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REMARKS

ON

THE FOUR GOSPELS.

BY

W. H. FURNESS.



" A great deal is said about the beauty of the Scriptures, without reference to any just principles of taste."

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P R E F A C E.



I HAVE endeavoured in this examination of the Christian Scriptures to realize in a degree the state of mind with which they would be read by one who should open them for the first time. It is perhaps impossible completely to project the mind beyond the atmosphere which it has breathed from the cradle ; or it can only be done at the imminent hazard of transcending the true point of view. To weigh with equal independence and candour the claims of the religion of one's age and country requires an almost incredible effort, especially from those whose office it is to uphold, in one form or another, the established faith. I can only say that I am not ignorant of the biases to which an inquirer, born and

brought up in a Christian community, is exposed. I have tried to guard against them ; to look into the Christian Records, as if they had just been placed before me, at least with no disposition in their favour but that produced by the undisputed excellence of their morality ; and to ascertain the precise truth as nearly as possible, unswayed by that veneration for authority which leads us to take too much for granted on the one hand, or by that love of novelty, so fruitful of doubt and denial on the other.

There are numbers who give no credit to the accounts of the Life of Jesus Christ. They barely admit his existence. There are many more whose faith rests only on tradition. I do not doubt, therefore, that works, like the present, whose aim it is to disclose grounds for personal conviction, are needed and may be useful. Still, a direct knowledge of the wants of others has not been the primary cause of this publication. The views contained in this volume have interested my own mind deeply. For this reason I have wished to publish them. I believe and therefore do I speak. Were I utterly unacquainted with the wants of others, I should deem it a safe

presumption that the experience of one individual, no matter how humble, in regard to a subject of universal interest, is the experience, if not of all, yet of many. Every man is the best representative to himself of other men. And he may justly be charged with arrogance, who fancies himself so peculiarly constituted, so different from all others, that what has satisfied his mind will not have a like influence in numerous other cases.

It is extremely difficult to suggest any new mode of regarding admitted truths, without incurring the suspicion of unfriendliness to the truths themselves; so generally is opinion identified with truth. I may be charged with a design to explain away the Christian Miracles, when, in reality, I am at a loss to express my sense of the value of the extraordinary facts of the life of Jesus. In every point of view, moral, religious, and philosophical—whether as lessons to every man's soul, or as attestations to the Divine authority of him by whom they were wrought, they possess a value of which we do not yet dream. They have been compared to the foundations of a grand edifice, into which the multitude enter and

dwell, rejoicing in its beauty, but "caring not about its foundation any further than to know that it has one." This is a just comparison so far as it expresses the fundamental character of the miracles. But it betrays the defect of the common representation of these remarkable facts. Why should the occupants of the building care to know any more of that part of it which is hidden, buried in the earth, than its bare existence? At the point of view at which I have considered the miracles, and which it seems to me, every just principle of thought indicates, while they are no less essential than the above illustration represents, they become the key-stones of the great arches and domes of the edifice, arresting every eye, visibly imparting strength and perfection to the whole, blazing with celestial characters, and hewn as out of that sapphire which, in the vision of the prophet, was the throne of God.

I am aware that the exposition I have attempted of the true mode of regarding the Christian miracles (Chapters VIII., IX.) is very imperfect. Still it is best it should be published. If erroneous, its fallacy may be shown. If true, it will attract the attention

and engage the services of abler minds. In the meanwhile I avow myself a sincere believer in the reality of these wonderful facts. I believe that the blind received sight, the lame walked, the dead rose, and the winds and waves were hushed at the word of Jesus of Nazareth. I do not deny that these events attest his divine authority. But I know not how they can have any force as evidences of the divinity of his mission, until they are felt to have been wrought for a diviner end than merely to convince the understanding, even for a certain intrinsic worth which must be discerned, whether it be definable or not. God's means are always ends, and hence their efficiency as means. A good act, performed for example's sake, is not a good act, and consequently cannot have the influence of goodness. It must be done for its own sake, and then it will be powerful as an example. So I conceive it to be with the miracles of Jesus. They were wrought principally for their own sakes. They are demonstrations of the power of a single and separate purpose; and therefore are they powerful to convince. Thus do they testify that he was moved by the inspiration of God.

notwithstanding the fact that the

“ Since I was of understanding ”—to use the words of Sir Thomas Browne,—“ to know we knew nothing,” I have felt that there could hardly be a greater objection to a theory or mode of thought, than the pretension to explain everything. I am impressed with nothing more deeply, than with the vanity of supposing that the mind of man can so penetrate and compass any work of God as to be able to relieve it of all difficulty. I do not believe there are any questions, connected with the great subject of these pages, which are unanswerable; but there are many, I freely confess, that I cannot answer. There are many passages in the Gospels which I have not attempted to explain. I have not sought to remove difficulties, but to unveil the beaming features of truth; to point out some of those characteristics of these narratives which produce an impression of reality that no difficulties are strong enough to obliterate.

I have not wished to allude to the opinions of others, however erroneous, except as it became necessary to the unfolding of what seems to me to be

intrinsically true. I fear, however, I may have occasionally expressed myself, when there was no absolute need of it, in a manner that may wound the feelings of the serious and honest of other denominations. I regret every such expression, and wish that it were erased.



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REMARKS.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

“The first condition of success is, that in striving honestly ourselves, we honestly acknowledge the striving of our neighbour; that with a Will unwearied in seeking Truth, we have a Sense open for it, wheresoever and howsoever it may arise.”—*Edinburgh Review*.

It is an imperfect statement of a fundamental principle to say that truth carries with it its own evidence. Evidence relates to the understanding. Whereas, under certain plain and natural conditions, moral and religious truths possess the power not only of convincing the understanding, but of impressing deeply the noblest affections of the human bosom.

When the mind is swayed by any inveterate bias, by a pride of opinion or of party, by an excessive veneration for what is already established, or a passion for novelty, by a conceit of intellect or the indulgence of vicious habits, then the most important principles of religion and morality may fail entirely not only of awakening any sensibility in the heart, but of gaining the faintest assent of the understanding. It is not for minds in this unhappy state

that these pages are designed. If they are likely to fall only into the hands of those in whom exists no candid and generous love of truth, to which I may speak, I may well lay down my pen in despair. I cannot forget that the greatest of teachers, speaking as never man spake, and performing works of unprecedented power, entertained no hope of acting directly upon those whose affections were in captivity to earthborn prejudices and selfish passions. But to the true-hearted—to whatever of truth and candour dwelt in the hearts of those around him, he appealed with the greatest confidence. “He who doeth the will of my Father, shall *know* of my teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” Wherever any conformity to the Divine Will had been attained, there he looked for a commanding influence.

If our various faculties and affections have been cultivated according to their opportunities and the intent of their nature—if the will of the Creator, signified in their very constitution and by his providence, has been complied with, in the degree to which this is the case, they are in a sound and healthy state; and there is a strong affinity between them and all truth. This is the condition, with reference to which I observe, that it is not doing justice to truth to say, that if truly presented it will *prove* itself. It will do infinitely more. It will send forth a light which will not only paralyse, if it do not destroy, all speculative difficulties, but enter and fill all the chambers of the soul. If it be truth relating to the Divine Nature, it will kindle our sentiments

of awe, veneration and love. If it concern human things, human endeavours, sufferings and obligations, it will call out our active human sympathies. Its influence will not stop, content with gaining the assent of the reason; it goes farther,—it reaches and sets in motion all the primary and most powerful springs of our being.

Such I conceive to be the power of truth, when presented in a true form. The modes of presenting truth are various. There are the essay, the argument, the poem, the history or narration, and so on. And there is a truth that pertains to these various forms, as well as to the subjects they are employed to exhibit. That is, there is a true way of expressing truth, a way distinguished by certain marks or signs which belong only to truth, and which, when perceived, carry with them all that power, the power of deciding the understanding, but more especially of touching the heart, which, as I have just said, is the essential and active property of truth. Every story, in its peculiar characteristics, affords us materials for determining its truth, and in great abundance when it is eminently historical, containing a variety of details; when numerous circumstances, places, and persons, are specified or alluded to. A true story of this description has a certain air—its different parts have a keeping or consistency one with another, which every intelligent and ingenuous mind feels deeply, even when it is wholly unable to analyse and define it.

I do not undertake to give a complete account of the traits by which the truth of any statement or

history may be ascertained. It would be no easy task, not because they are either slight, incidental, or ambiguous, but because they pertain to the very essence of truth, and to the profoundest philosophy of thought and expression. Very often the indications of truth are so delicate, that, although they may be instantly and fully felt, they cannot readily be described, nor, without the finest powers of discrimination, referred to general principles. And besides, it is not necessary to my purpose. It will suffice for the present, if I am able to point out as many of these internal signatures of truth in the case of the historical books of the New Testament, as will cause their substantial truth to be felt in something of its intrinsic vividness.

This, now, is my object in the following pages. Taking up the first four books of the New Testament as human compositions, forgetting as far as possible all that has been said of their authority and inspiration, cherishing only that respect for them which the most imperfect acquaintance with their contents never fails to inspire, and that candour which it becomes us always to cherish, I propose to point out those characteristics of these writings which have produced in my mind a new and lively conviction of their truth,—a new sense of their wonderful beauty and power. I do not presume to furnish anything like a complete analysis of their style and contents. I am deeply impressed with the idea that all which I can offer is gathered but from the borders of an immense field in which untold treasures of moral truth and evidence lie buried. I wish only to state

what I have seen with my own eyes, and felt with my own heart ; to give some of the results, such as they are, of my own humble reading and study. My fondest hope, so far as others are concerned, will be fulfilled, if these pages serve to create in minds better qualified to pursue the work, a belief in the exceeding riches of a region, as yet so imperfectly explored.

There are many and powerful arguments for the truth of the great facts recorded in the New Testament, extrinsic of the records themselves. They have been ably stated in numberless forms. I do not question their weight. But to be duly appreciated they require a degree of intellectual cultivation and an amount of learning entirely out of the reach of the great body of readers. The considerations which I would now suggest, besides being, as I apprehend, of a most affecting nature, are within the reach of all ; requiring principally, in order to their just appreciation, an honest and ingenuous temper, a healthy moral taste, and only so much time as the avocations of the busiest allow.

The train of thought upon which I now propose to enter, admits of certain concessions which I wish to make distinctly in the outset.

1. I am willing to concede, that upon a first and cursory examination of these four histories, things of a strange and improbable nature present themselves. Extraordinary facts are stated, which we feel demand extraordinary proof ; and the suspicion is not unnatural, that delusion may have had some share in the production of these writings. Admitting that these impressions may be made by some parts of the

New Testament history, I nevertheless hope to point out features of truth, numerous and significant enough to create a lively sense of reality; and to induce an impartial mind to draw no conclusions from any portions of these books, however obscure and difficult, which do not go to establish powerfully their substantial credit.

2. In the exposition of that beautiful argument for the truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul, stated with so much felicity by Dr. Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, he has this language: "The reader is at liberty to suppose these writings (the Epistles of Paul and the Book of Acts) to have been lately discovered in the library of the Escorial, and to come to our hands destitute of any extrinsic or collateral evidence whatever; and the argument I am about to offer is calculated to show that a comparison of the different writings would, even under these circumstances, afford good reason to believe the persons and transactions to have been real, the letters authentic, and the narration in the main to be true." I am ready to make a similar concession—to suppose that the four Gospels, as they are called, have just been discovered under some ancient ruins—that the names even by which they are designated, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, have been obliterated—that they are anonymous. Even if the reader incline to the idea that the four Gospels are only different versions of one story—one original Gospel, it will not materially affect the present argument. Still I trust it will appear that these books are the productions of truth and honesty—that the accounts they contain were

drawn from persons present on the spot—in fine, that they are not legends, fictions, romances, but true histories of real persons and real events.

There is one thing, however, respecting these writings, which, it is obvious, I intend to assume, their antiquity; not, however, because even this point may not be very satisfactorily made out from their internal structure. If they were now suddenly placed before us for the first time, from what quarter we knew not, there would be incontestable evidence that they were not the productions of any recent period. There is no work so general and abstract that it is not in innumerable particulars indelibly impressed by the age in which it appears. A biographical or historical work, abounding in notices of places, persons, manners, customs, and sentiments, in certain modes of thought and expression, furnishes on its very face, the means of fixing its date with some approach to correctness. This is the case with the writings which we are now to consider. They are antique in their whole costume. They could not have been written in this age, nor at any time very far removed from that at which they are generally believed to have been composed, because they bear none of the impressions of any such time. I do not insist that their date can be fixed with precision merely from internal marks, but that they show beyond all doubt that they were written very near the time to which they are usually referred. It is not the direct notices of time, found here and there in these writings, which constitute indubitable signs of antiquity, because such notices might easily have been

forged and interwoven with these narrations, even had they been produced at a much later period. It is their numerous and familiar references to the customs and opinions of a certain age, their peculiar forms of expression and thought, connected with the absence of all allusions to modes of thinking and speaking prevalent in all subsequent ages, that help us so effectually to determine the period to which they should be assigned.

But it is unnecessary to undertake an enumeration of the evidences of antiquity abounding on every page of the New Testament, because there are hardly any so ignorant or so captious as to question the age of these writings. And if there are, there is one consideration at hand which seems to me must be decisive. You need not go back to the past to inquire about the existence of these books; consider a fact that presents itself before your eyes—the wide, and I may say superstitious veneration with which these books are now regarded. They lie at the bottom of the faith of many nations, and a complicated structure of forms and institutions rests upon their professed authority. How does their influence pervade the whole fabric of society—our public establishments, our systems of education, our modes of thought and language! The feelings of awe and sacredness which have gathered round these books cannot have been the growth of any brief period. The religious prejudices and associations of the human mind are not the offspring of a day, but the slow formation of centuries. The extensive circulation of the New Testament—the present fact that it is

every where a familiar, household book, proves, I say, not its truth, but its age. The Gospels must be hundreds of years old, at all events.

But decisive as is the inference in favour of their antiquity from the position which they now occupy, it is not all. Their existence can be traced back some fourteen hundred years, to go no further, by a chain of historical evidence as strong and uninterrupted as the most sceptical can demand. And the earliest notices we have of them are not as of books then first published, just appearing, but of works even then extensively received and copiously quoted. A great portion of the literature that existed ages ago, bears incidental evidence not only to the existence, but to the influence of these writings. So abundant are the quotations from them in the works of early Christian writers, that it has been said that if they had been lost in their present forms, they might have been restored from the writings of the Fathers. At the commencement of the fourth century, Christianity was the religion of the Roman Emperor. The Gospel must have had an existence antecedent to this event, the conversion of Constantine. Now, if we know that so long ago these books were extensively read, quoted, and venerated, the conclusion is inevitable that they were in existence years and years before. To have won their way into so wide a circulation—to have become possessed of so large a space and so weighty an authority, when no art of printing was known, and the means of intercourse and communication were so imperfect, must have been a work of time. So that the Christian records must have been

old, even when we find the first notices of them in early writings.

Assuming the antiquity of these writings, without further remark, I proceed to the proposed examination of their style and contents, upon the principle, that from every written composition, we may infer, more or less confidently, the character and credibility of its author. Every narrative, by the manner in which it is put together, enables us to form some conception of the intelligence, the amount of information, the spirit and the particular motives and prepossessions of the individual from whom it has proceeded. So that every history is unconsciously and unavoidably a history of its author. It is a virtual account of his mind and character, a representation of his moral and intellectual lineaments, of his qualifications for the work he has produced, of his claims to be believed,—in fine, of the source whence the history has emanated; whether it be the offspring of Truth, of Imposture, or of Delusion. It is true the motives which a writer professes, the sentiments he expresses, may not be his real motives and sentiments. Still Affectation is one species of Falsehood, and, as such, though it may not be as readily, yet it is as truly distinguishable from Truth as any other form of error. To different writings these remarks apply with different degrees of force. A work may be so brief, so general and so obscure, as to afford us but a very dim idea of the spirit of the writer. I hope, however, to make it appear that the books now to be examined are, to a remarkable extent, precisely of the kind which furnish the most copious and satisfactory manifestations of the spirit and aim

of their authors. Indeed, I venture to assert, that if we had authentic and minute biographies of the writers of the four Gospels, we should still have the most decisive illustrations of their characters, in the style and structure of the Gospels themselves. We should still see in these their works, the strongest evidence that they were eye and ear-witnesses of the things they record—men of good sense and sound hearts, possessing excellent powers and opportunities of observation, and inspired, to an uncommon degree, by that single-mindedness upon which we always delight to repose our most cordial confidence.



CHAPTER II.

THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

“ The Scripture is no one summary of doctrines regularly digested, in which a man could not mistake his way ; it is a most venerable, but most multifarious collection of the records of the divine economy, a collection of an infinite variety of Cosmogony, Theology, History, Prophecy, Psalmody, Morality, Apologue, Allegory, Legislation, Ethics, carried through different books, by different authors, at different ages, for different ends and purposes.

“ It is necessary to sort out what is intended for example, what only as narrative.”—BURKE, *Speech on the Acts of Uniformity*.

IN looking over the four Gospels, the first and most obvious feature that strikes us is their Historical character.

They have been so long and so widely treated, as if they were creeds or formulas of faith, made up of formal propositions, each by itself affirming an inde-

pendent and unqualified article of belief, that we are apt to overlook altogether this remarkable trait, their historical nature. They are not argumentative, nor didactic. They belong to the department of History, Biography, Memoirs. They may be complete or imperfect, true or the grossest fabrications, still they are not philosophical treatises, elaborate statements of principles more or less important. They are evidently histories, narratives. They are crowded with incidents. They abound in notices, direct and indirect, of persons, places and events. They scarcely contain what with any propriety can be called an abstract discourse. The circumstances mentioned, too, are for the most part remarkable for their publicity, and even those portions that approach nearest to the character of sermons are not general in their style of thought, but are expressed in a popular phraseology, and are filled with local and personal allusions. The scene is not laid in a dark, retired corner, but the course of events is represented as going on over a vast extent of country, in the presence of particular individuals and large multitudes. Cities and villages with their respective localities are incidentally designated, wherein the facts narrated took place. To speak still more dramatically, the curtain rises, and the first glance shows us Jerusalem and its magnificent temple, Judea, the River Jordan, the Sea of Galilee, and the region round about; and we stand in the open air, and under the noonday sun, to observe the progress of the events related. Multitudes are collected before us. Different individuals and whole classes of men pass over the stage, Pharisees and Sadducees, teachers of the

Jewish Law, Roman soldiers, tax-gatherers, centurions, and magistrates, and all has the air of the greatest publicity.

