to whom shall we go? for thou hast the words of eternal life;" now, after a moment of misgiving or doubt, "My Lord and my God;" and now in a passion of surrender, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." It would be vain to make an attempt to enumerate all the people on whom the Gospels have produced this powerful effect. The Person in the written pages speaks to them as a real and living voice, and sways them as a

seen and acknowledged Lord. The words are read—"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest": we lose sight of the book and of the writer, we attend only to Him who speaks. We come to Him, and He gives us rest.

Now it is not a little extraordinary that a vehicle apparently so inartistic and so incomplete should produce such an effect on following generations of men. We can point to no other records of a life, even though they may be far more finished, more detailed, more exact, which have the vital result of bringing us into spiritual contact with the Person of whom they speak. Many of us have read with tearful eyes the *Memorabilia* of Socrates, or the great description which the gifted disciple gives of his master's death in the *Phædo*; but while we lovingly admire the noble and indomitable sage, it does not occur to us to come to him; indeed, it did not occur to him to invite us. Or to take a much more modern instance, we have studied that curious and fascinating picture of a beautiful soul drawn from within, the *Journal of Amiel*; his exquisite words haunt the ear, and the story of his pensive life, his pure meditations, his wise and critical observations, the tragic over-

clouding of his declining days, touches us with a tender human sympathy, and makes us reach out yearning hands of brotherhood to his melancholy shade; but which of us thinks of coming to him? Wise counsellor and sober teacher in many delicate issues of life we may admit him to be, but he does not draw us. He dies a kind of silent martyrdom, but it gives us no hope in our hours of need. The marvellous and inexplicable fact about the Person of the Gospels is, that it draws us; we find ourselves unconsciously in the crowd trying to touch the hem of His garment; we involuntarily take a place at His feet and feel that we have chosen the good part which can not be taken away; His death told in simple but impressive detail holds us with a singular spell; like the little children to whom Robert Elsmere tells the story of the Cross, we break into sobs and tears—we know it is for us; we go to the tomb, and unlike the curiously insensible disciples, we feel that it was not possible for Him to be holden of death; the brief cry, "He is risen," penetrates our heart with a subtle hope; He seems risen for our justification, and a quickening faith enables us to be crucified and buried with Him, and to rise also with Him to newness of life.

We take up these dear records of His life and death again and again; we read and re-read the words that He spoke; we meditate afresh upon His many works of healing and mercy, His few works of severity and judgment. What is there in them? We thought we knew them almost by heart; they are familiar to us as the sky and the woods and the sea; but they are always new. Some miracle or sign which once seemed difficult to believe is constantly passing into the category of the credible as our understanding of Him rounds and grows. If there are some things which still seem to us incredible we can leave them cheerfully aside, for we count it an irreverence to attribute to the Person whom we are getting to know anything which is out of harmony with the character as we know it. The Cross is always breaking upon us in new aspects and new phases, like a mountain peak which is eternal, but never the same for two hours together in the passing of cloud or the outbreak of sunshine, the gathering of the treasures of the snow or the unsealing of the fountains which are to water the vale. His words too—they are spirit and life, and we are always saying with a fresh emphasis, “Never man spake like this man.” Some simple

apophthegm of His is constantly piercing down to the roots of our life, or some lovely parable will quietly unveil a spacious landscape of unnoticed truth. We study the Sermon on the Mount for a lifetime, and in the second sight and brightening intuition of an old age which has passed from godliness to godliness, we begin to perceive with awe that we have understood but the surface of it, and have never sounded its depths. We turn back again and again to His summary of the Law and the Prophets, and with every sorrowful failure, every painful discovery how little we love, how little we seem capable of loving, we come back to Him and say, Master, Thou hast well said : to love God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves is the clearness and joy of heaven ; Lord, teach us to love. And how often, when with a foolish optimism and a shallow misconception of the solemn facts which form the underground of life, we have thought to minimize or explain away some of His searching severities, His words about the fire which is not quenched and the worm which does not die, we have been constrained to come humbly back to His feet with the surprised confession that He knew best !