Now what is the natural inference from this obvious feature of these writings? If a book of a similar character were published at the present day, a book not occupied with speculative discussions, not stating principles or opinions, but relating facts, purporting to have occurred in some well known country and within the last fifty or sixty years, filled with circumstantial details, abounding in allusions, local, personal, civil, introducing the names of public functionaries and offices—of parties, religious and political, how would such a publication be regarded? It would either be understood at once and by all as a mere work of imagination, so considered by the author himself, and published as a fiction, not to be credited as true, but to exercise and illustrate his own genius, and to procure for him the fame of genius; or, if we supposed that he intended and expected to be believed, then it must be because of its substantial truth, or else he must be among the most absurd of men. Every man who has intelligence enough to fabricate a story with a view to impose upon the world, takes especial care how he meddles with facts, circumstances, names; “all things animate and inanimate are combined against falsehood.” In the great system of Nature and Providence, nothing exists alone and insulated. Every circumstance and every object, however trifling apparently, are inextricably related in innumerable ways to innumerable other circumstances and objects, so that every fact virtually ~~appeals~~ ~~to an~~ incalculable

mass of testimony. He who lays the scene of his story in a certain country, in the presence of multitudes, in the midst of public affairs and institutions, summons he knows not how many witnesses to testify to the truth of what he affirms. Every circumstance that he introduces swells the cloud of witnesses beyond all enumeration. If he relates what has no foundation in reality, he exposes himself to detection at unnumbered points, and it is impossible that he should not be instantaneously overwhelmed with the shame and ridicule which he so urgently invites. He is only spreading snares for his own feet, weaving a web in which he is sure to be caught and entangled.

It is fairly to be presumed, therefore, that the authors of the books under consideration never intended to state what was false. If they had designed to deceive—to relate what they knew was not true, they never would have been so prodigal of circumstances, so profuse in allusions to public persons, places, and events. Some caution—some apprehension of their liability to exposure would have shown itself in the manner in which they touch upon details. But we find nothing of this kind. These writings are pervadingly narrative—full of incidents. There is no trace of caution or constraint. Whether true or false, then, we cannot but conclude that they were written in good faith—that their author or authors believed them to be true. And if so, the presumption is equally strong that they *are* true in the main. Because although the most honest of men are liable to be deluded, yet it is wholly without example and utterly incredible that such a multitude of particulars as are

recorded in these books, should be mere delusions. They may be more or less misapprehended, but they must be substantially founded in fact. Such seems to be the obvious and natural inference from the simple abundance of facts in these books, from their character so eminently circumstantial.

Or, if the force of these remarks be not felt, then one thing is very clear, that writers so unwise, so imprudent—so reckless as to go blindly on, accumulating facts, adding incident to incident, and these too of the most public character, utterly insensible to the certainty of detection, at every step made doubly sure, must evince the same want of judgment and common sense in the structure of these narratives; and we may entertain the most confident expectation that a closer scrutiny will make the falsehood of their stories perfectly plain. If they were so foolish as thus shamelessly to fabricate such an abundance of facts, facts too of a public character, we may be sure of discovering the groundlessness of their pretensions. For although events appear to take place very much at random, and to be strung together with very little order and connexion, and individuals to speak and act from accidental and inconsistent impulses, yet every real series of circumstances of any length or number, especially if they involve the sayings and conduct of any number of individuals, or even of only one individual, have a certain consistency belonging only to Nature and Truth. In fact, in the wildest appearances of the natural world,—in the clouds when they are piled in the most irregular masses in the atmosphere, there is ever a pervading and essential harmony

of light, and shade, and form, which the common observer feels, though unconsciously, and without the perception of which the efforts of the artist are utterly fruitless. In the scenes and phenomena of the moral and intelligent world, a like coherence exists as a vital and all connecting element. It may not be easy, as I have already intimated, to show in what this keeping consists. But it is recognised and felt instantly by every intelligent and ingenuous mind. We perceive the absence of it continually in the ablest and most ingenious of the myriads of fictitious histories—of novels and romances, with which the press teems. In certain passages they always betray, even to unpractised eyes, the hand of human art, and the want of that air of truth, which though indefinable, is nevertheless real and most affecting. Nature and truth have their own marks which they impress upon every work of theirs, marks which to some extent human art may counterfeit, but which after all transcend the reach of fiction as much as the great Intelligence that upholds all objects and controls all events exceeds the mind of man. So, then, if the four Gospels are mere fictions, and the series of events related have no foundation in reality, but only in imagination, then, to the extent to which this is the case, they must be deficient in that naturalness which is the accompaniment of truth only. It is impossible that mere fabrications should be undistinguishable from facts founded in truth and nature. Especially must the difference be apparent in the case of the Christian records if they are fictitious, because they abound in facts, and are evidently put together without any apprehension

on the part of their authors of their liability to detection. They who are so simple as to lay the scene of their fictions amidst public transactions, places, and persons, with so little perception of the risk of exposure, must betray the same want of good sense in the composition of their stories, and we may be perfectly certain that it will require no extraordinary degree of penetration to lay bare the delusion.

It is departing somewhat from the course which I have prescribed to myself, still I may be permitted to remark in this connexion, that the simple fact that these writings have obtained extensive credit, creates a very strong presumption of their substantial truth. That a thing is not proved because it has been long and generally believed, is a consideration of great importance which should never be lost sight of. Still the force with which it applies in any given instance, is determined by the nature of the subject proposed to us for our assent. If it be a mere matter of speculation—of opinion—a point upon which there is a peculiar liability to error, prejudice and delusion, authority can have but little weight. Yet, even in this case, we can hardly help believing that whatever a large mass of men have for ages credited, must have in it some portion—some basis of truth. The extensive and enduring prevalence of a certain conviction or faith, is a fact, an effect, for which some cause must exist, and there is no cause so universal as truth. Thus it is commonly said and admitted that the universality of a belief in a God and in a life to come, is one argument for these two great doctrines, a presumption, at least, of their truth. But this pre-

sumption is a great deal stronger when the proposition demanding credit states a fact, or a number of facts, and these, too, not insulated, not of a private but of a public nature; because facts of this description must naturally and necessarily be associated and interwoven with myriads of other facts of universal notoriety, and the evidences of their truth or falsehood must be spread out in the greatest abundance in the eye of the world. If there were now just published a narration of facts of a character public and remarkable, like those recorded in the New Testament, and purporting to have taken place quite recently, within a few years, in this, or in some neighbouring community, if there were no truth in them, they could not gain credit for a single moment, for their falsehood would manifest itself at once to every man, so that he who runs might read, in the entire absence of all that near and collateral evidence, which every real event carries with it in the multiplicity of its public bearings and connexions, and which does not require to be searched after, as it is impossible to be overlooked. The times, places, customs, institutions, feelings and opinions alluded to more or less distinctly, presenting none of the traces or impressions which the facts reported must have left, would by their silence immediately reveal the fraud. On the other hand, if it were pretended that the incidents now first published, had occurred a great while ago, the simple fact, that in the present state of things no signs were visible of the impression which they must have originally made, would be decisive with every man, and they never could command general credit.

Therefore, I say, the contents of the four Gospels being such as they are, events public and extraordinary, it is difficult to conceive how these books could ever have come to be extensively believed, if, when they were first published, whether soon or late after the things related took place, they had not been accompanied and corroborated by that strong, indispensable, though unestimated and unrecorded testimony which every public event brings with it through its connexions and relations with other matters of undisputed notoriety. I am not maintaining as a general remark that a thing is proved to be true because it is believed. This only do I say, that it is hardly possible to imagine how the four Gospels could ever have obtained credit if they were not substantially true, because they are not accounts of abstract opinions, they are narrations, not of private visions and secret experiences, but of public occurrences closely affiliated with the public affairs, persons and institutions of a certain period and a certain community. Their character being thus eminently circumstantial, the fact that they have been credited, is no faint presumption that they are true—that when they were first published, they brought with them that collateral corroboration which is exceedingly powerful, although it is seldom or never defined and estimated.

However, this is a digression from our proposed course of remark. My present design is, without reference to the authority or faith of others, to exhibit as far as is possible the truth of the Christian records, that quality in them which appeals to a deeper faculty than the understanding, from internal indications

alone. With this view, we have now cast one hasty glance over these books, and the first thing that has arrested our notice, and furnished food for thought, is the *obviously historical and public nature of their contents*. From this trait we have inferred that they are either substantially true, or the most reckless fabrications ever published to the world. If the latter, then there is an entire want of art in their composition. No one actuated by a design to deceive, would have strung together so many details, since he would be thereby virtually collecting an untold weight of testimony to disprove the truth of his relations. I have not entertained the supposition that the authors of these books may have been self-deluded. In some particulars they may have been deceived. Whether they were or were not, remains to be seen upon a closer examination of these writings. We have looked now only at the circumstantial and public nature of the things they contain. So far as this is their character, they are inconsistent with delusion. Looking at the facts as they are given, having occurred as it is professed in the open air, at noon-day, in public places and amidst crowds, we hold that these accounts must be true in the main, or else such a want of art is evinced in their fabrication, as will show itself in their whole structure, and render it no difficult thing to settle fully their real character and claims.

CHAPTER III.

THE MARKS OF HONESTY APPARENT IN THE GOSPELS.


“ So stands it, in short, with all forms of intellect, whether as directed to the finding of truth or to the fit imparting thereof ; always the characteristic of right performance is a certain spontaneity, an unconsciousness.”—*Edinburgh Review*.

I COME now to the consideration of another and more decisive characteristic of these writings. It is the same trait upon which we have already remarked, but more strikingly manifested, showing itself in other ways ; it may be designated as Unconsciousness or Simplicity. This feature reveals itself by luminous tokens. It appears in the most impressive manner that the authors of these books were wholly unconscious of any design to make out a case—to do anything but state facts.

In the eleventh chapter of the fourth book, entitled the Gospel according to John, we have a minute account of a most extraordinary event, the raising of a dead man, Lazarus, to life. It is represented as having taken place in a public manner. The stone which covered the mouth of the tomb is removed. Jesus calls aloud to the dead man to come forth. And he comes forth in the presence of a number of persons.

Now what does the narrative immediately proceed to inform us of? Why, that although some of the spectators were impressed and led to admit the ex-

traordinary authority of Jesus, others did not believe, were not impressed, but went away and told the enemies of Jesus what had taken place! We are told with great particularity how a most astonishing event took place, and in the same breath we are informed that some of those who stood by and saw it were unconvinced. And this information is communicated without the slightest appearance of reluctance or hesitation. Not an attempt is made—not a word is introduced to explain why the miracle failed to produce upon some who witnessed it, what we should consider its inevitable effect. It cannot even be said with propriety that they *confess* there were some present who did not believe. The information is not wrung from them. They give it freely, without the least consciousness of the ground it might seem to furnish for doubting the reality of the event. Here, I say, is a manifestation of the unconscious fearlessness of a true and honest mind, which beams out upon me like light from Heaven. I see here that the writer thought of nothing but telling the truth, and telling it too, as a matter of course, without the least parade of frankness. The facts he states may be hard to be believed, and difficult to be reconciled with one another; still he cannot help that, and he does not even think of helping it; he gives them without hesitation, without comment, without any anxiety about the effect of the narration. Here it is that the true inspiration of these writings begins to be discernible, the inspiration of a single mind, unconscious of itself, stating the truth in the freest, simplest, most natural manner possible.



Again. In the twenty-eighth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we have an account of the resurrection of Christ himself—of his appearing alive to his friends after he had been crucified and buried. “Then,” so we read in the 16th and 17th verses, “the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some *doubted*,”—doubted whether it were indeed he. The most important event in the whole history, so we are explicitly informed, was doubted by some of those who had the best opportunity of ascertaining its truth! What is this but another instance of that perfect fearlessness, that indifference to effect, which truth can only have?*

Once more. In the twelfth chapter of John, we read that when Jesus had uttered the words, “‘Father, glorify thy name,’ there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by and heard it, said that it thundered; others said, an angel spake to him.” What can be more manifest, than that the writer had no thought here but of stating facts? He relates a most extraordinary occurrence—the utterance of a voice from heaven, and, at the same time, without a word of explanation, tells us that the

* The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel exhibits signs of being hurried. We may suppose that on the above-mentioned occasion there were many others present besides the eleven. It is said elsewhere, that Jesus was once seen, after his resurrection, by five hundred of the brethren. In so large a crowd there must have been some who were unable to approach him near enough to be sure that it was he.

people who stood by and heard it, said that it was thunder.* It is these passages, and others like them, that satisfy me that the narrators were honest—that they aimed only at relating things just as they took place. I see no shaping or accommodation of the events related to a particular design. There is a quiet, unobtrusive confidence in their mode of narration, which seems to me identical with a perfect conviction of truth—with a true spirit. I have given only a few instances; enough, however, to define and render prominent the characteristic of these writings upon which I am now remarking. Throughout, the same peculiarity is apparent.

It is very often objected to the truth of the New Testament history, that if the wonderful things therein recorded actually took place, how is it possible that they should not have convinced the great body of the people. They must have been irresistible, it is said, and we cannot conceive that they really could have occurred, or they would have produced a greater impression. We find that they were not believed—that the multitudes in whose presence Jesus is said to have done these astonishing works, clamoured for his blood, and joined in putting him to death.

From a careful examination of the history, we may find reasons, although they are not ostentatiously thrust forward, to suspect that the unbelief of the Jews was not so great nor so general as this objection supposes. In one passage we are expressly told that many of the chief men believed in Jesus,

* For further remarks on this passage, see Chapter XI.

although their fear of their equals did not allow them to confess it.* We are informed also that his enemies once and again dared not lay hands on him, because he was so generally favoured by the people. And then the seizure of his person, which took place in the night, and the disgraceful hurry of the Jewish court, by which he was pronounced guilty of blasphemy, create the idea that he fell a victim to a faction. The priests knew well enough that if they could only present him before the people in the condition of a prisoner and a criminal, the association of such circumstances with his pretensions as the Messiah would shock the public mind and exasperate a mob against him. Shortly after his final disappearance we read of the conversion of three thousand persons to the Christian faith.† This is usually represented as sudden and miraculous. But surely it is more natural to suppose that this large body of converts was composed mainly of those who had listened to the words and witnessed the works of Jesus. The tide of popular feeling was setting strongly in his favour, and the priesthood saw that his success must be their destruction; and I cannot but think that he was put to death by means of a sudden revulsion of feeling which the priests succeeded in producing.

But allowing the unbelief of the Jews to have been as inveterate and universal as is commonly represented, it may be perfectly accounted for, I apprehend, upon the known principles and constitution of human nature. Experience and observation

* John xii. 42.

† Acts ii. 41.

bear witness that when men are swayed by any inveterate bias or passion, they are impregnable to the strongest evidence contradictory of their idolized notions. Every day we see men unaffected by facts and considerations, whose force miracles could not increase. The slave of intemperance, for instance, sees his wife and children perishing before his eyes. Shame and ruin and death stare him in the face, and still he persists in his darling indulgence, and keeps on in the downward path of destruction. The love of power intoxicates in a similar way. The Jews were burning with the thirst of national glory—of earthly prosperity and success. They had long considered themselves a sacred people—the peculiar favourites of Heaven; and they were stung to madness at the thought of the foreign domination under which they had been brought—of the insolence of the Gentiles—“the sinners—the dogs,” as they were wont to call them,—by whom they had been enslaved. They longed for triumph and revenge. They had set their hearts, like spoiled children, upon the appearance of a temporal prince and warrior to lead them on to victory and boundless renown. While absorbed by these passions, they could not bear to listen to one who, like Jesus, breathed peace and love and forgiveness. They could not endure to have those hopes disappointed which they had so long cherished, and which, as they believed, their religion encouraged and sanctified.

In fact, the unbelief of the Jews not only admits of the explanation at which I have briefly hinted, but when duly considered it becomes an indirect and inverted evidence of the power manifested by Jesus.

It could not have been any ordinary thing that wound them up to such a degree of exasperation. There must have been no little weight in the words and works of Jesus, or they would never have raged against him with so much violence.

But it is not my object now to give a full account of the unbelief of those in whose presence the wonderful works related in the Gospels were wrought. There is one thing upon which I wish to fasten the attention of the reader. Where is it that we learn that the Jewish people were unaffected by what was said and done by the man of Nazareth? who is it that has told us that he was doubted and gainsaid by the mass of those among whom he lived and taught? It is the authors of the Gospels themselves—it is they, who without the slightest equivocation have recorded the fact that the majority of the people, including the teachers of the Law, the leading men of the time and community, yes, and the members of his own family, gave no credence to the pretensions of Jesus. This fact they have recorded so unreservedly that they cease to appear as his friends and adherents. They rather seem like impartial and uninterested spectators, having no feeling for the one side or the other; no feeling, at least, that for a moment disturbs their determination to tell the truth. I say their determination. And yet this does not seem to be the proper word. For there is no appearance of effort, or constraint, or labour, as if, conscious of a temptation to unfairness, they had to guard themselves accordingly. They write straight on, as naturally as they breathe, stating with equal explicitness or with equal brevity

the words and works of Jesus, and the objections and incredulity of those around him, making no explanations, betraying no anxiety to influence the mind of the reader. In fine, their candour is for nothing more remarkable than for its unconsciousness. They do not seem to know that they are candid, or that they are actuated by a spirit in any degree remarkable and praiseworthy. Their honesty has no appearance of being put on. It is rather a part of their nature, the breath of their nostrils. If, after all, there is any mind so diseased with doubt as to fear that this character may have been assumed, I observe that it not only strikes me as utterly impossible, but if it were possible, then, for such deep laid and incredible cunning, there must have been the inducement of some most selfish and corrupt design, for the existence of which not a shadow of proof appears. But it is abundantly enough to say that if this is not candour—honesty, there is no telling what honesty is; there can be no indubitable tokens of its presence, and we can have no ground for faith or confidence in man.

The honesty of these narratives reveals itself in another way.

It is evident that Jesus Christ is their principal subject. They are histories of his life. Their authors obviously considered him worthy of profound reverence and implicit credit. And yet their accounts have not the faintest shadows of the character or style of eulogies, panegyrics. How truly has it been said that “biographers, translators, editors, all, in short, who employ themselves in illustrating the lives or the works of others, are peculiarly exposed to the Bos-

wellian disease of admiration." Whether the individual described be a creature of the imagination, or a real personage, he becomes the hero of the writer, and the utmost pains are taken to set him off in the most glowing colours—to magnify his least excellence—to be silent about every trace of imperfection in him—to guard every thing he says or does against misconstruction, or the slightest impression of an unfavourable nature. Nothing of this sort appears in the Christian records. No attempt at embellishment can be detected. There are no expressions of admiration, no prompting, no challenging of the applause of the reader. All is calm, direct, and simple.

Indeed, in some cases it would appear that, so far from being conscious of any endeavour to heighten the effect of the things they relate, they not only do not do justice to the great subject of their biographies, but absolutely do not seem to have understood Jesus in all his elevation. There are passages from which one may incidentally, but on that account not the less fairly, infer that the conduct and meaning of Jesus were more beautiful than they have represented or even understood it. There is one curious case in point, which I proceed to consider. I do not affirm that the following view of it is necessarily the true view. I only say that it admits of the construction I put upon it.