Now it is this Person of the Gospels—and not merely the sketchy portrait of Him—which is the great revelation of God. “All things have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him” (Matt. xi. 27). It is the Person who could say this, who could realize, too, what He said, that strikes all criticism dumb. All that is told about Him gathers round what He is. Miracle and sign are not given as proofs of what He is, but they seem to flow by a kind of inner necessity from Him who uttered those wonderful words. We do not believe in the Divinity of Jesus because of the miraculous conception mentioned in the first chapter of Matthew; rather we are forced by the conviction of His Divinity to believe in that manner of His birth. If He was born in the common way of human generation the miracle of what He is seems too transcendent for human faith.

It is indeed a strange conceit that any artificial guarantee is needed for the Person presented in these Gospels. To prop His authenticity by a dogma about the infallibility of the evangelists is like trying to shore up

Mont Blanc, and to keep it from falling with a few pine logs hewn from its ridges. We may joyfully anticipate the day when Christians will surrender their puerile apologetics, their attempts to verify the eternal Truth by a paltry fiction which is pricked like a bubble by the first touch of inquiry.

Non tali auxilio, non defensoribus istis
Tempus eget.

Some day we shall let the evangelists again tell their own tale, without our impertinent prelude of tales about them; and an astonished world will see again in these *Memoirs of Jesus* the unmistakable reflection of the Jesus whom the disciples saw.

But still the strongest answer to a timorous belief remains. The abiding reason why the frank admission of what the Gospels are cannot take away our Lord is this: the Person of whom the Gospels tell is nothing if He is not a living and active presence now. All that is said of Him, and all that He is reported to have said, is naught unless He gave the distinct promise that wherever two or three were gathered in His name there He would be in the midst of them. The Gospels are mere waste-paper, or at least of no more practical religious value than the

Memorabilia of Xenophon or the *Journal of Amiel*, unless we may accept literally the assertion, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Did He say that? Does He fulfil that saying? That is the vital question, and not, whether Matthew was a sacred penman miraculously guaranteed against the possibility of error. Now we may conceive the three Gospels as in effect three witnesses from the age after the Resurrection, eagerly asserting that the Lord had risen, had appeared to one or another of His disciples, had finally disappeared, but only on such terms that His presence with His people would be perpetual and unbroken. If the Gospels in asserting this are maintaining a lie, let them be ruthlessly thrown aside. Some good Christians seem to think that the only proof they have of the assertion is the statement of the evangelists, and their timid anxiety to maintain the infallibility of the Gospels arises from a fearful conviction that if those books were lost the Living Christ would be lost. Orthodoxy of this type, it is almost unnecessary to repeat, rests on a profound and radical unbelief. Its champions are sceptics who can attach no meaning to the great saying, "I am with

you," except this, that a written word is with them, a Book infallibly inspired and miraculously preserved. But what we may call the orthodoxy of the first Christian century—the century before the New Testament was written—is becoming again the orthodoxy of the Nineteenth Century, the century in which the cramped doctrine of Biblical infallibility has become doubtful. Men are beginning to believe again the mighty truth that Jesus lives and is with them even now. A hard and incredulous materialism, created largely by a hard and essentially sceptical Christianity, says still with a sneer, Where is your Lord? Show Him to us if He indeed be alive. And we answer not by an appeal to documents which unbelief will not accept as an authority, but by an appeal to facts which unbelief itself may ignore but cannot deny. We may boldly venture all on the fact that *Jesus lives and is among us now*. If the doubter will not take the trouble to examine the details of religious history, if he will not test the reality of Christ's saving presence in the lives which have been redeemed by Him, in the miserable rescued by Him from their misery, in the bad turned by Him into the good—we must at least in-

sist upon it that he should try for himself whether Jesus lives before he commits himself to his arbitrary negation. The first apostles went to convert the world not with a New Testament in their hands, for it was only their labors which resulted in the production of the New Testament, but with the risen Christ in their hearts, and with a power not their own, which was able to bring Jews and Gentiles alike into a personal contact with this living Saviour. That is precisely the method which is needed to-day. If these pages fall under the eye of an unbeliever, of one who is a stranger to Christ, they have a message for him, direct and simple as that which Peter preached at Pentecost. This message thrusts aside as irrelevant the thousand and one pleas and objections which unbelief is accustomed to urge, and comes at once to the point. Jesus, the living Saviour, bids you come unto Him with the promise that He will save you. "But how?" you say; "I cannot see Him." No, but as a spiritual presence He is at hand and accessible to your spirit. "But," you object, "I do not believe in His Divinity." No, but what He asks is that you should believe in Him, and He puts no metaphysical tests in