In three of the four books we have an account of obviously the same incident. I refer to the case of the woman who went behind Jesus in the crowd and touched his garments, and was instantly cured of

a disease under which she had long suffered. In the Gospel of Matthew, this circumstance is related thus :

“ And behold a woman who was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him and touched the hem of his garment. For she said within herself, if I may but touch his garment, I shall be made whole. But Jesus turned him about ; and when he saw her, he said, ‘ Daughter, be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole.’ And she was made whole from that hour.”

Mark’s relation is this. “ And a certain woman who had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, ‘ If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.’ And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, ‘ Who touched my clothes ?’ And his disciples said, ‘ Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou who touched me ?’ And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knew what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, ‘ Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.’ ”

Luke relates that "a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, who had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him and touched the border of his garment, and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd. And Jesus said, 'Who touched me?' When all denied, Peter, and they that were with him, said, 'Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?' And Jesus said, 'Somebody hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.' And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came, trembling, and, falling down before him, she declared before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was immediately healed. And he said unto her, 'Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.'"

Now, although we perceive in these three accounts such variations as we commonly find and naturally expect in the different statements of honest and independent narrators, relating the same event, yet they all agree in one thing. They all tell us that when the woman came forward, Jesus addressed her in a cheering tone, assuring her that her faith had cured her. By this assurance, as I conceive, he intended to correct the impression she had evidently entertained, that there was a miraculous power of healing in his very garments. It was through the power of her own faith—the influence of her own mind, that so instantaneous a cure had been effected. It was not, as she had evidently surmised, through any medical virtue in his clothes. but through the energy of her own convic-

tion, that she had been made whole. This seems to be the natural and obvious meaning of the few words he addressed to her.

But, and here is the point to which I wish to direct the attention of the reader, he does not appear to have been understood by at least two of the narrators. For Mark says that Jesus discovered that some one had touched him, by the departure of a healing virtue from his person. And Luke represents Jesus as declaring in so many words that he had felt a miraculous virtue go out of him. That he really made any such declaration, his assurance to the woman that her faith had made her whole, forbids me to believe. It is much more natural to suppose that it was purely the inference of the historians that Jesus ascertained that some one had touched him by the departure of a medical virtue from his body. They concluded that this was the way in which he found out that he had been touched: and one of them (Luke) has gone so far as to put words to this effect into his mouth. If these remarks are correct, then it follows that the narrators did not reach the true import of the words of Jesus, when he said to the woman, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." His view—his representation of the case, was more simple and spiritual than they supposed. I mean to say, in short, that they undertake to account for his knowing that some one had touched him, in a way which he evidently intended to disallow, when he bade the woman consider her own faith as the cause of her cure.

It is natural to suppose that the woman, agitated by the most powerful emotions, did not merely touch

his garments, but seized them with a quick, convulsive grasp, and so he felt something peculiar and significant in the movement, and, surmising the truth, was induced to turn round and ask who it was.

If the account given above of this incident is admitted, how decisive, by the way, is the proof that the incident must actually have taken place. The narrators could not have recorded what they did not understand, if it were not real.

I beg the reader not to permit the miraculous character of this occurrence to prevent his surrendering his mind to a full and candid consideration of the case. Upon the miraculous nature of many of the things related in these books, I propose to remark at length in the sequel. In the meanwhile, the reader is at liberty to regard this incident as furnishing one of the cases, by no means rare, in which an immediate and extraordinary effect has been produced upon the physical frame, through the power of a strong mental impression.

Whether the view I have taken of this case be correct or not, or whether there are any other instances in which the historians have fallen short of understanding the words and conduct of Jesus in their real greatness and simplicity—one thing is plain enough. They evince no disposition to magnify him. They do not show him off. They make no comments, suggest no explanations, calculated to place what he said and did in a striking light. In their simple and brief sketches they appear oftentimes to have omitted the mention of important circumstances illustrative of his words and works. They seem to have been so

fully possessed with the reality of the things they relate, that the idea of their ever being disproved never crossed their minds. They show not the slightest misgiving, lest others may fail to see and understand what is as clear to them as the sun at noonday. They betray no apprehension that the truth will not speak for itself, or that it needs any pains on their part to make it manifest. Hence the artless and careless brevity of their narrations.

At one time, as they tell us, an individual said to Jesus, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus replied, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Again, another offered to join Jesus, but begged permission first to go and bury his father. To him the reply was, "Let the dead bury their dead." On these occasions Jesus is represented as using a roughness inconsistent with his usual mildness and consideration. We may suppose that the individual first mentioned was actuated by a mercenary feeling in offering to follow Jesus, that he hoped for some worldly advantage, and that Jesus, seeing or fearing that such was his motive, gave him timely warning not to expect anything of a worldly nature from him. With regard to the other, who desired first to be permitted to go and bury his father, we may with great probability conjecture that he made his filial duty a mere pretence for temporizing. He was not perfectly sure that Jesus was the expected Messiah; and while he wished to wait awhile until the true character of Jesus should be more satisfactorily ascertained, he desired to secure the advantage of an

early profession. His father, we may even suppose, was not yet dead, but only very aged and infirm, and the request was in effect, "Let me first discharge my duty to my father, and then I will come and be your disciple." To him, therefore, the reply of Jesus was most appropriate, "Let the dead bury their dead," that is, let those, and they are numerous enough, who are dead—insensible to the claims of truth—to the import of what I say and do, perform the necessary offices for the dead. Such are the explanations of which these passages are susceptible. They certainly appear natural and probable. But observe, they are not given, they are not hinted at, by the narrators; they are only indirectly, undesignedly suggested by the general tenor of their stories. They take no pains to guard against misapprehension, or to place the conduct of Jesus in the best light. Here I behold the boundless confidence of truth.

There are even more striking instances of the entire absence of any disposition to exaggerate the things recorded in these books. Circumstances are related with the utmost brevity, and without any indication of fear, which seem to be palpably inconsistent with the greatness and power ascribed to Jesus. We are told, for example, with an all-unconscious frankness, of the powerful appeals made to him by his enemies after he was fastened to the cross. They shook their heads at him, and cried, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now,

if he will have him, for he said I am the Son of God." Who has ever paused over these words for the first time, without feeling that they contained a bitter force—without secretly saying to himself, "O why did he not come down? If he had power to heal the sick and raise the dead, why did he not descend then from the cross and dissipate all doubt for ever?" Upon reflection, it is true, we recollect that he is never said to have used his extraordinary gifts for his own sake. It was not physical power that he sought to exercise, but moral power; the power of a love which no insensibility on the part of its objects could exhaust—of self-forgetfulness—of fortitude—of meek and patient endurance. He sought to show how one might do and endure, not from necessity, but voluntarily, to disclose the before unrevealed energy of a generous and self-denying free will. And had he relieved himself, had he shrunk from suffering pain and contempt, he must have forgotten his great spiritual purpose.

But, although this explanation is at hand, the narrators, be it remembered, do not suggest it. They record the sneers of his enemies, in all their naked force, unrelieved by a single word of comment. But I must pause here for the present.

Many a one, I imagine, when disturbed with doubts about the truth of the New Testament history, has secretly wished that he had been permitted to live in those days—to be present on the spot, and then how easily might he have satisfied himself. For my own part, I confess, I shrink at the thought of such a trial. A trial it must have been, as every one will perceive, who is aware of his own weakness, and knows the

tremendous power of the example of a multitude. I fear I should have wanted courage and candour to resist the accumulated authority of the rich, and great, and learned, of the mass of the people, and have fallen in with the general insensibility, or participated in those prepossessions which presented so effectual a barrier against the force of the words and works of Jesus. One thing does seem to me most desirable. Could I only have an account of those events from persons, or from only one person, whom I knew, in whose good sense, integrity, and fairness, I have perfect confidence, then I should have a ground for my faith, than which none could be surer. Could individuals of this character have been present, and could we have their testimony, nothing would be wanting. I open the four Gospels, and I feel that this want has been supplied most amply. When I read these books in the way in which I am now attempting to do it, I care not what names they bear, I see—I *know*—that they are the work of an honest and impartial spirit. Nowhere in the writings of the dead, or in the conduct of the living, do I discern evidences of integrity and singleness of mind so luminous and affecting. I see none of the art of a fraudulent design—none of the incoherence of self-delusion. These histories command my cordial confidence. They are to me full of inspiration, not a vague mystical inspiration, but the inspiration of truth and honesty, the same spirit that breathes in every honest man, in every true word, the Holy Spirit. God give us this spirit without measure !

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

“ — I only speak right on.”

WE have remarked upon the honesty of the Christian historians, particularly as it is evinced in the manner in which they speak of the principal personage of their narratives, the great object of their reverence and faith. They make no attempt to show him off. They manifest no apprehension about the impression that may be made by what they record. I am struck with the exhibition of their free, unguarded honesty, in the case which I am now about to mention.

We are given to understand with the utmost explicitness in these books, that Jesus was possessed of the most extraordinary powers—that he could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead, by a word. Numerous instances are detailed with remarkable particularity, in which, in the most public and satisfactory manner, he exercised these miraculous gifts. But on more than one occasion we are told that some of the principal men of the community came to him, and requested him to perform a miracle—to give them a sign: thus affording him an opportunity, as it would seem, of convincing them of his authority as a messenger from Heaven. “How long,” said they, with apparently great plausibility, “how long dost

thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." On these occasions, as the historians have not hesitated to inform us, he directly and uniformly refused to comply with the request made to him. They give us no explanation of the reasons of his refusal. They leave him open to the charge of having evaded an appeal apparently very fair.

It is not my immediate purpose to state the grounds of the conduct of Jesus in these cases. Still, as it admits of an explanation at once sound and rational, not only in accordance with, but illustrative of, the dignity of his character and the spirituality of his object, I may be permitted to hint at it in passing. The Jewish nation, as I have already had occasion to state, cherished the fond expectation of the appearance of a military leader and king, who should deliver them from Roman bondage, and place them where, as the peculiar people of God, they fancied they belonged, at the head of the human race. The existence of this expectation is proved incidentally, and therefore the more satisfactorily, by the Christian records. So we need not resort to other witnesses to establish this point, although they are not wanting. How tenaciously this hope clung to the minds of the Jews may be gathered from the conduct and feelings of the adherents of Jesus. They evidently expected him to establish a worldly kingdom, and to distribute among them its chief offices and honours, and out of this expectation there frequently rose among them jealousy and strife. After all that he had said and done to the contrary, they still cherished this hope to the very last. And just before his final disappearance their

language is, "Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?" As confidently as the Jews looked for a Messiah, they looked for him to be a temporal Prince and Deliverer.

Seeing then that this expectation existed so widely and deeply, is it not natural to infer that those who demanded of Jesus "a sign from heaven," failed of being convinced by what he did actually say and do, because, although it proved him to be no ordinary man, still it did not carry out and realize their darling idea of the Christ? They wanted him to assume a character and to perform miracles, conformable to their cherished and pre-established notions. So that although at first sight it may appear that when they asked of him "a sign," they meant merely a display of miraculous power, no matter of what description, we may suppose that they intended a sign of a particular sort, a sign which should correspond to and justify their prepossessions. Indeed, it may be gathered from the Jewish writings, that an idea was entertained that the Messiah, when he came, would give some peculiar token or signal—some extraordinary display of power—a luminous appearance in the heavens perhaps, for it is not distinctly defined, which should be a credential of his authority, to point him out to the people as the Messiah, beyond the possibility of mistake. The Apostle Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, observes that the Jews seek after "a sign." And the inference is thus confirmed, that the sign sought was of a peculiar character, a sort of signal corresponding to the universal idea of the expected Deliverer. The demand for a sign, therefore,

was equivalent to a demand for evidence that he was such a personage as was expected. But Jesus did not present himself to the nation as a military leader. The office he assumed was infinitely superior to that of the most brilliant conqueror. Evidence therefore was demanded, of which the very nature of the case did not admit, and which he could not give. The grandeur and dignity of his aim prevented it. It was not he that made the Pharisees to doubt. Their doubts resulted from their own false prepossessions. These it was that led them astray or stopped them short of conviction. He could not speak more plainly than he had already done by word and work. And if these failed to satisfy them, it was in vain that further evidence was asked for. He had nothing else to offer—nothing different in kind, nothing that those who were as yet unconvinced could appreciate, if they were not impressed by what he had already done. There were other things about to take place fitted to vindicate his authority. Events were approaching, as he intimated,—his death and resurrection,—which in their significance and consequences would, like signs from heaven, attest that he was sent by God.

But although the refusal of Jesus to comply with the demand of those who sought from him a sign, admits of so ample a justification, yet it is not obvious; neither is it urged by the historians. And here again is the characteristic to which I wish to direct particular attention. They have not shrunk from recording, with simple and fearless brevity, the fact that, on different occasions, when Jesus was asked to exercise his miraculous gifts, he refused to

accede to the request. They show no apprehension that the motive of his refusal may be misunderstood, or that he would come under the imputation of shrinking from a fair test of his power. They interpose no explanation to guard him against misconstruction. I can account for this characteristic of their narrations only by supposing, either that the explanation was so obvious to them that they never thought it could be necessary to give it, or else, that their confidence in Jesus was so perfect and entire, an unconscious feeling of their bosoms, that they never once dreamed that he could be suspected of an unworthy motive, however inexplicable his language or his conduct on certain occasions might appear. Whether his words and works were understood or not, they do not appear to be aware that an injurious construction could by any possibility be put upon them. I know not what others may think, but it seems to me there is something so genuine, healthy, and natural, both in this state of mind, and in the way in which it manifests itself, that I cannot but refer it to truth and reality.

There is a consistency so remarkable and evidently so wholly undesigned, on the part of the narrators, in the passages in which mention is made of "a sign from heaven," that I cannot help taking notice of it in this connexion, although it does not properly come under our present head.

On one occasion we read, that just after Jesus had cured a demoniac in the presence of a multitude, some of the Pharisees asked him for a sign. He replied that he could give them no sign but his death and resurrection. At another time, immediately after he

had driven the money-changers from the temple, he was asked to give a sign—to produce his credentials for the authority he had assumed. In this instance, also, his reply is an obscure allusion to his death and resurrection. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up." Once more, just after he had fed a large multitude in a miraculous manner, the people followed him demanding a sign, intimating that he had not done as much as Moses, who had given their ancestors bread from heaven, alluding to the manna gathered by the Israelites in the wilderness. To this request Jesus answers at length and obscurely, but the main points of his reply are his death and resurrection.

Now, we cannot fail to observe that the authors of these histories appear to be wholly unconscious of any remarkable keeping in these passages, and yet it is most curious. The circumstances upon these three occasions are entirely different, and so is the language of Jesus. But the ideas expressed, the feelings evinced, are in perfect harmony. On each occasion, the demand for a sign was made just after Jesus had performed a remarkable work. So that it would seem as if those present had really been in some degree impressed with his extraordinary power, and only wanted to be satisfied that he was such a person as they were looking for, to give in to his claims at once. His reply is invariably the same in substance, though differing entirely in form. He will give, he declares, no stronger evidence of the divinity of his mission, than would be expressed in events shortly to occur, his death and resurrection. These, he intimates, would furnish the most imposing proofs of his authority.

I confess I want words to express the sense of reality produced by these passages, so different in detail, so singularly consistent in substance. Of the consistency here, the writers do not appear to be at all conscious. They have taken no pains to make it apparent. It is perfectly natural and easy, but it is not obvious. I do not know that it has ever before been remarked upon.

I alluded just now to the driving of the money-changers from the temple. It is related that "when Jesus found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting, he made a scourge of small cords, and drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables, and said unto them that sold doves, 'Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandize.'" This incident certainly appears, at first sight, to be inconsistent with the usual gentleness of Jesus, and that abstinence from all violence which he so emphatically inculcated, and on all other occasions exemplified. The reader has probably seen a picture representing him in the temple, with outstretched arm, wielding the scourge with great vigour: I need not say how offensive it must have been.

Without the least violation of probabilities, we may suppose, that on this occasion Jesus went into the temple attended by a large concourse of people; and that, upon the first intimation of his will, the traders and money-changers, overturning the tables in their precipitation, fled before one who had the populace *with him*, as Jesus then had. The "scourge of small

cords," so far from being an instrument purposely fashioned for violence, we may conjecture, was nothing more than a piece of cord found on the spot, and originally used for obvious purposes by the dealers in oxen and sheep, and taken and folded up into a sort of whip by Jesus, not perhaps with reference to the men, but the cattle. It is not by any means necessary to suppose that he even struck these animals, or that he assumed any attitude inconsistent with what we feel must have been the habitual dignity of his deportment. Candour justifies us in putting such a construction upon this incident, involving, certainly, no improbability. But the narrators do not hint at it. They have not feared to relate this event in the briefest and most careless manner. They have not told us how the dealers in oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the money-changers, came to be in the temple; although upon reflection it is clear that they were there to supply the demand for sacrifices and offerings for the temple-service, and to accommodate those who, coming from distant places, were under the necessity of exchanging their foreign money for the currency of Jerusalem. The authors of the Gospels have not told us these things, obviously because it never occurred to them that they needed to be told. Now, their confidence in the reality of what they were relating, and in the correctness of the conduct of Jesus, is precisely like their knowledge of these circumstances, so settled and familiar a feeling with them, resulting from such obvious realities, so perfectly natural, that it does not occur to them that others may be deficient in these respects, and may require explanations. In the familiarity of their own

information, and in the unconscious fulness of their own faith, they forget the possible ignorance and incredulity of others. Who can fail to recognize here the simplicity and integrity of their minds?

Once more. It is obvious that the authors of these writings must have considered Jesus as possessed of extraordinary spiritual strength, great firmness or fortitude. If in the composition of their narratives they have had any earthly object but a distinct and honest statement of what they had seen, known, and believed, if they have fabricated, coloured, or even selected incidents for any particular purpose, we may suppose that it was for the sake of showing the superiority of Jesus to every human infirmity. The suspicion of such a purpose becomes exceedingly natural when we consider two things.

1. In the Epistles Jesus Christ is spoken of in the most exalted terms. He is described as the image of God, and the brightness of his glory. In him, it is said, dwelt the fulness of the Divinity. And again, in him it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. But it is unnecessary to specify passages. The Apostles appear to exhaust language in expressing their sense of the excellence of their master.

2. But not only do the Apostles in their letters express in the strongest manner possible, and by the loftiest figures of speech, their sense of the greatness of their master,—at an early period, the idea sprung up, and it has almost universally prevailed ever since, that the man of Nazareth was a super-human being—super-angelic,—nay, the Supreme Being himself, the very God. He has literally been deified for ages.

Believing Jesus Christ to have been a man, a man

indeed of miraculous gifts, and of unequalled moral greatness, I see nothing either in the lofty language concerning him which we find in the Epistles, or in the prevalent faith of the Christian world, that does not admit of an easy and natural explanation. When I consider what power moral goodness has, even in its most imperfect manifestations, to touch and thrill the heart, and kindle the imagination, and inspire the utterance, I do not wonder that the Apostles used the boldest forms of speech to express the sense they had of the dignity and greatness of their Master. I do not content myself with referring to the strong and figurative character of the language of the East, although this is a circumstance not to be lost sight of. But I say it would have been strange indeed if they had employed cold and qualified terms when they spoke of Jesus. I honestly avow that I can find no epithets, no titles applied to him in their Epistles, which, with my views of his nature, I cannot cordially go along with. Had I been in their situation—had I cherished that fervent sense of his moral greatness, which they must have entertained, I am convinced I should have used language like theirs, and even stronger language, I might almost say, if that were possible. They apply no title to him, which, upon the supposition of his simple humanity, does not seem to me to have an appropriate significance.

And then, too, as to the general belief of Christians in the supreme divinity of Christ, it does not surprise me. In all times the tendency to deify the great and good has shown itself. Man has always been disposed to recognize the brightest manifestation of God in his

own nature. What were the gods of the ancient pagan world but deified men, individuals of extraordinary energy? This popular doctrine, therefore, respecting the nature of Christ, which has so long prevailed, is to my mind a most expressive tribute to the transcendent excellence of his character.

But the object of these brief allusions to the language of the Epistles and the common belief of Christians concerning Christ, is, to show how very natural is the supposition, that the authors of the New Testament narratives, if they had had any earthly purpose beyond a simple statement of facts, would have been desirous of representing Jesus as superior to every human weakness, as impassible to every form of temptation and grief. This has ever been the strong tendency, to exalt the great and good above the common attributes of humanity. But every suspicion of such a bias on the part of these writers, singularly impressed though they must have been with the greatness of Jesus, vanishes the instant we open their narratives. For we find that without the slightest attempt to explain, reconcile, or soften the apparent inconsistency, they have mentioned in the plainest terms repeated instances of human weakness in Jesus. I would not needlessly shock the reader, and therefore I observe in advance, that these instances, so far from obscuring the beauty of his character, heighten its effect. Upon this point, however, I will remark as I proceed. For the present, we have only to observe, that the instances referred to are there, on the records, expressly detailed, and unqualified by a single word of explanation.

On one occasion, and this too at the very opening of his history, when, if they had had any anxiety about the effect of the things they were going to relate, the writers would have taken care to place Jesus in the best light, they represent him as *tempted*. It is true the temptations that assailed him are described as the suggestions of another, the Evil One. But it must be remembered that this representation is made in accordance with the rude philosophy, if so it may be termed, of the age, with the universally received idea, not that men were tempted by a malignant being assuming a visible shape,—for under such circumstances the temptation of the weakest would be impossible—but that the evil thoughts and inclinations, arising in men's own minds, were to be attributed to the agency of an evil spirit. Agreeably to this opinion, the temptation of Jesus is described as the work of such a being. And in the same way any individual living at that time, and in that region, would in all probability have represented his own temptations, if called upon to relate them. Although it is thus described, I see no reason for supposing that the authors of the Gospels had any idea that the temptation of Jesus would be understood to differ essentially from the temptations to which other men are exposed. If tempted, then, as we are, he had thoughts and imaginings which it became him to resist and banish; and thus the common weakness of our nature is made visible in him. This his biographers have unhesitatingly recorded.

Once when he was speaking to his disciples of the

sufferings and death that awaited him, Peter, who was shocked at the thought that one, whom he believed to be the Christ, should be exposed to ignominy and violence, exclaimed, "Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be done unto thee!" Jesus replied with great warmth and severity, and, by the strength of his language, showed that he was aware of the moral danger to which the suggestion of his warm-hearted friend exposed him. "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me." As if he had said, "Hush! thou art my enemy! Wouldst thou tempt me?"

But he is placed before us, not only as tempted, but as moved by indignation, as shedding tears, nay, as overcome by the prospect of suffering, and disclosing his emotion by exclamations of distress and groans of agony.

Twice is it particularly mentioned that Jesus wept. In both cases most needless is the mention of the fact, if the writers had had any purpose beyond a straightforward account of the things they had seen and heard. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. But why did he weep there? Does not the narrative give us distinctly to understand that he had determined to restore the dead man to life? We should rather have expected that his whole deportment would have been expressive of joy and triumph, at the near prospect of dissipating the sorrow of his friends, and that the air of gladness produced by his secret and benevolent purpose, would have been made to appear in striking contrast with the lamentations of those around him. But as it is, the

historians tell us that he wept and groaned in spirit, and was troubled. They barely state the fact. They offer no interpretation of it. Indeed it would seem to bear no explanation but that which those present put upon it. "Behold," said they, "how he loved him." And some said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" So it appears that the narrative not only represents Jesus as giving way to tears, but as yielding to this weakness, when he had but little reason to weep, in morbid sympathy, for so we must esteem it, with a grief which he knew in his own heart was about to be turned into the most extravagant joy—a grief, which, seeing as he did, what was about to take place, must have appeared to him almost groundless. Certainly the fact of Jesus weeping under such circumstances never would have been suggested nor recorded, if the writer had thought of anything but telling the truth.

When we duly consider it, the grief of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus is susceptible of an explanation not quite so obvious as that just alluded to, but an explanation which, so far from marring the character of Jesus, gives us a new impression of its extraordinary elevation. If the narrative had mentioned only that he shed tears upon seeing the tears of Mary and those who were with her, we might refer his grief to the mere impulse of sympathy. But it was no slight or transient emotion by which he was affected. He appears to have been in a state of great depression. We have three several notices of

his tears or sighs on this occasion. And if we bring fully into view what he was, what were his aims and prospects, we may conjecture a probable and adequate cause of his melancholy. That he was a man of great tenderness of feeling, is evident enough from the whole genius of his religion. Even though we had no direct information concerning him, we might confidently infer from the pacific and gentle character of Christianity, that its author must have been possessed of no common degree of sensibility. Peculiarly formed by nature to appreciate the delights and consolations of human sympathy, he was cut off from all these, so far as the objects and purposes nearest his heart were concerned. There were individuals, it is true, who were affectionately attached to him, but they did not understand him. They did not enter into his lofty views and sympathize with the great aim of his life. He was deprived of all human aids. It was impossible that he should be unconscious of his loneliness—of the profound and appalling solitude of the heart in which he stood—a stranger in the world which he loved and yearned towards, with a new and unwonted love. When he stood at the grave of Lazarus, his own fate was near its consummation, and how natural is it that the tokens of human feeling and sorrow, and the sight of a grave, should bring over his mind, with peculiar vividness, a sense of his own melancholy situation—the thought of that rapidly approaching hour when he should suffer and die, without a single heart beating in unison with his. When, a few days after, Mary poured over his person the precious ointment, merely as an expression

of her profound personal reverence, he immediately connected it with the thought of his death and burial. The perfumed ointment had to him the odour of the grave, and seemed as if intended to embalm his body. So, when I consider what he was, and how he stood in the world, I cannot wonder that he sighed deeply and was distressed, when the images of death and sorrow came thronging around him. That such should have been the feelings which caused him to sigh deeply and repeatedly, was touchingly natural. Besides, what a sense does it give us of his sublime superiority to all selfish weaknesses, to every emotion of self-complacency, that he should evince such a state of mind just when he was about to work a stupendous miracle, and exercise the most astonishing power! What an elevated idea may we form of his greatness, when we perceive that he was not in the slightest degree elated at the thought of the mighty work he was just about to do!

Such is the account that may be given of the melancholy of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus; and so the fact harmonizes with his character and situation. But the authors of the gospel have not breathed a single explanatory word.

When Jesus approached Jerusalem, attended by an immense multitude, shouting hosannas, then too he wept. And then, too, it was, most probably, that he uttered the words, "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." How does his distress at such a time exalt our idea of him! Not for a moment was he blinded by the imposing demonstrations of popular favour.

The whole city was moved to meet him. The excitement was so great and the exciting cause so powerful, that he declared that, if the people could have been unmoved and silent, the very stones would have cried out. Harder, then, than the stones, must have been the hearts of those who remained unaffected by all that Jesus had said and done. The populace lavished upon him the most striking expressions of respect, spreading their garments before him. And he was weeping! He wept because he looked above and beyond the hour, because he was so completely elevated above the weakness of being imposed upon by the dazzling prospect of success, which his popularity at that moment may well have suggested to his mind. He saw that he was entering the city, there to be condemned to death, and that the tide of popular feeling was shortly to be turned against him. The cross which he had long borne in imagination, now began to press with a close and oppressive weight upon his mind. He saw, too, the inevitable ruin of his country, and he broke forth into that pathetic cry, "O that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now are they hid from thine eyes!" This incident, however, is recorded with the greatest brevity, and the narrators leave it to speak for itself. They linger not to point out its beauty.

CHAPTER V.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

“While he suffers, the spirit of God and glory rests upon him. There is a glory and a freshness sparkling in him by suffering, an excellency that was hidden.—He that doth and can suffer, shall have my heart.”—*Anon.*

THERE is one instance, in which I cannot divest myself of the impression, that Jesus is represented as speaking in a tone of haste and irritation. At least the historians, in their fearless frankness, have not breathed a word to guard us against such an impression. I refer to the exclamation, “Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?” Let us endeavour to appreciate the occasion on which these words were uttered.

In the most public manner Jesus had, by his word, relieved a man who had lost the powers both of sight and of speech, and who, according to the current belief of the times, was under the influence of a malignant spirit. Certain Pharisees, who were among the spectators, charged Jesus with being in league with the very prince of the evil spirits. By this charge, they virtually admitted that the cure he had just wrought transcended the power of man. One cannot but feel that such inveterate perverseness of mind must have shocked him deeply. After replying to the charge in various ways, he went on to make those

solemn declarations which have so often struck terror into the minds of readers: "All manner of sin and blasphemy will be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." Now in the very form of these sentences, I think I perceive that they must have been uttered with great feeling—with the deepest emotion. They are in the shape of general propositions. They are couched in unqualified language. Deep feeling always craves this mode of expression. It delights to leap at once, from the particular circumstances which have excited it, to the annunciation of a general or universal truth; or rather, such is its magnifying power, that it immediately swells out the incident or object which has awakened it, whether it be joyous or otherwise, into a world-embracing light or an all-obscuring darkness. It loses sight of all qualifications of time or circumstance.

And here I cannot but mourn, to think how the thrilling life of the Christian scriptures has been concealed through the irrecognition of this mode of expression, so characteristic of intense feeling. Passages, from being expressed in universal terms, have been understood as cold, formal, creed-like statements of theological dogmas, when in fact they assumed their particular form because those by whom they were originally uttered or written, spoke or wrote from hearts bursting with emotion. Thus, for

instance, a dry, doctrinal character has been given to the language of the Apostle Paul when he says "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." And yet, when I consider the connexion of these words, I cannot help feeling that in this general way, he was giving expression to his own burning experience. He exclaims just before, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And then, he adds, "For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision is of any importance, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."* What an immense change had taken place in the mind of Paul! The cross, that instrument of suffering—that symbol of the deepest shame—had become, in its spiritual aspects, its moral manifestations, his central light, and a glory streamed from it, which was as the glory of God! Well did he say, and he must have uttered it from the fervent feeling of his own soul—'To be a Christian, is to be ushered into a new creation.' In eyes illuminated by the moral light of the cross of Christ, all things are changed. The old world with its artificial standards of judgment and thought, its superficial distinctions, vanishes utterly away, and a new world appears, a world, not of outward observance, but bound together by the moral influences, and irradiated by the spiritual light, of the cross of Christ.

But to return. On the occasion mentioned above, they who cavilled at the astonishing work wrought by

* Not 'a new creature.'

Jesus, betrayed a moral blindness, hopeless to the last degree. A work which they confessed to be super-human, and in which power and benevolence were miraculously displayed, they refused to refer to the agency of God. As I conceive, and as I have already said, Jesus was shocked at the impenetrable hardness of their hearts. And it is as if he had said, 'Any other sin or blasphemy, of which men may be guilty, they may be forgiven, for they may repent of it; but you are past repentance, you, who speak against the Spirit of God, so overpoweringly manifested. There is no hope of you. You cannot be moved, and of course you cannot be forgiven. He who speaks against me as a man, without knowledge of my words or works, as, no doubt, many do, may be forgiven, for he may repent; but when a man sets himself against God, against the most striking exhibitions of God's presence and agency, there is no hope for him, now or ever.' Such I believe to be substantially the meaning of this passage. It was uttered with direct reference to a peculiar case, and in that general and unqualified manner, which the deep feeling, excited by the case, naturally prompted.

The Pharisees immediately ask Jesus for a sign. And this request, in connexion with the peculiar circumstances, intimates, as I have suggested in another place, that the Pharisees were momentarily impressed by what he had done, and were ready to believe in him, if he would only do a work which should prove him to be such a Christ as they expected. That this was their state of mind is implied by what follows. For, after saying that no sign of his

authority would be given them except his death and resurrection, he goes on to describe the condition of a man suffering under one of those violent maladies, which in those days were ascribed to evil spirits, and which come on by paroxysms; evidently hinting in this description at the moral condition of the Pharisees. They might appear for a little while to be forsaken by the evil spirit of unbelief which possessed them. But its departure was only temporary. It would return like other diseases with seven-fold fury and violence.

We come now to the point which I wish to make prominent. The narrative proceeds to inform us that while he was speaking, speaking, as I have represented, with the greatest earnestness and solemnity, one said to him, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." Some thoughtless individual, insensible to the import of his words and to common decorum, or, it might have been, some one who disliked the direction his remarks were taking, and was glad of an opportunity to break them off, interrupted him, telling him that his mother wanted to see him. Now it seems to me he was disturbed at the interruption, (*"ægre ferens interpellationem,"* says Kuinoel) and that the exclamation, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" reveals a momentary excitement of mind. So full was he of what he was saying, and so offended, if I may be allowed the expression, that he speaks as if he had forgotten that he had either mother or brethren.

I am unable to understand the feelings of those

who can consider this incident, thus regarded, as indicating any defect in the character of Jesus. It reveals his humanity, it is true, but in so doing, in showing him affected by human feelings,—weaknesses, if you please—it heightens my reverence for him, and makes him live more vividly in my faith and affections. With not a trace of human weakness, his character might have been beautiful, but its beauty would have been unreal and visionary, appealing only to the imagination. It could have had no foundation in nature, no power over the deep and active sympathies of the human soul. There is none absolutely good but one, God. We want not a character absolutely good in the person of a man, for that would be an inconsistency in the nature of things, but we want a specimen of the perfection of a nature, still seen and felt to be a human nature, possessing the inherent, ineradicable principles of humanity. My mind does not pause with the least regret over the hasty feeling which prompted the exclamation, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" but I feel all the more deeply the touching manner in which he corrects himself, the evidence he immediately gives of the tenderness of his filial and fraternal affections, when, extending his hand towards his disciples, and, as if he could say nothing more affectionate, he adds, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever will do the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

In commenting upon this passage I have followed the Gospel of Matthew. Luke relates the circum-

stances of the same occasion, but he does not mention that the mother of Jesus desired to see him, he only mentions that a woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts that gave thee nourishment!"* Is there not a probable coincidence here between the two narratives? Some one, as we learn from Matthew, told Jesus that his mother was waiting for him. Upon the mention of his mother, a woman, herself probably a mother, exclaimed in effect, "Thy mother! what a blessed woman thy mother must be!" The whole passage is redolent of nature and life. Is it looking at it too curiously to see in the introduction of the word, "sister," a little

* To this benediction, Jesus replied, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." Here, by the way, we have an instance of that mode of speaking, upon which I was just remarking—a proposition general in its terms, but prompted by, and applying to a particular case. It was not a formal declaration, but a spontaneous and sudden exclamation. We cannot doubt that when Jesus uttered these words, he fastened his eyes upon the woman whose language had called them forth. And it is as if he had said, "Dost thou deem my mother happy? Rather most blessed art thou if thou but know thy present privilege, and hearing what I say, bear thyself accordingly." How deeply absorbed he was with what he had just been saying, we may infer from the sensitiveness he evinces to the least disposition on the part of his hearers to think of anything else.

When the woman uttered this benediction on the mother of Jesus, little did she dream that she uttered a sentiment to which, in the worship of the Virgin, the world was for ages to respond; and which was to be embodied in the finest efforts of Art. In the adoration of the infant Jesus and his mother have we not a touching tribute to the power with which Christianity has appealed to some of the best and tenderest affections of our nature? With the manhood of Jesus the world has yet to learn to sympathize.

fraction as it were, a bright but delicate hue of truth! Observe, according to Matthew, Jesus says, "Whoever will do the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my brother and *sister* and mother." Bringing before the imagination the whole group, keeping in view the sensibility of the woman who had just broken forth in blessing her who had borne such a son, may we not suppose that he was led, unconsciously as it were, to increase the point and emphasis of the sentiment, by the introduction of the sisterly relation—turning his eyes as he spake towards the woman?

But my present object is to illustrate the honesty of the Christian historians, evinced in the unconcern with which they record repeated instances of human weakness in Jesus. The most striking case in point, and the last I shall mention, comprehends all the notices of his conduct and bearing, at the prospect and in the agonies of death. The narrators have not hesitated to mention words and actions of his, expressive of the greatest distress at the thought of the fate that awaited him. And the extravagant explanations to which Christians in subsequent times have had recourse in their anxiety to avoid what certainly appears to be the most obvious inference, namely, that Jesus was smitten with horror at the thought of dying, only serve to show off most strikingly the simple honesty of the historians who have related the facts without one explanatory remark. Once at a comparatively early period he is said to have exclaimed, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" In other words, 'I have a terrible trial to go through, and O! *the agony till it be over!*' Again, "Now is my soul

troubled, and what shall I say?" Surely these are expressions of mortal suffering. To his betrayer he is represented as saying, "What thou doest, do quickly." Do not these words show that he felt the intolerable wretchedness of suspense? And then in the garden, just before he was seized and led away to trial, what a scene of misery is disclosed! He went to that, his favourite place of resort, accompanied by the eleven. When he reached the spot, he took his three intimate friends, bidding the rest remain where they were. In the company of these three "he began to be sorrowful and very heavy." He said to them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" in other words, 'The anguish of my mind is so great I feel as if I should die.' Shortly he left these three and went apart and threw himself prostrate on his face, and prayed that, if it were possible, the torture to which he was about to be put, and which he was already suffering in anticipation—the bitter cup of mortal agony, which he was about to exhaust to its very dregs—might be put aside. He returned to his three friends, and then went away again, and prayed in an agony of mind so intense that the sweat poured from him as if it had been his life-blood, and again he returned, and again he went apart by himself, uttering the same prayer every time—that he might be excused, if it were possible, from the dreadful hour which was at hand. No doubt he said much more to the same purport, but his disciples, who were exhausted probably with watching and excitement, fell asleep, awaking only for a few moments when he approached them, and therefore catching only a few

words.* Thus we are not only explicitly told that he was in an agony, but in going away by himself and returning to his friends, as he did again and again, it seems to me a state of mind is disclosed almost bordering on distraction. He turned repeatedly from man to God—from heaven to earth, seeking some relief, some support amidst the horrors that environed him, and, for a while, seeking it in vain.