the way of your accepting Him. "But I do not believe in the miracles, the story of the birth, and the rest." He is here, not speaking of these, but of His power to save you; will you come unto Him that you may receive life? If you *will*, he gives you life; if you will not, you are without life. "But," still you exclaim, "I do not believe in the atonement." When He bids you come unto Him He does not demand a theological definition or the acceptance of a religious formula. He says that He came to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. He says that His blood was shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. The question is, will you trust the love of God, will you accept the remission of sins which Jesus offers, will you take your position as a pardoned and reconciled child of God in Jesus Christ?

Where a man has learned his own weakness and sinfulness and need, where in consequence he humbles himself as a little child, he comes to Jesus in one brief and heartfelt prayer. Jesus is unseen, but His presence is acknowledged, and He is received. And as many as receive Him get power to become the sons of God, even as many as believe on His name. Now, the whole of our subse-

quent investigation of the New Testament writings will tend to show that the very essence of this Gospel was the proclamation of a living Christ, whose living power was ordinarily manifested in the persons of men and women who gave admission to Him. If the value of these first three memoirs of the Lord is that they present us with a tolerably accurate picture of Jesus as He lived and died upon earth, and rose again from the grave, and ascended into heaven, they are only the introduction to a series of writings which derive all their value from the witness they give to this resurrection life of Jesus. "And it came to pass, while He blessed them he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God." That is how the third and latest of the three closes the narrative. The Risen One has left His disciples, and yet He has not left them disconsolate. There is an attitude of expectation; there is a breathless pause. He has gone, but He is not far away; He will be with us still. The following books of the New Testament show in a variety of ways how this expectation is fulfilled. If the first

three Gospels are a revelation of God in the person, the human person, of Jesus, they lead immediately up to the revelation of Jesus Himself, prolonged in the work, the experience, the faith of His chosen disciples and their successors. The memoirs of Jesus were closed, nothing more could be added; nothing has been added except a few trifling recollections preserved by St. Paul, and the treasure of reminiscence in the Gospel of St. John. The brief beautiful life on earth was rounded and set like a triple cameo-image in a simple frame, to last as long as man is on the earth. But the saving life of Jesus was only just beginning; it manifested itself in certain normal and sufficient ways in the apostolic days, and the New Testament writings are the record of it. It still manifests itself, for the most part strictly along the lines of that New Testament literature, but by no means necessarily confined to them. The revelation of God in the face of Christ Jesus is perpetuated in the life of the Church, the saints in whom He has dwelt, the teachers, the martyrs, the heroes, whom He has inspired. And by a not unnatural figure the whole sum total of redeemed beings in whom He has manifested, or will still manifest,

Himself to the end of time, may be treated as the body, the limbs, of which He is the head.

Perhaps it was with some glimmering consciousness of this that one of the evangelists, the one who echoed Peter's teaching, gave to his brief record of the human life the singular title, "The *beginning* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." A beginning indeed, and yet if we may be pardoned the paradox, a complete beginning.

In closing this chapter it may be permissible to appeal to the guardians of the letter of Scripture, and to ask them whether the truth does not begin to dawn upon them that God has provided a more substantial protection of His revelation than the traditional dogmatisms which once seemed strong, but now are sufficiently worm-eaten and insecure. Would not believers in Christ commend Him best to the world if they really believed in Him, and ventured to fall back on the promises which He has given? Are believers quite sure that they are not themselves the main cause of the world's unbelief? Have they not demanded faith in a book, where Christ meant them to demand faith in a Person? Have they not led the world astray in a weary

conflict about literary details, with dull reiteration declaring that that is the word of God which is not the word of God, so that men have not seen the true Word of God that was with God from the beginning, and became flesh, and tabernacled amongst us? If they would only understand that Jesus lives, and present Him living to the weary and sinful humanity around them, would not all men be drawn to Him?

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