Here, surely, is a revelation of human weakness. This passage in the life of Jesus has given occasion not only to the captious and cavilling, but even to some serious and well-disposed minds to question his fortitude, and deny him that perfectness of character which his followers have ascribed to him. Comparisons unfavourable to him have been suggested between him and the Grecian sage, who drank the deadly hemlock without the least agitation. And Christians, it would appear, from their far-fetched explanations of this portion of the history, have been greatly embarrassed by it. It is common to say that the agony of Jesus in the garden arose from his having then the sins of the whole world laid upon him. In this account of his suffering, there is a pretty distinct figure of speech, and that is all. But it has proved sufficient

* It really pains me to hear it asked, as it has been often, how the disciples could have seen what Jesus did, if, as they say, they were asleep; it is so easy and natural in common candour to suppose that when Jesus approached they awoke, and, when he went aside, they observed him for a few moments, and then their drowsiness returned. Instead of suggesting such captious queries, it becomes us to admire the unsuspecting confidence of the narrators, who were unable to conceive that any one could be so narrow—so devoid of candour, as not to supply the necessary explanations.

to satisfy those who go not beyond words, if they are only put together with grammatical propriety. In truth, a greater absurdity could hardly be fabricated. It is scarcely necessary to say that there is not a whisper of any such theory of the facts, nor indeed of any explanation of them whatever. The circumstances are given with the utmost simplicity. They are not put together in a shape to indicate any particular solution. They show no design on the part of the narrators to make out a case one way or another. So possessed do they appear with one simple object, namely, a narration of facts, that, so far from being on their guard against unfavourable impressions, the thought of misconstruction seems never to have occurred to them. They place Jesus before us in the greatest agony, and leave us no way of accounting for it, but by resolving it into the dread and anguish produced by the prospect of death, and its attendant horrors. The reality of this scene of suffering alone accounts for its being narrated. Had the historians been any other than the truest and most single-hearted of men, had they been conscious of any feeling but that calm and perfect confidence which truth alone can produce, they would have omitted these passages, as they might have done very easily. Can we discern such manifest inspiration—the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth—and not have every doubt superseded by a living faith?

At first view, the agony of Jesus at the thought of the terrible death that awaited him, may seem to indicate a great want of fortitude. But candidly meditated, it discloses the unparalleled greatness of

his character. O compare him not with Socrates! The Grecian philosopher was an old man, meeting death in a form comparatively mild and easy. The peasant of Judea was in the bloom of life, and a fate peculiarly excruciating and ignominious was before him. The former was surrounded by adoring, idolizing friends, who felt with him and for him, and so helped to inspire him with the requisite strength. When a man feels that there are those about him who enter into his spirit, and understand and honour his purposes, and applaud him for what he is doing, be they few or many, they become all the world to him, and they communicate to him, unconsciously it may be, a world of spiritual force; such are the mysterious sympathies that connect man with man. And such was the support of the Athenian philosopher. But the Man of Nazareth had no human aids. With a nature of almost feminine tenderness—a heart all alive and glowing with the most generous affections, yearning towards humanity with a more than fraternal interest, he had not a single being on earth to whom he could unbosom himself. It is true there were those around him who were warmly attached to him. But they understood not the great object for which he had lived, and for which he was about to die. So far as that was concerned, the dear and sacred purpose of his being, they were to him no more than the dumb brute, who, with blind affection, follows his master. I might almost say they were less, for sympathy could not be looked for from the brute. To them it was all darkness and mystery. Jesus stood alone in the world in the profoundest sense. Peculiarly constituted to

appreciate human sympathy and to be sustained by it, he saw that this prop was stricken away from beneath him. Every earthly source of strength and encouragement was closed against him. He was to suffer, suffer fearfully and alone, without having been able to make a single human being so far understand what he was to suffer for, as to derive comfort and support therefrom. To the very last, his nearest friends misconceived his purpose altogether ; as the contention which arose among them at the Last Supper showed only too plainly. It was, I believe, this utter loneliness that constituted the peculiar severity of his trial. Here was the bitterness of death. This it was, that made the still and lonely hour of midnight, just before his crucifixion, the hour when the soul is left to itself, undistracted by external sights and sounds, so awful to him.* Human sympathy surrounds and sustains a man insensibly. It is like the unfelt pressure of the atmosphere, or the force of gravitation.

Had Jesus, therefore, been otherwise than most deeply affected by the circumstances in which he was placed, I confess I should have painfully felt that there was in his character a want of sensibility. It might then have been suspected that his mind was in a state of unnatural excitement—that it was deriving its

* " Truly night was made for sleep ; since to its wakeful hours belongs an oppression unknown to the very dreariest hours of day. The stillness is so deep, the solitude so unbroken, the fever brought on by want of rest so weakens the nerves, that the imagination exercises despotic and unwholesome power, till, if the heart have a fear or sorrow, up it arises in all the force and terror of gigantic exaggeration."—ANON.

strength from some stimulus provided by a diseased imagination—that he saw things around him not as they were, but in some false light. The agony he suffered satisfies me that the fortitude that followed it, was the pure, unadulterated quality, without any earthly admixture. The calmness which others have shown in dying, may have been produced by no higher cause than a mere sentiment of honour, more or less disguised. But in Jesus, I am now convinced that the composure, which, it cannot be denied after all, he did habitually exhibit to an astonishing degree, was not a matter of temperament, or of an excited imagination, but the offspring of the purest and most elevated spirituality. He saw his condition in all its horrors, nay, he felt them acutely, and in agony of spirit, and yet—and yet he went calmly forward, and did and suffered all that was necessary. He presented himself on that memorable night, with a demeanour so collected and so dignified before the persons who came to seize him, that they were for a moment overawed, and, like the soldier sent to assassinate Marius, they shrunk back unable for awhile to lay hands on him. Utter insensibility to pain is scarcely anything more than a physical quality. True fortitude is that virtue which a man exhibits amidst the consciousness of great suffering. He who shudders at death, and is overcome by the thought of pain, and yet for some generous purpose exposes himself to both, awakens in the mind a far deeper sentiment of power, than he who shows himself wholly unaffected by these things.

Such, briefly, are some of the considerations which

help to explain the agony of Jesus, and to put this part of his history in its true light—where it may be seen as a manifestation of the purest spiritual power, and not an exposure of weakness. I do not, of course, pretend to give a full account of the deadly anguish which he endured. No one can do this fully, until he has entered deeply into the mind and spirit of Jesus, and learned to appreciate the great spiritual purpose of his life. I cannot fathom the depths of that agony. Great as it was, his piety was greater still, and secured its perfect victory.

There remains only one particular to be noticed in this connexion, and the remarks already made render it unnecessary to dwell upon it. I allude to the language ascribed to Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The explanations usually given of this language, and by which it is attempted to avoid the impression that it was an exclamation of momentary agony and despair, seem to me forced and unnatural, altogether too refined for the physical condition in which Jesus was. I cannot but regard it as an ejaculation, wrung from him by the intense suffering of the moment. How does it enhance the beauty and pathos of the piety—the forgiveness, the filial affection which he manifested in that terrible hour, when we consider that these touching and noble qualities were evinced by one so acutely sensible of pain—of a temperament so susceptible, that, for a moment, he was overwhelmed by the frightful agonies of crucifixion.

But the circumstance that arrests my attention and impresses me most powerfully, is the artless and honest brevity with which the narrators have put this

exclamation of pain and despair on record. Had they not been raised above every thought of embellishing the character of Christ, they never would have mentioned a circumstance of this kind, at least without some explanation.

As the narrators are thus free from any design to show off, and exaggerate the great subject of their narratives, so is it equally clear, on the other hand, that in the composition of these stories, they were unconscious of any angry or malignant feeling towards the opposers of Jesus. They betray no desire to excite the passions of the reader against those who persecuted him. This point has been happily illustrated by Dr. Campbell, in the Dissertations preliminary to his translation of the Four Gospels. The absence of all bitterness, in the minds of these historians, is shown by their indifference about the *names* of the enemies and persecutors of Jesus. It is remarkable, as Dr. Campbell has observed,* that the names of the High Priest and his coadjutor, of the Roman Procurator, of the Tetrarch of Galilee, and of the treacherous disciple, are all that are mentioned of the many who, no doubt, took an active part in the prosecution and death of Jesus. In regard to the first four, the omission of their names could have made no difference, for their offices were so public and eminent, that the official title was equivalent to the designation of the individual. And the part that Judas took was altogether too prominent and notorious, to admit the suppression of his name. "Whereas of those Scribes and Pharisees, who bargained with Judas, of the men who apprehended

* *The Four Gospels, &c.* by G. Campbell, D. D., Diss. 3, sec. 22.

Jesus, of the officer who struck him, of those who afterwards spat upon him, buffeted, and mocked him, of those who were loudest in crying, 'Away with him, crucify him—not this man, but Barabbas;' of those who supplied the multitude with the implements of their mockery, of those who upbraided him on the cross with his inability to save himself; or of the soldier who pierced his side with a spear, no name is given by any of the historians." It may be said, that the names of these individuals were not known to them. It is very probable they were not. But had the narrators been acting the part of partizans, in the accounts they have left us, had they been conscious of any angry or vindictive feeling, they would have sought the names of those who made themselves prominent in these cruel and disgraceful acts.

"This reserve, in regard to the names of those who were the chief instruments of the sufferings of Jesus, is the more observable, as the names of others, to whom no special part is attributed, are mentioned without hesitation. Thus Malchus, whose ear Peter wounded, and who was, immediately after, miraculously cured by Jesus, is named by John; but nothing further is told of him, than that he was present when our Lord was seized, and that he was a servant of the High Priest. Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross, is named by no fewer than three of the Evangelists;* but we are also informed that in this

* There appears to have been a particular reason for mentioning this individual. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus, the latter of whom appears at a subsequent period to have been a Christian of some eminence at Rome.—See Rom. xvi. 13.

service he did not act voluntarily, but by compulsion. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are the only members of the Sanhedrim, except the High Priest, who are mentioned by name; but they were the only persons of that body who did not concur in condemning the Son of God, and who, though once fearful and secret disciples, assumed the resolution to display their affection, at times when no one else ventured openly to acknowledge him.

“Of the Scribes and Pharisees who watched our Lord, and on different occasions, dissembling esteem, assailed him with captious and ensnaring questions—of those who openly ascribed his miracles to evil Spirits, called him a madman, a demoniac, and what they esteemed worse than either, a Samaritan, who accused him of associating with the profligate—of Sabbath-breaking—of intemperance and blasphemy, and of many others who put themselves in attitudes of opposition to Jesus, no names are ever mentioned, nor is the young, but opulent, magistrate named, who came to him with the question, ‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life,’ for, though there were some favourable symptoms in his case, yet as, by going away sorrowful, he betrayed a heart wedded to the world, the application did not terminate to his honour. But of Simon the Pharisee, who invited our Lord to his house, of Jairus, and Bartimeus, and Zaccheus, and Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, and some others, of whose faith, repentance, gratitude, love and piety, the most honourable testimony is given, a very different account is made.

“As to the disciples of Jesus, in recording their

faults, no secret is made of their names. Of this, the intemperate zeal of the sons of Zebedee on one occasion, and their ambition and secular views on another, the incredulity of Thomas, the presumption of Peter, and his lamentable defection in the denial of his Master, not to mention the prejudices and dulness of them all, are eminent examples. These particulars are all related with the same undisguised plainness which they use in relating the crimes of adversaries, and with as little endeavour to extenuate the former, as to exaggerate the latter."

And yet, after all, there is nothing studied in the style of these narrations, no appearance of care or pains taken to suppress one name, or introduce another. There is throughout an impressive forgetfulness of effect. It is common to speak of the authors of the four Gospels, as *witnesses*. But the idea of a witness conveys the impression of one speaking guardedly, as upon his oath, and as in the presence of individuals ready to cross-examine, and to doubt. But there is no appearance of this kind about these historians. When the mind is fully impressed and completely filled with any truth, whether of opinion, sentiment or fact, we find it impossible to think that others cannot see things just as we see them. What is so obvious and present to us, we imagine must be equally so to all. This appears to have been the predominant feeling in the minds of the writers of the Christian narratives. To them, the reality of the facts they record, was as indisputable as that of the sun in heaven; and abidingly filled with this conviction, they could not sympathise with the

doubting and the incredulous. They lived, moved, and spoke, and wrote, with the truth of things they relate filling and surrounding their in like an atmosphere.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSISTENCY OF THE CHARACTERS ALLUDED TO THE FOUR GOSPELS.

“ I should have laid little stress upon the repetition of actions stantially alike, or of discourses containing many of the same exsions, because that is a species of resemblance, which would e belong to a true history, or might easily be imitated in a false Nor do I deny, that a dramatic writer is able to sustain prof and distinction of character, through a great variety of sep incidents and situations. But the evangelists were not drau writers ; nor possessed the talents of dramatic writers ; nor will believe, be suspected that they studied uniformity of characte ever thought of any such thing in the person who was the subje their histories. Such uniformity, if it exists, is on their part cas
—PALEY.

In these histories there is one personage who h the first place, and of whose words and acts sufferings they are obviously sketches. There other individuals introduced more or less consp ously. And they are as easily distinguishable a many personal acquaintances. Now it is the rem able peculiarity of these writings that the vivid consistent ideas which they give us of the per whom they mention, are communicated without least appearance of design, or even of conscious on the part of the narrators. They do not seem

be in the slightest degree aware that they are enabling the reader to form clear conceptions of the personal characters of those of whom they speak. This is a characteristic of these writings, which admits of copious and striking illustrations, and which to my mind establishes their authority as true histories beyond all controversy. Their authors have related a number of incidents in the briefest and most sketchy manner, unaccompanied by comments, and with no special regard to any sort of order, even to the order of time. So true is this, that there is hardly anything more difficult to determine than the precise period occupied by the events which they relate. And yet by means of these incidents, thus carelessly strung together, we come at distinct, harmonious ideas of the persons presented in the scene. In this respect, these narratives resemble those curious pictures that we sometimes see, which at first view appear to be nothing more than representations of landscapes, composed of trees, rocks and ruins. But on closer inspection, we discover that the objects depicted are so grouped as to form complete and symmetrical figures, in attitudes of life, grace, and motion. And this effect is so successful, that although not obvious, yet when once perceived, it can hardly by any effort be lost sight of. Only in the case of these histories, the several forms of moral life resulting from the incidents related, are, let me repeat, produced wholly without design. The writers betray no sort of suspicion of what they were doing.

That this harmony of character should have been

the work of accident or cunning is entirely out of the question. Material objects, or the representations of material objects, may be so put together as to form momentary and chance resemblances of living forms and features. The fantastic combinations of the clouds of a summer sunset may present the rude appearance of a castle, a warrior, or some huge animal; and this only for a little while. But those occurrences must have an existence in truth, whose keeping is so natural as to create in the most natural manner in our minds, individual and complete and permanent ideas of intellectual and moral life. From a mere disjointed collection of falsehoods and fables such a result never could flow. They might be circumstantially, but they never could be morally and intellectually consistent.

Does it not constitute the chief miraculousness of the genius of Shakspeare, that adopting a form of composition, the dramatic, which allows little or no room for the direct and elaborate delineation of character, he has been able, somewhat in the way now referred to, to construct spiritual forms consistent with themselves and standing out individually before us, through the words they are made to speak, and the scenes, acts, and sufferings in which they are represented as concerned. But even in the case of Shakspeare's creations, the moral consistency which renders them so wonderful is wrought out, not indeed with any apparent labour on the part of the artist, but only by means of numerous and diversified illustrations. The characters, which his genius creates and inspires, are made to do and to bear and to say

much, in order to their full unfolding. Whereas, in the New Testament histories, character is developed, as we shall see, by the briefest word and the slightest incident; and if they are fictions, then as works of genius, they leave the productions of Shakspeare as far behind, as these excel all others.

Without farther preliminary remark, I proceed to illustrate my meaning by examples, the consideration of which will suggest appropriate reflections.

There are two females, Mary and Martha, mentioned three or four times very briefly in the course of these narratives. Once, as we read, Jesus "went to a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered with much serving, and came to him and said, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.' And Jesus answered, and said unto her, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part that shall not be taken away from her.'" Again, these two sisters are mentioned more particularly in the account of the raising of Lazarus. They are introduced once more in the next chapter of John, where we are told that Mary came and poured very precious ointment upon Jesus, while he sat at meat.

Now, there is no attempt to describe the distinctive qualities of these two individuals. They occupy only a small place in the scene. They appear before us

but for a moment at a time, and they say and do but little. And yet they stand out with wonderful distinctness. Their images are not blended and intermixed. Their characteristic features are unveiled in the most incidental manner—by a word; a breath lifts the veil, and their faces once seen are never to be confounded.

From the first notice of them we gather that Martha was possessed of an active, matter-of-fact temperament, and that if not by age, by right of her peculiar character, she took the lead in household concerns. She set herself immediately at work to provide an ample entertainment for her beloved guest, and had so little sympathy with Mary, so imperfect an appreciation of the real greatness of Jesus, so little of the sensibility which was so prominent in her sister, that she complained of Mary, and invoked the authority of Jesus, to obtain her sister's aid in her domestic labours. I pray the reader, now, to mark the beautiful correspondence of the other notices of the sisters with their characters thus incidentally developed.

When, upon the death of Lazarus, their brother, Jesus approached Bethany, the village where they dwelt, and the rumour of his coming preceded him, it was Martha that first heard it, and went forth to meet him. Mary sat still in the house. Martha, we may suppose, was engaged in the active concerns of the household. How naturally the report of the approach of Jesus came to her ears first! Mary, with her greater tenderness of mind, was in a retired part of the house. The custom of the age and

country allowed the afflicted to spend seven days in the indulgence of grief, and to receive visits of condolence. With the disposition of Mary this custom harmonized, and she naturally availed herself of it. On any other occasion—under any other circumstances, Mary, we may suppose, would have been the first to hasten to meet Jesus. As it was, Martha went first, because she first heard that he was coming. Mary went as soon as she was informed of his approach. If Mary had heard that Jesus was coming, before she learned it from Martha, then her friends from Jerusalem, who were with her, must have known it also, and they would have suspected whither she was going, and not have supposed that she was going to the grave to weep there.

And then how characteristic the manner in which the sisters meet their venerated Friend. They both addressed him in the same words, and the coincidence is very natural, because the thought which they expressed must have been continually uppermost in their minds. They had perhaps said the same thing to each other and to themselves a thousand times. "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!"* But while Martha was able to enter into conversation with Jesus, unembarrassed by her feelings, Mary, as soon as she saw him, uttered a few words, and then fell at his feet in an agony of tears.

* This coincidence is no slight evidence of the unsuspecting integrity of the narrator. If the story were fictitious, its author would scarcely have ventured, without some explanation, to put the same words into the mouths of the sisters, as it would certainly appear at first sight to want verisimilitude.

When he directed the stone to be removed from the mouth of the sepulchre, observe it is *Martha*, and not *Mary*, who interferes, questioning the propriety of the direction, and betraying the coarse turn of her mind; "Lord, by this time he is offensive, for he hath been dead four days!" Such a suggestion, we perceive, came naturally from her. *Mary's* reverence for Jesus was too profound to permit her to object to anything he might propose. While *Martha*, constitutionally incapable of as deep a feeling, presumed to speak as if he knew not what he was doing.

We have only one mention more of *Mary* and *Martha*. Shortly after Lazarus had been raised from the dead, Jesus again visited Bethany. "*Martha* served. But *Mary* brought a quantity of costly ointment and poured it upon his person."* By this act, she simply intended to express her personal reverence for Jesus. How like herself is the attitude in which she is here represented! Perfumes and ointments formed a part of the offices of hospitality. But the use of an ointment so precious was a mark of extraordinary respect, and showed how deeply *Mary* revered Jesus.

Let the incidents just briefly specified be pondered well. Mark their exceeding brevity, and the accidental manner in which they are introduced. And yet how clear are the impressions we receive from them of the characters of the two sisters. Two or three, and—as to any design on the part of the narrators,—random strokes, and the moral features

* See Chap. X.

of Martha and Mary are before us in all the freshness of nature. The outlines are complete, never running into each other, and formed, not purposely, but by the combination of a few brief incidents. Let those believe who can, that the circumstances related, from which we have this result, are matters of fiction and not of fact.

It will help us to estimate the characteristic of the New Testament histories which I am now illustrating, to glance at the works of imagination abounding at the present day; and observe how striking is the contrast between them, and the writings under consideration, in this respect. There is no department of literature in which human genius is so active and triumphant, as in the composition of fictitious narratives. Within a few years, through an alliance with history, an extraordinary revolution has been produced in this class of writings. The novelist now-a-days prepares himself for his work by the acquisition of an extensive and familiar acquaintance with the customs, the opinions, the whole condition of the period at which he lays the scene of his story, and is thus enabled to throw over it an imposing air of truth. And yet, after all, how much pains do the most gifted,—does the great Northern Story-teller himself, take to impart to his readers distinct and consistent impressions of the characters in which he aims to awaken interest! How continually are we made to feel that incidents are either fabricated or coloured in order to bring out character; or else, for the sake of the story, occurrences are introduced which violate the consistency of the cha-

racters portrayed. I am reminded in this connexion, by the force of the contrast, of the well-known romance of "the Pirate." If so familiar an illustration may be allowed, we have only to observe the care which the novelist has taken to discriminate the characters of Minna and Brenda, to perceive how immeasurably more striking is the brief scriptural representation of Mary and Martha. In the novel, everything is done to assist the conceptions of the reader by a minute personal description of the two heroines, and they are thrown into circumstances calculated to bring out their respective peculiarities in the most prominent manner. Whereas in those rapid sketches of the New Testament, the incidents, which so consistently and admirably unfold the characters of Mary and Martha, are told with the utmost brevity, and if for the sake of showing off any one, it is with a view to the character of Christ. But natural even as such a design might be, it does not appear to have been entertained. The occurrences related, with all the light they throw upon the moral features of the individuals concerned, seem to be mentioned for no reason but their simple truth. They had taken place. They were real, and therefore they were related.

The character of Peter is developed in a similar way. Not the shadow of an attempt to describe him is visible. But we cannot take up these narratives at any passage where he is mentioned, without recognising him as readily as we recognise the countenance of a familiar friend.

For the sake of illustration, let me crave the

attention of the reader, while I endeavour to revive an incident that occurred at the last Supper, mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Let us for a moment leave the world in which we live, and go back some eighteen hundred years into the past, and enter Jerusalem, the capital of that nation, which, of all the nations of antiquity, was the only one that worshipped one God, using no similitudes—no idols.

It is the season of the Passover, a great national festival celebrating the ancient providence of Heaven. The city is crowded with Jews from all parts of Judea, and from remote regions. Its numerous dwellings are now occupied by friendly and family parties, observing the appointed ceremonies of the occasion, which consisted principally of a social entertainment, at which the mercies of God in times past were commemorated with appropriate forms. In a large upper room are assembled thirteen individuals from Galilee. Extraordinary circumstances, as their looks and tones indicate, have given a peculiar interest to the occasion. They have the air of men excited by strange events, and high but vague expectations. One among them is clearly shown to be their chief, by the deference which is paid him. They seem to regard him as a prince in disguise, a being of no common authority. He takes the principal place at the table, and as they also seat themselves, there is a struggle for precedence.* They are evidently jealous

* The strife at the last Supper is not mentioned by John. A notice of it is found in Luke. But even if there was no mention of it in any of the Gospels, we might infer that something of the kind

of one another; and a contention arises among them which shall be the first. They are inflamed by the prospect of the wealth and honours which he, whom they acknowledge as their master, is, as they conceive, shortly to distribute among them, and the desire of these worldly advantages then, as always, awakens feelings of animosity and ill-will. With these earth-born passions, however, the countenance of their Leader betrays no sympathy. A sublime purpose—a singular and mysterious destiny has thrown over his whole appearance an expression of unearthly greatness. There, in that face, in wonderful harmony, the melancholy cast by the shadows of Suffering and Death is blended with a peace kindled by light from an invisible source. In the midst of the strife of his followers, which evidently pains him deeply, for it seems to show that all he had yet said and done, and it was not a little, had been of no avail,—he quietly rises from the table, lays aside his principal garments, takes a towel, pours water into a basin, and then

took place, from what is related. The words and actions of Jesus were almost always suggested by some passing incident. And I cannot but suppose that the striking lesson, which he gave his disciples when he washed their feet, was prompted by some evidence, afforded at the moment by their conduct, of their need of it. The nature of the contention, which I suppose arose among them, also appears to be indicated by the very form of instruction which their master adopted—the performance of a menial service for them. In taking their places at the table, a dispute probably arose, and jealous looks were exchanged. And to show them how entirely out of place such feelings were, he performed for them the lowest office at a social entertainment. This view of the case seems to reveal the propriety and significance of the symbolical act, by which Jesus sought to convey a moral impression.

kneels and begins to wash the feet of one of the company. Immediately the harsh sounds of discord are hushed. Silence reigns through the apartment. Every angry passion dies away—every angry glance is lost in the looks of questioning and amazement which the disciples exchange with one another. He goes from one to the other, washing their feet; and they, struck dumb with the awe which he habitually inspired, offer no resistance, until he comes to one who, unable to repress his feelings, shrinks back, exclaiming, "Lord! dost thou wash my feet?" The Master replies, "What I am doing thou dost not understand now, but thou shalt know shortly." "Thou shalt never wash my feet," rejoins his follower. "If I wash thee not," says Jesus, "thou hast no part with me." "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" cries the disciple, accompanying the words, no doubt, with a movement full of expression.

The character of Jesus is not now our topic. Still I cannot avoid making a brief allusion to the agreement of this passage with all that we elsewhere learn of him. How perfectly in character the method by which he sought to teach his friends to defer to one another! Since all that he had already said and done had failed to inspire them with a generous spirit, it would seem as if he adopted this method as a last resort, intending, we might almost think, to shock them by the attitude he assumed, the office he discharged, resolved to make an impression upon their minds never to be effaced. And then, too, how wisely and characteristically did he manage his resisting follower, melting him down with the words "If I

wash thee not," *i. e.*, if I do not cleanse thee, "thou hast no part with me." Thus he avoided an explanation of what he was about, until he had gone round and performed the same menial service for all, and so rendered the impression as strong as possible. "If," the disciple exclaims, in effect, "if thou put it on that ground—if my place in thine heart be in question, then wash me all over."

Who now requires to be informed that it was Peter with whom this short conversation took place? His speech bewrayeth him. As in the hall of the High Priest's house his accent proved him to be a Galilean, so all that he says and does shows him to be Peter, and no other. We discover here the same individual who, a little while after, when Jesus told his disciples they could not follow him then, (through the rugged and bloody path by which he was to be perfected,) protested, "Lord! why cannot I follow thee now! I will lay down my life for thy sake," and yet, shortly after, upon a change of circumstances, denied all knowledge of Jesus. This is he—the very man—we know him at once—who can help recognising him?—that, upon another occasion, after Jesus had commended him for the explicit avowal of his faith, exclaiming, "Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonas," and pronouncing him the rock upon which he would build his religion, was so emboldened by the praise, that when his master immediately afterwards was telling his disciples how he was about to suffer and die, had the forwardness to contradict and rebuke Jesus, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be done unto thee," and so incurred a reproof as severe:

as the previous commendation was warm. This is the same individual who, yet at another time, when he saw his master coming on the water toward him and his fellow-disciples, who were in a vessel on the Lake of Galilee, cried out, "Bid me now come unto thee on the water," and when, at the bidding of Jesus, he had left the ship, and the waves were rolling about him, was so overpowered with terror, that he exclaimed, "Lord! save me, or I perish!" In all these instances we see the same moral individual—the same self-confidence—the same sudden fluctuations of feeling. It is not putting the case too strongly to say, that if the name of Peter were stricken out in all these passages, and, instead, we were merely told that one of the disciples said or did so and so, *that* one disciple would stand forth to our minds in bold and unmarred individuality. We could not mistake him. No one could suppose that the writer or writers of the New Testament had any intention—any thought of communicating to us an idea of Peter. And yet such an idea is received far more vividly, than it could have been from the most minute and laboured description. No one has ever read the New Testament with any degree of attention without gathering from it an impression of Peter, distinct and peculiar. And yet, let it not be forgotten, no care is taken by the historians to produce this impression. It is the direct but undesigned result of a simple record of a few simple facts. This is that divine harmony of nature, that truthful consistency, which infinitely outweighs, in my esteem, all the discrepancies of words and dates, and which the most transcendent genius may imitate, but never equal.

The impression derived from the Gospels, of the moral character of the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, is wonderfully vivid and consistent; especially when we consider how brief is his appearance in the Divine Drama. He had degenerated greatly from the old Roman nobleness. Want of moral strength was his chief trait. This defect continually produces results as disastrous as those that flow from a determined malignity of purpose. Men of good feelings, but destitute of the guidance of a good principle, bring calamities upon themselves and others, as heavy as if they were actuated by the basest motives, and had deliberately said unto evil, "Be thou our good!" Of the truth of this remark, Pilate affords an ever memorable instance. That such was his character is most evident from the Christian records. Almost every word attributed to him is in keeping with it. He appears to have been persuaded of the innocence of Jesus, but he had not courage to resist the mob headed by the priests. And the miserable expedients to which he had recourse to throw off his inevitable responsibility, all betray the same imbecility. He first tried to get rid of the case altogether—to make the Jews settle it themselves. Failing in this, he caught at the mention of Galilee, and as soon as he was told that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent him to Herod, who was then at Jerusalem, and within whose jurisdiction Galilee was. But Herod returned the prisoner upon his hands. As the next resort he attempted to persuade the populace to bestow their mercy upon Jesus, rather than Barabbas. I am aware that it was customary among the Romans to scourge those condemned to be crucified, just before

execution. But from the different accounts we are led to infer, that Pilate caused this part of the punishment to be inflicted on Jesus under the idea that it would appease the Jews. He brought the prisoner forth, bleeding under the recent tortures of the scourge, and called the attention of the mob to him, as if he hoped thereby to induce them to relent. Is not this precisely the course a weak man under such circumstances would adopt, as if by yielding he would not inflame and encourage the cruel passions of the people instead of subduing them? When Jesus, seeing that words were of no avail, and that the magistrate had no strength to withstand the priests, preserved a dignified silence, Pilate attempts to make him speak by reminding him of his power. "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to release thee, and have power to crucify thee?" How palpable here is his cowardice, in the idle vaunt of a power existing, as he must have known in his own soul, only in name! He was awed too, as indeed a much stronger man might, and so weak a man must have been, by the look and bearing of the prisoner, connected with the rumour of his extraordinary career, which could not have failed to reach his ears; with the dream of his wife, whose imagination, no doubt, had been excited by reports of the words and works of the remarkable person arraigned before her husband, and with the declaration of the priests that Jesus had called himself the Son of God. And then again, the symbolical act of washing his hands before all the people, to which the numbers and uproar of the mob compelled Pilate to have

recourse, to signify that he had nothing to do with the death of Jesus, expressive though it was, was utterly vain. He could not throw off the responsibility of his office as he dashed the water from his hands; and only a weak-minded man could have found any satisfaction in such a device. When the Jews indirectly menace him with an accusation of a want of loyalty to the Roman Emperor, he is evidently alarmed and overborne. And he endeavours to conceal the effect of the threat under a ridicule, which he dwells upon so long, that we may well suspect it to be affected. "No man," Dr. Johnson has somewhere observed, "thinks much of that which he despises." Thus Pilate repeats the title of King in application to Jesus too often, to allow it to be believed that he really ridiculed and despised the charge which the Jews threatened to allege against him. "Behold your king!" he said to the Jews. And when they shouted, "Away with him, crucify him," he replies "Shall I crucify your king?" And the inscription which he caused to be affixed to the Cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—"This is the King of the Jews," and which he refused to alter, was partly dictated, we may suppose, by this state of mind, and partly by the mean desire of ridiculing the Jews and so revenging himself upon them for the painful fears they had awakened in his breast. That a suspicion of his loyalty should have made such an impression upon Pilate, cannot surprise us when we bring into view his subsequent fate—banishment upon a charge of treason,—and the distrustful character of the reigning Emperor, Tiberius. With this prince, as Tacitus

informs us, the charge of treason was the sum of all charges.

In the instance of Pilate, as in the other cases mentioned, how all-unconscious are the narrators of the consistency they have preserved! They have thought only of giving a simple relation of the things they had seen and heard. And the keeping, discernible between the details of their histories, is the natural result and accompaniment of real facts, a portion of that harmony pervading all real objects, all actual occurrences. In short, we behold here the presence of that Divinity that not only shapes our ends, but impresses and moulds all realities, abrupt, rough-hewn, and disjointed as they may at first seem.

I cannot altogether omit a brief reference to the disciple John, as an example of that trait which we are now considering. From all the Gospels we gather that he was one of the three favourite friends of Jesus. Not much is told of him, but he speaks of himself as the especial object of the Master's love. But he shows no consciousness of the evidence he gives in support of this character when he tells us that he sat next to Jesus at the last supper and leaned upon his bosom. How beautiful too is the correspondence between his intimacy with his venerated Friend, and the benign and spiritual tenour of his Epistles!

A similar consistency is maintained in the notices, not only of individuals, but also of whole classes of men. The Pharisees are represented as attaching the first importance to forms, to external rites, disregarding the moral requisitions of the Law, cherishing without restraint the most selfish and corrupt passions.

Everything ascribed to them, accords with this representation. At one time they are on the watch to see whether Jesus would perform a cure on the Sabbath. Zealous for the sacredness of that day, they had no hearts for a work of mercy. At another, they pronounced him a Sabbath-breaker, because on that day he had not only given sight to a man born blind, but had done it in disregard of that tradition, which pronounced it a profanation of the Sabbath, to use any medicaments on that day, even so much as to put saliva on the eyes. Again they deem it a serious charge against the disciples of Jesus, that he did not require them to observe frequent fasts, and that, regardless of the danger of uncleanness, they did not scrupulously wash their hands before eating. When they carried Jesus before the Roman magistrate, thirsting for his blood, the Pharisees refused to enter the Gentile Hall of judgment, lest they should contract ceremonial pollution and be unfitted for the observance of the Passover. And once more, they could clamour for the blood of the innocent, but they could not endure that the bodies of the crucified should remain upon the crosses, exposed to public view, defiling the Sabbath and the Festival. All these things are related briefly and incidentally, without any effort to point out their agreement, nay, without any consciousness that this agreement is at all worthy of note.

So also the words and feelings attributed to that little band, the personal followers of Jesus, harmonize wonderfully, but most naturally, with one another, with all that we know of human nature, and with the *probable circumstances* of the case. They were

evidently men possessing no small degree of ingenuousness. Their hearts were open to the spiritual power and beauty of the instructions and character of Jesus. He impressed and won their affections. Still they shared in the universal expectation of the times. And while they venerated and loved him, they still clung to him with mixed motives, in part with worldly views and hopes. At quite an early period, upon being interrogated by him as to what they supposed him to be, they avowed through Peter, that they believed him to be the Messiah. To have come so early to such a conclusion manifested great openness of mind. It showed how much they had been impressed by the moral wisdom he had uttered, the deeds of mercy he had wrought. By these they were convinced, although he had neither declared himself to be the Messiah, nor had he done anything conformably to their idea of that expected Deliverer, nor did his external appearance present anything of the magnificence which they had identified with that illustrious personage. Still they did not relinquish the darling hope of a splendid kingdom. They are continually betraying the tenacity with which they cling to it. Once they asked their master, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"—a general question apparently. But when we observe that a little while before they were quarrelling among themselves, who among them should be the first in the approaching empire,—when we consider the reply of Jesus, who beckoned a little child to him, and told them they could never so much as enter the heavenly kingdom (a moral kingdom) until they gave up all their prepossessions and became as docile in his hands as that little

child,—we perceive that, although they couched their question in general terms, their object was to ascertain who among themselves was to be the chief officer under the new dispensation: Again, when Jesus declared that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, meaning obviously by this declaration, that it was next to impossible for one accustomed to the self-indulgence of wealth to descend voluntarily to the despised and persecuted condition of those who sought with him to effect a grand moral revolution,—the disciples were exceedingly astonished, and exclaimed, “Who then can be saved!” The salvation they were thinking of, was a political deliverance, and they could not understand how there could be any salvation, any kingdom, if the rich were to have no part in it. Jesus perceiving that they were not yet able to bear a further disclosure of the true character of the approaching dominion, forbore to shock them any more, contenting himself with assuring them, that although it appeared to be impossible to them, for the heavenly kingdom to be established without rich men, yet it was very possible with God. Still they are uneasy, and Peter, no doubt expressing the wishes of his fellow disciples, and deeming it high time to come to an understanding, immediately asks, “And what shall we have therefore, we, who have left all and followed thee?” So deep was their impression that he would establish an external kingdom, that, after his death, they sorrowfully exclaim, “We had thought it had been he who was to redeem Israel.” And just before his final disappearance their inquiry is, “Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?”

With these coarse, worldly expectations, it is beautiful to see how there was growing up in their minds a deep sentiment of reverence and affection for Jesus,—a disposition to defer to his authority, before which their earthly hopes were destined slowly to recede, and, if never to be formally abandoned, yet to lose all vital influence. It was their hearts that were first touched, and that were gradually expanded, until the narrowing bands of their prejudices were broken. The evidence of their personal attachment for Jesus is seen in the fidelity with which they adhered to him, despite the example of the great and powerful, and the continued inconsistency of his words and conduct with all they had so confidently expected. Once and again they were afraid to question him, so great was their awe of him. And their great respect for their master is incidentally shown at the Last Supper, as we once heard it finely remarked by a friend. When their master declared that one of them would betray him, they did not resent the accusation, but in the spirit of a touching self-distrust, which their experience of his better wisdom had taught them to cherish, the cry broke forth on every side, “Lord, is it I?” “Is it I?” When one whom we deeply reverence charges us with an evil design, we suspect ourselves of it, rather than him of a wanton accusation. So was it with the personal friends of Jesus.

But all this appears in the narratives in the most accidental manner possible. It may be said that it is all a matter of inference. I acknowledge freely that it is so. On this very account, because it is so plainly undesigned, it is affecting and decisive. That the

Gospel histories admit of inferences so accordant with nature, so consistent one with another, is to my mind an irresistible sign of truth. It is to me a sign from heaven. To truth alone can such perfect harmony belong.



CHAPTER VII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.—THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

“ For it is an immutable truth, that what comes from the heart, that alone goes to the heart: what proceeds from a divine impulse, that the godlike alone can awaken.”—COLERIDGE.

Of the unconscious consistency, upon which I have remarked, as one of the distinguishing features of the New Testament narratives, there is one illustration, in comparison with which the instances already mentioned, striking as they are, sink into insignificance. I allude to that great moral wonder, the character of Jesus Christ. The other characters brought into view in the Christian records are, in their prominent traits, of no peculiar and uncommon kind. They indeed stand out before us fully and individually, without any pains taken by the narrators to produce this effect. Still they may be severally assigned to classes with which the daily intercourse of life and our common observation of human nature have rendered us familiar. Who has not often met with persons resembling Mary and Martha, Peter, John and Pilate in their principal features? But the character of Jesus stands alone, without precedent or pattern. It

constitutes a specimen—a model by itself. The history of the world furnishes us with no other instances to be classed along with it. Here the loftiest and loveliest attributes of humanity meet in full development in one individual. In his person, not only are conjoined, in the profoundest harmony, those remarkable qualities, which have been exhibited by different men at remote intervals, “every creature’s best,” but we discern new forms of virtue, a new manifestation of greatness.

Although through the extravagant errors which have prevailed concerning the nature of Christ, his character has been but very partially apprehended, still it has generally been felt to be the grand argument for Christianity. But it appears to me that the very remarkable manner in which it is bodied forth in the Four Gospels has never arrested the attention which it deserves. For my own part, I am at a loss to say which is the most astonishing, the character itself, or the way in which it is exhibited by the historians of the life of Jesus.

In him we have a new and original specimen of human nature. If he never had an existence—if he were a fictitious personage, it is evident that the writers of his life had no model to go by. But while he is original, he is at the same time perfectly natural. He is an harmonious whole, a self-consistent individual. This is abundantly enough to satisfy me of his reality. For it is not for minds deluding or deluded, and one or the other we must suppose the New Testament authors to have been if we do not admit their truth, it is not for such minds, nor is it within the ability of any human mind to produce a new creation,—to make

a new form of humanity, stamped all over with the truth and naturalness which characterize only the works of nature and of God.

But this is not all. The crowning wonder still is, the manner in which the character of Jesus is placed before us. At once, in the highest degree, new and natural, it is nowhere elaborately described in the Four Gospels. There is not the slightest appearance of an attempt at minute description or analysis. That the writers felt most deeply the force of the character of Jesus, is not to be doubted. But, (and perhaps for this very reason, because they felt it so deeply,) they do not endeavour to define its force, or to point out wherein its peculiar greatness and beauty lay.* In the briefest and most rapid manner they have related a variety of occurrences in which he bore a conspicuous part. Their narrations show no traces of care or labour, no pains to put things together in a way to assist the reader to form, I say not a consistent idea of Jesus, but so much as any idea of him at all. They seem to be possessed with only one very plain and natural purpose—a simple relation of the things they had seen and heard, as they appeared to them. The reader may find a sufficient exemplification of

* "To analyze the characters of others, especially of those whom we love, is not a common or natural employment of men at any time. We are not anxious unerringly to understand the constitution of the minds of those who have soothed, who have cheered, who have supported us; with whom we have been long and daily pleased and delighted. The affections are their own justification. The Light of Love in our hearts is a satisfactory evidence that there is a body of worth in the minds of our friends or kindred, whence that light has proceeded."—*Wordsworth, Essay on Epitaphs.*

these remarks, in the instances which I have already adduced in another connexion. Still one case occurs to me so strikingly in point that I must mention it here.

Once, as we read, a young man, of a very winning appearance, came and knelt before Jesus, saying, "Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He is rebuffed with the reply, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God." Again, when a woman, with an amiable sensibility, broke forth in blessing the mother of Jesus, his language is, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." Now these instances would seem to imply in Jesus an extreme sensitiveness to any disposition on the part of those around him, to magnify him personally. And yet, when Mary came and poured that costly ointment upon him, an act whereby she expressed the greatest personal reverence, he upheld the propriety of the apparent waste, and paid no respect to the very plausible suggestion—"Why was not this ointment sold, and given to the poor?" A consideration of the respective circumstances of the three occasions alluded to, will satisfy us, that the language of Jesus, on each occasion, was expressive of, and consistent with, a healthy sensibility of mind. We shall recur to these passages of his life more particularly hereafter. In the meanwhile it is interesting to observe, that for all that appears in the letter of the narratives, there is a downright inconsistency. Looking only at what they expressly mention, we scarcely recognize the same individual in him who so willingly received the costly offering of Mary's

reverence, and yet so promptly rejected the respectful address of the young ruler at one time, and at another, sought so instinctively to give a different direction to the sensibility of the female who poured out her benedictions upon his mother. Here is most impressive evidence, to my mind, that the writers of his history were wholly unconscious of any attempt to portray his moral features, or to communicate an individual idea of him. They are entirely occupied with the facts, the particulars that had passed before their eyes, and they leave all conclusions and inferences to take care of themselves.

Now this, I say, is the great and all-satisfying miracle—that from histories of this description we are able to form in our minds a distinct and consistent conception of an individual, such as the world has never seen before nor since. If, indeed, instead of being what they are, the Four Gospels were careful and laboured descriptions of Jesus Christ, profound critical analyses of his moral traits, even in this case I should be at a loss to understand how so grand a moral idea could ever have been suggested to the human mind but by reality. In its reality I should find the most obvious and satisfactory cause of its existence. But as it is, it is immeasurably more surprising that from such books as those of the New Testament, for the most part the merest record of particulars briefly told, we should come at a result so novel, so sublime, and yet so perfectly natural. Thinking only, as it appears, of relating what they had seen and heard, with such faculties and opportunities as Providence had granted them, the authors of

These histories have unconsciously furnished us with the means of forming an idea of individual character, the most harmonious, the most beautiful, and the most kindling,—an idea fitted to stir up our best sentiments, to give life and power to our noblest springs of action, to transfigure, purify, and elevate our whole nature, through the admiration and love it awakens, the imitation which it sets us upon attempting. Surely an idea full of this living and generous influence, possessing a power so practical and beneficent, so accordant with the highest principles of the human constitution, must be founded in reality. A mere human fiction, the offspring of ignorant delusion or narrow cunning, never could have such an effect. Otherwise, all distinctions between the true and the false are broken down and obliterated.

As I have already remarked, the character of Christ has as yet been very imperfectly understood. It would almost seem to require another Messiah to do justice to the first. It is not for this age,—far less for this feeble pen, adequately to portray his pure spiritual glory. That I approach this subject, therefore, with a diffidence almost amounting to despair, I pray the reader to believe. Happy shall I be, if to a single mind I can communicate one quickening impression, or impart one inspiring glimpse of him, in whom are hid untold treasures of life, and truth, and beauty. If on any occasion it is appropriate to invoke the inspiration of a higher power,—if my heart ever heaves with unuttered prayers for light and grace,—for the sanctifying influence of the

Holy Spirit, it is when I approach this theme with a desire to depict its glories. What eye, dimmed by mortality, shall behold Jesus Christ as he is !

I proceed now to consider, at length, some of the prominent traits of the character of Christ, as they may incidentally be gathered from the facts which make up the body of the Christian histories. I shall anxiously endeavour to make no assertion which these facts do not fairly justify. Our first topic is *the character of Jesus as a Teacher*.

With respect to his style of teaching, there does indeed occur, here and there in these narratives, a remark of a descriptive character. We are told, for instance, that the people were astonished at his teaching, "for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes," not as the common teachers of religion, and again, "that he employed parables." But these things are incidentally said. They are not stated as formal propositions to be anxiously illustrated and made out, but rather as conclusions forced upon the notice of the writers, so that they could not help stating them.

The first thing remarkable about Jesus as a public teacher was his entire freedom as to times and places. On one occasion he was seated for the purpose of instruction on the side of a mountain ; at another, in a vessel cast off a little way from the shore crowded with auditors. Again we find him discoursing among men of profligate lives and tax-gatherers, that odious class of persons ; and again, at the entertainments of

the rich and honourable. There does not, however, appear to have been any affectation in this. For at the same time, he never scrupled to enter the synagogues, the consecrated places of instruction, on the Sabbaths, the stated occasions of religious service, and to teach in accordance with the usual forms. He spoke freely and spontaneously wherever the opportunity offered, either when in the open air and on the highway, or in the synagogue or the temple. By this simple and natural method, all that he uttered acquired a freshness and force of which the formal expositions of the regular teachers of the day were destitute. He confined himself to no set times nor places. He availed himself of no laboured modes of instruction. His teaching was exclusively oral, and this of the most informal character. He used no paper nor parchment. He committed not a word to writing. While he was thus original, he did not affect originality. He never sought to magnify his own method of proceeding by denouncing any other. There is a uniform simplicity or unconsciousness in his bearing as a teacher; his peculiarity in this respect is the absence of all peculiarity, the entire freedom from all technicalities.

How striking the contrast between him and all other teachers! Although he employed none of the usual means of extending his religion, how wide is the sphere through which his words have ranged! "A poor uninstructed peasant," I use the eloquent language of another,* "by labouring for three years in the most despised corner of the most despised nation on

* H. Ware, jun.

earth, whose whole territory is but a speck on the map of the world,—laid the foundation of a work which was to survive the changes of empires, and the ruins of the philosophies and religions of man. And this, without seeming to make provision by any means adequate to such an effect. Other teachers have committed their wisdom to writing, lest, being entrusted to words which are but breath, it should be dispersed and lost. But Jesus confided in the divine energy of his doctrine; and, with an unconcern truly sublime, cast it abroad to make its own way and perpetuate its own existence. Other instructors have elaborately wrought out their systems; have sometimes clothed them in eloquence which seemed little less than inspiration, and promised perpetual continuance to their influence over men. Yet how small and short has that influence proved! How have their sects disappeared! And by how very few are their works even read, though still accounted among the perfect productions of the human mind! While Jesus, uninstructed in human philosophy, with no attainment in the elegant learning of the world, teaching but for three years, and putting not a syllable upon record—has yet made his instructions as familiar to the nations as their own native tongues—has bestowed on the humblest of his followers a wisdom superior to that of the Grecian masters themselves—nay, has affected the whole mass both of sentiment and character, throughout, as those great, laborious and long-lived men were able to affect only a few familiar friends within the privileged sphere of their own personal influence.”

Unfettered by any formalities, the Founder of Christianity was enabled to take powerful advantage of circumstances. This constitutes another trait of his character as a teacher. While the professional teachers of the day were employed in commenting upon the traditions, and in nice and puerile distinctions, Jesus walked amidst the works of nature and the busy scenes of life ; almost every object and every circumstance he arrested, and made them the messengers of his instructions. He became a voice to nature and Providence, or rather he made them the witnesses and symbols of the things which he uttered. It is true he frequently expressed himself in general terms, employing those universal forms of speech by which abstract truths or principles are enunciated.* But as I have already observed, this general mode of speaking is almost always suggested by deep feeling. It does not necessarily imply a state of mental abstraction. And I think if we carefully examine the passages, in which at first sight it appears as if Jesus were merely announcing general truths or principles, we may find reason to suspect that he was speaking on those occasions with profound emotion, awakened by some present and particular incident. But however this may be, his utterances are obviously suggested and modified in most instances, by circumstances. Does he speak of the Providence of God ? He points to the ravens † wheeling about in

* See Chap. V. pp. 56, 57.

† In the exquisite lines of Bryant to the waterfowl, we have an amplification of a passage in the sermon on the mount.

the depths of the sky, and to the lilies* growing in the fields around him. Are little children brought to him? He takes them in his arms, and beholds in them a resemblance to the inhabitants of the spiritual world. Is he athirst? He is reminded of that living water of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst again. Blindness and death suggest spiritual blindness and spiritual death. Is he followed by an immense multitude? He finds in the circumstance an occasion of solemn and emphatic admonition, turning round and declaring that he who would indeed follow him, must be ready to take up his cross, and consider himself a doomed man. Is mention made to him of his mother and brethren? His language instantly is, "whosoever doeth the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my mother and sister and brother." Has he cast out an evil spirit? He is

* The following Sonnet by Mrs. Hemans may be familiar to the reader, but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of enriching my pages with it.

"Flowers! when the Saviour's calm, benignant eye
 Fell on your gentle beauty;—when from you
 That heavenly lesson from all hearts he drew,
 Eternal, universal, as the sky,—
 Then, in the bosom of your purity,
 A voice He set, as in a temple shrine,
 That life's quick travellers ne'er might pass you by
 Unwarn'd of that sweet oracle divine.
 And though too oft its low, celestial sound,
 By the harsh notes of work-day Care is drown'd,
 And the low steps of vain, unlistening Haste,
 Yet, the great ocean hath no tone of power
 Mightier to reach the soul, in thought's hush'd hour,
 Than yours, ye lilies! chosen thus and graced!"

instinctively prompted to allude to the evil spirit of unbelief which possessed the hearts of many of those around him. But why should I specify instances? Read over the Gospels with this view, and you will find that the sentiments uttered by Jesus were continually suggested by passing occurrences. His discourses never seem to be formal, abstract, studied; but directly and strikingly the reverse. On so many occasions does this appear from what is explicitly related in the narratives, that even when there is no allusion made by the narrators to the particular circumstances under which he spoke, we may fairly infer them from the forms in which his declarations are expressed. When he pronounced himself the light of the world, we may suppose that the thought was suggested by the rising of the sun; and when he said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman," it may be conjectured that he was walking with his disciples in sight of the vineyards on his way to the garden to which he loved to resort.

Let us pause over the probable circumstances of one very interesting passage of his life, as related in the 7th chapter of John.

The Jews were celebrating one of their great national festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles as it was called. It lasted eight days, and consisted of a series of the most imposing ceremonies. It was designed to commemorate the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness after their departure from Egypt. It received its name from the tabernacles or bowers which, formed of branches of trees, were erected by the people in the open air, and in which they ate and

drank and spent a large portion of their time during the continuance of the festival. By these tabernacles, which filled the city, and must have presented a most picturesque appearance, the people were reminded of that early age when their ancestors, flying from Egyptian oppression, erected similar dwellings in the wilderness. National enthusiasm and religious zeal brought the Jews from all parts of Judea and from distant countries, up to Jerusalem, to observe this stirring festival. At that celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles to which we now have reference, the people were universally excited by the expectation of the speedy appearance of a long-promised and heaven-sent Deliverer, who should emancipate his country from the Roman yoke, and raise it to the highest earthly grandeur. And, what was not a little startling, a strange individual had appeared, one Jesus, of the obscure town of Nazareth. He had already produced a great sensation in Galilee and elsewhere by his astonishing works of power and mercy, and by the originality of his whole deportment. At the Feast he appeared publicly in the Temple, exciting the wonder of those who heard him by the boldness and authority with which he spake. The leading men of the nation, alarmed at the impression he was making, employed officers to seize his person. They returned to those by whom they were sent, the commission unexecuted. When asked why they had not brought him, they replied, "never man spake like this man."

By connecting what we know of the ceremonies observed at this festival with this part of the history of Jesus, we shall perceive an impressive example of

that characteristic of his teaching, upon which we are remarking—the promptness with which he seized upon occasions and made them speak for him and with him. On the last and great day of the feast, the same day on which the officers, sent to apprehend Jesus, are said to have made the above-mentioned confession, the services of the temple were peculiarly magnificent. Then all the people forsook their tabernacles, and crowded the courts of the sanctuary. The officiating priests were arranged in due form before the altar. A golden vessel of water from the spring of Siloam was brought, the bearer crying aloud, “with joy we draw water from the well of Salvation.” The words were taken up and repeated by the assembled multitudes. The water was mingled with wine and poured upon the altar, amidst the shouts of the people. This was the ceremony of which it was commonly said among the Jews, “he who has not seen the joy of the drawing of water, has seen no joy.”* Now we cannot help imagining it was in some sort of connexion with this impressive ceremony,—probably in one of the pauses or intervals of the service, that, as we read, Jesus stood up and cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, and from within him shall flow rivers of living water.” The stirring cry had just burst from all lips, “with joy we draw water from the wells of Salvation.” The water of Siloam was pure and refreshing to the sense and hallowed to the mind of the multitude. But Jesus said, ‘Come unto me and I will slake your

* Helon's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, translated from the German of Fred. Strauss. Boston Ed. vol. ii. page 231.

thirst. A full, rich and perennial fountain of blessedness I will open in your hearts.' The circumstances of the occasion were so impressive that, as the narrative goes on to inform us, "many of the people when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ." And then too it was, that the officers sent to take Jesus returned without him, saying, "Never man spake like this man."

This characteristic of the teaching of Jesus, the constant advantage which he took of circumstances, lets us incidentally into the secret of his extraordinary power as a teacher. It shows that what he said, he said from his heart; that the sentiments he uttered had first become his own sentiments, parts of himself, the irrepressible feelings of his own soul. He spake, because he believed, he knew, he felt, with the whole undivided force of his spirit. He did not speak from hearsay, or because he was expected to speak, or with a view to effect. From no outward call of vanity or interest, did he express himself. It was upon those rivers of living water of which he spake, and which were welling up in his own bosom, that his words floated forth and were poured with resistless power into the souls of those who heard him. In short, his words were sincere and true, the direct and natural expression of truths identified with his inmost being, the deep springs of his own character and life.

That this was the character of his eloquence is apparent, I conceive, from the unstudied, extemporaneous, occasional form of his instructions. When a man's heart is full of a particular subject, it is curious

to observe how everything that happens, connects itself in his mind with the one engrossing topic of his feelings. Everything is looked at in relation to that which chiefly interests him, and every event suggests reflections connected with his favourite pursuit. How often do we discover the several professions of a number of individuals, from the manner in which they express themselves under particular circumstances! Their modes of thought and speech will be affected by the subject which commands their principal attention, and holds the first place in their hearts. Thus, the seaman, the merchant, the mechanic, the lawyer, and the physician may all be recognized by their respective ways of thinking and speaking; and in the same situation each will find something analogous to his daily pursuit, and think and express himself accordingly. Most fairly and naturally, then, may we infer the existence of a deep spiritual fountain in the nature of Jesus, from the fact that scarcely anything could occur in his presence, which he did not consider and represent in a spiritual light. How plainly does he show what it was that most deeply interested him!

I apprehend that in this respect he has never yet been understood. He so uniformly represented himself as speaking and acting by the express command of God, that he is too much regarded as a mere passive instrument, the mechanical agent of another and higher Being. We are not aware of the strong personal interest, which the whole style of his teaching undesignedly shows he must have cherished in his work. I believe the principal force of the Divine command was felt by him in the free and

inner force of his own convictions. The voice of his own soul, clear and imperative—this it was that he revered as the commanding voice of his Father. This was to him the most intimate and solemn expression of the Divine authority. His words were continually modified and suggested by external circumstances. And what does this indicate but the fulness of his heart, the inexhaustible abundance of his spirit? Must it not have been with him even as I have said, that he was full of spiritual life, and that when he spoke he spoke from within? He could not have held his peace, and he needed no outward inducement to speak, but such as was offered at the moment. The vessel was filled to the brim, and every breath made it overflow, and like the precious ointment upon the head of the High-priest that ran down, down to the skirts of his garments, the costly streams, from the full heart of Jesus, fell upon the world, cleansing and sanctifying.

Here was the unequalled power of the words of Jesus. This it was that gave them a victorious influence. They were uttered simply and earnestly as the natural expression of thoughts and sentiments, which he himself cherished and felt far more deeply than it was in the power of any language to express. This is true Eloquence,—when a man speaks not for the sake of effect, not from any outward necessity, but from an impulse within, which he cannot resist,—from the concentrated force of his own convictions. Then words are words no longer. They are acts. They exhibit and convey the life's life, that energy of human thought and feeling which is of eternity and of God. Of all the powers of nature, the power of a human spirit,

thoroughly persuaded in itself, penetrated with faith, is the most vital and intense. When the force of such a spirit is bodied forth either by word or deed, it acts upon all surrounding spirits—on all other minds. A brief sentence, a single articulate sound of the voice, coming from the heart, or rather bringing the heart along with it, possesses a resistless power. It is like “the piercing of a sword,” like “a winged thunderbolt,” prostrating all opposition, inflaming all souls. Such are the sympathies between man and man. It was this that gave to Peter the Hermit the power to arouse all Europe, nobles and their vassals, priests and kings, the rich and the poor, men, women, and children, and lead them to the recovery of the Holy Land. The historian Gibbon sneers at his fanaticism and confesses his power, observing that “the most perfect orator of Athens might have envied the success of his eloquence.” Ignorant though he was, mean and contemptible in appearance, still his words expressed the burning convictions of his own soul, and so he created the same convictions in other men.

Seldom, alas! have human words exerted this influence. The reason how obvious! They have seldom shown themselves to be the inspiration of the living heart. They, who have enjoyed the opportunity and the privilege of teaching, have taught from self-interest or for reputation's sake, or to produce upon others an effect which has never been wrought upon themselves. They have been sworn to maintain and advocate certain established systems of religious opinion. They have consequently spoken, because they were required to speak and must say something, and take

good care not to deviate from a track before appointed. How widely opposite to all this, the spirit of a true teacher, of one in whom the truth lives and works, as in Jesus of Nazareth, stimulating every power, inspiring every affection, commanding his whole being, and who therefore speaks because something within—the voice of the living God, commands and will not be disobeyed. He must utter himself even if he perish in the act. He neither thinks to please nor to offend, to conciliate nor to shock. His feeling is—Let me speak out my own heart or let me die! He that hath the word of the Lord, hath it stamped upon his inmost being, sounding for ever through the secret chambers of the soul, let him speak that word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?

The teaching of Jesus being so uniformly associated with the incidents in the midst of which he lived, we have in this circumstance an interesting ground for believing, that what he is recorded to have uttered was actually uttered by him. If the things ascribed to him were fictitious, made for him by the authors of the New Testament histories,—if these writers had put into his mouth things which he did not say, it is impossible they should have been so particular and occasional. They would have been more general and abstract. “We may conclude,” says Dr. Jortin, one of the wisest theologians the Church of England has ever produced, “that the writers of the Gospels have given always the substance, often the words of our Lord’s sermons. They did not invent discourses and ascribe them to him, as Plato is supposed to have given his own thoughts to

his master Socrates, and as Greek and Latin historians never scrupled to do. If they had followed this method, they would probably have made for him discourses exhorting to virtue, and dissuading from vice, in general terms. It would not have entered their thoughts to have crowded together so many allusions to time and place, and to other little occurrences, which nothing besides the presence of the object could suggest."*

The peculiar style of the teaching of Jesus is interesting in another point of view. We cannot but be struck, upon the most cursory perusal of the Four Gospels, with their particularity,—the frequent minuteness of their details. The question arises, if they are true histories, and were not written until years after the events related took place, and their authors did not take notes at the time and on the spot, and neither of these is pretended, how comes it that the writers recollected things so particularly?

This is a fair inquiry, and in order to arrive at the true answer we must first make due allowance for the peculiar style of the writers. Much of the particularity of detail apparent in these histories exists only in appearance—in the form of the narration. Authors unpractised in the art of composition, possessing only a limited vocabulary, naturally adopt a scenic or dramatic mode of relation. This is manifest in the works of all primitive writers and historians. I find in the ninety-fourth number of the Edinburgh Review, in an article entitled "History," (page 333, English

* Discourses on the truth of the Christian religion.

edition,) the following remarks illustrative of the point under consideration. "The faults of Herodotus," says the Reviewer, "are the faults of a simple and imaginative mind. Children and servants are remarkably Herodotean in their style of narration. They tell everything dramatically. Their *says hes* and *says shes* are proverbial. Every person, who has had to settle their disputes, knows that, even when they have no intention to deceive, their reports of conversation always require to be carefully sifted. If an educated man were giving an account of the late change of administration, he would say—'Lord Goderich resigned: and the King, in consequence, sent for the Duke of Wellington.' A porter tells the story as if he had been hid behind the curtains of the royal bed at Windsor: 'So Lord Goderich says, "I cannot manage this business; I must go out."' So the King says—says he, "Well, then, I must send for the Duke of Wellington—that's all."' This," adds the Reviewer, "is in the very manner of the father of history." And this, we also may perceive, is in the very manner of the unpractised writers of the New Testament histories. They continually express themselves, not only as if they were ear-witnesses, when, from their own showing, it is manifest this could not have been the case, but also as if they were present in the very bosoms of those of whom they speak, and knew exactly the forms of language which their thoughts took, as they arose in their minds. Instances in point may be gathered upon every page of the Gospels. The forty-eighth verse of the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, runs thus: "Now he that betrayed him

gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.'" The narrator is not to be supposed to give the precise words uttered by Judas. This is simply his way of relating the circumstance. A more cultivated writer would have stated it somewhat in this manner, "The traitor had agreed to point out the person they were to seize by kissing him." We read in the book of Acts, that after Paul had defended himself before Agrippa, "the king rose up, and Bernice, and they that sat with them. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, 'This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.'" Of course, the historian is not to be understood as if he had been present and heard what was said. This minuteness of narration belongs to an age and a writer comparatively primitive.*

* I cannot help thinking that the above remarks throw light upon the following passage of the Gospel of Mark xiv. 12—16: "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, 'Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover?' And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, 'Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest chamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.' And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover." At first sight there appears to be something supernatural in the knowledge which Jesus possessed of the man to whom he sent his two disciples, and of the circumstances under which they would meet him. But it is worthy of note that the parallel passage in Matthew produces no impression of this kind. "Now the first day of the feast of un-

These remarks, however, account for the particularity of the Gospel histories only in part. They do leavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, 'Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?' And he said, 'Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.' And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover." From this statement of Matthew, I infer that the miraculous air given to this portion of the history by Mark and Luke, exists only in appearance, and results from the mode of narration. There are many probable particulars in the case, which the historians in their brief and peculiar mode of narration may have omitted, mentioning only the most prominent. Jesus may naturally enough have been acquainted with some well-disposed inhabitant of Jerusalem, who, he knew, was accustomed to send a servant daily for water to one of the public wells or springs, Siloam, perhaps. There were numbers in the streets of the city constantly bearing water to and fro. So that we cannot but suppose, that the directions which Jesus gave to his two disciples, were more full and minute than they are represented. They were probably directed to a certain spot, where they may have waited, we know not how long. But I cheerfully commend this passage of the history to the good sense and intelligence of the reader. Similar observations are applicable to the passage, where we are told that Jesus sent his disciples to procure the ass upon which he rode into Jerusalem.

The remarks made in the text, appear to me to throw some light also upon the memorable passage in Genesis i. 26: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image,'" &c. Nobody imagines that God actually spoke. And it is equally clear, I conceive, that he did not consult any other being. According to the poetic and scenic style of the primitive period, when this account of the creation was written, God is described as speaking—as addressing directly the objects created. But when the writer comes to the creation of man, he shows his sense of man's dignity, and his superiority to the other works of God, by representing the Deity as first planning this his best work, before he created it. To express this idea, God must be introduced as *telling* what he is about to do; and if so, then such a form of speech must be adopted, as would imply the presence of some being or beings, to whom the plan of the Divine mind was communi-

not cover the whole difficulty. We are still at a loss to know how these writers came to recollect so many particulars. It is therefore to be considered further, that, although it is not pretended that they wrote until years after the death of Jesus, still it is not to be supposed that the events which make up their narratives, had lain dormant in their minds in the interval. The things which they record, they had been relating orally for years. The contents of these books had in all probability constituted the burthen of their preaching, the testimony whereby they created faith in the minds of their hearers.

But it is in that trait of the teaching of Jesus upon which I have been remarking, that I find a satisfactory explanation of the minuteness of detail which characterizes these writings. Had his discourses been abstract and general, we might well doubt whether they could have been so easily remembered. But as it was, his style of teaching was most admirably adapted to fix the sentiments and often the very words he uttered in the memory. It seems to me that if he had carefully and designedly taught upon a system of mnemonics, he could not have stamped his words more effectually upon the minds of his hearers, beyond

cated ; otherwise, all the effect of representing the Deity as speaking, might, to an imaginative mind, be lost. The idea of the dignity of human nature, thus poetically expressed in the Mosaic account of the creation, is also found in the writings of Seneca, and, it is curious to observe, with precisely that difference in the mode or style of expressing it, which we should expect between writers of such different degrees of cultivation. "Cogitavit nos," says the philosopher, "ante Natura quam fecit!"—"Nature paused before she made us." See *Le Clerc* in *V. T.*

the possibility of being forgotten. We are all familiar with that curious law of the mind, the law of association. We all know how easy it is to preserve the remembrance of the merest trifles, if they only chance to be associated with some outward object or incident. When we travel a road after a long interval, its successive scenes, as they present themselves, will recall the most transient thoughts that were suggested, the most incidental remarks that were made, the last time we passed that way. We perceive that almost every syllable of the declarations of Jesus was uttered under circumstances rendering it impossible that it should ever be forgotten. On one occasion, when attended by an immense multitude, he turned round while the people were crowding after him, and said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me." I doubt whether any who heard these words, fully understood their purport at the time. And yet when we consider the circumstances under which they were said, we see that they must have made a startling and ineffaceable impression. A crowd was following Jesus, intensely excited by the hope that he would prove to be the Messiah—the glorious leader and king so long and ardently looked for. Taking advantage of this state of feeling, Jesus declared in substance, "If you would indeed follow me, you must take up your crosses, you must consider yourselves as condemned to death." Again, turn to the account of the raising of Lazarus. When Jesus had cried aloud, "'Lazarus, come forth,' he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and with a cloth about his face. *And Jesus*

said, 'Loose him and let him go.'" At first view we cannot help feeling that there is an abrupt falling off here in the narrative, a sudden descent to a trifling particular—to an observation apparently and comparatively insignificant. We instantly ask how came Jesus to give this trifling direction? Or, if he did give it, how happened the narrator to recollect it and to think it worth while to put it on record? These queries are silenced the instant we recur to the probable circumstances. If the dead man actually appeared, into what consternation must the by-standers have been thrown! Some shrieked, some fainted, and all, transfixed and bereft of their composure, and doubting whether they beheld an apparition or real flesh and blood, left Lazarus to struggle and stagger in the grave-clothes in which he was wrapped 'hand and foot.' It is impossible that any one present could have failed to be most deeply impressed with that sublime self-possession which Jesus alone preserved, and with which he quietly bade them go and loose the grave-clothes, and set Lazarus at liberty. That simple sentence—"And Jesus said, 'Loose him, and let him go,'"—thus considered, in connexion with the circumstances, how full is it of truth and nature! To my mind, it furnishes evidence the most decisive, because entirely incidental, of the reality of the restoration of Lazarus. It is a slight circumstance in itself, but in its perfect naturalness there is an indelible stamp of truth. *Ex pede Herculem.*

So by numerous instances it might be shown, that oftentimes the slightest remark of Jesus must have sunk deeply into the minds of those around him, in

association with the particular circumstances, and under the pressure of the peculiar occasions on which it was uttered.

The remarks which I have made upon the character of Jesus as a teacher, have been confined to the form and style of his teaching. I have not touched upon his characteristic views and doctrines. Nor shall I attempt a discussion of them. To give a complete and discriminating account of the truths he taught, lies not within my ability. Under this head, I might deal easily and largely in general assertions, but a true and distinct portraiture of the moral and religious doctrines of Christ is quite another matter. To be well and wisely done, it would require, if I mistake not, a thorough appreciation of the various systems of religion and philosophy by which Christianity was preceded, and of the true philosophy of mind and morals. Without a profound acquaintance with these, it is hardly possible to estimate the author of Christianity justly. We may think and speak extravagantly of him, and with a brief sentence, place him immeasurably above all other teachers. But it is another thing to think of him justly, and with discrimination.

There is however one characteristic of his religion, as it was taught by himself, to which I would ask a moment's attention. It is the entire absence of all that is vulgarly termed speculation—theory. Every sentiment uttered by Jesus, admits of being understood as the expression of a fact—an eternal and essential truth. His religion, as a revelation, is a

revelation of things true from all eternity. The great topics of his teaching were not the fancies, the creations of his own mind. They existed in the nature of things. When he declares, for instance, that "unto him who hath shall be given, and from him who hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath," who does not see that this is only the assertion of a truth, wrought into our very nature and condition, and corroborated by all our observation of life? He who improves, acquires more power; he who does not improve, loses the power which he originally possessed. Again, read over the beatitudes, and you will find that they all express natural truths. "Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Is not inward purity the sense, the eye whereby we discern the pure spirit, the indwelling God of the universe? "Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." In the possession of a merciful temper, have we not a gift of divine love—a token of divine mercy? Even in that startling declaration, "Whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die," we have an indisputable fact. Is it not inevitably and unchangeably true, that death ceases to be death to him whose feelings and views accord with the spirit of this great Teacher? When he spoke of his coming in power and great glory, he asserted a glorious fact of which we are the witnesses. He is coming in the influence of his religion, more gloriously, with a deeper and more searching power, than if he had appeared in person amidst the clouds of heaven accompanied by angelic hosts. Examine his language on all occasions with this view, and you will be struck

with its truth. We call the principles which he inculcated by his name, but not because he originated them, for they are older than the creation. But he did originate a new manifestation of them. He not only asserted them with an unprecedented clearness, he gave them a new and living force in his own being. He realized them in all their beauty and fulness in his life. In his doings and sufferings,—the true sacred writing, the characters and symbols by which the divine mind expresses itself,—the great facts and principles of the moral world were revealed anew. If we cannot always discern the whole of the truths he uttered in nature and life, we can at least discover some intimations, some germs of them there. Affecting no peculiarity of language, he freely expressed himself in the popular religious phraseology of the day, but interpreted, as the language of every man should be, by the general tone of his life, we see that it was used by him metaphorically. Who, for instance, can for a moment suppose that when he talked of his kingdom and his glory, he had any idea of an outward kingdom, a visible glory, when his whole life shows so eloquently that it was the glory of an entire self-sacrifice, which won and inspired his whole soul! Recollect his sublime declaration to Pilate, “Yes, I am a king.” How does he define his regal character! “For this end was I born,” he adds, “and for this cause came I into the world to bear witness to the truth. Every true man is my subject.” How perfect his definition of real power—of true greatness! “Let him who would be the greatest be the servant of all!” To the beautiful correctness of this definition, what

evidence has been afforded in the history of the world! Even the sublime doctrine of a future life, which is so frequently represented as a peculiar doctrine of Christianity, is nowhere formally asserted by Jesus. It is rather taken for granted—treated as if it were a plain and indisputable fact. And if theologians were not so anxious to exalt the Gospel at the expense of reason and nature, it might be perceived that the immortality of man, like all the other truths of the New Testament, is written in our very nature, and that in all his allusions to it, Jesus regarded it as a natural truth.

So much now may I venture to say, that with respect to the substance as well as the style of his teaching, the author of Christianity affected nothing peculiar, and herein was his greatest peculiarity—his most original trait. He treated the truths he uttered as great and momentous truths; as possessed of a value of which the world had not dreamed, of a profoundness which thought had not fathomed. He declared them with a new authority, and exemplified them as they have never been exemplified before nor since. But he did not appropriate them to himself. They were of the world,—of eternity and of God.

Behold now the unutterable, everlasting glory—**alas!** that I should be compelled to add, the as yet unsuspected glory—of the humble peasant of Judea, that he taught fully by his lips and his life, what?—the very truth which universal nature from all its heights and depths, and the infinite God teach! I confess I see no disparagement to Christ in the fact that Christianity is as old as the creation, for I

believe that it is a great deal older—from eternity. “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever God had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting is the truth taught by Christ.”

But why, it may be asked, why call the truths of religion by his name, if they were taught so long ago and by so many mighty teachers, if they were, long before he appeared, engraven upon the ancient tables of the human heart? For a plain and emphatic reason. The life of Jesus of Nazareth, his words, acts and sufferings, being real, being facts, are a part of the grand and all-instructive system of creation,—they constitute a page, nay, a chapter, and at once the profoundest and the clearest chapter, in the vast volume of God. Nowhere do I see spiritual and eternal things so clearly revealed, so touchingly expressed, as in his life. The truth which all else teaches is presented by him and in him with a new significance, an original beauty. Let it be that he taught nothing more than the religion of nature, still by concentrating all its force and loveliness in his individual being, by incorporating it with his life, and so teaching it as it had never been taught by any other, he made natural religion HIS religion, HIS truth. He has given a new illustration of it. Regard his life as only a part and portion of the great system of nature, the grand chain of Providence,—still I say that from no quarter of the grand whole come there such all-enlightening beams as from him. His history amidst all objects and events is by far the most *luminous point*. It is the grand interpretation of

ture—the revelation of her mysteries. There the truth shines forth with satisfying clearness. Therefore I hold it to be true and right to call the truth he reached through his own being, *his* truth—*Christian* truth. When it is so denominated, it is not meant that he appropriated it to himself. On the contrary, the sense in which it is *his*, it is more effectually that within the reach of all men, and imparted to all, and we are made to feel that it is natural and eternal truth. It may sound extravagantly, yet so perfect is the manifestation of the spiritual power and beauty of truth in him, that if I presumed to say, but I do not if I presumed to say for what *one* purpose God made all that we see, and arranged the mighty and complicated course of events, I should say it was in order to provide a sphere for the manifestation of such a being as Jesus of Nazareth; that he is the masterpiece of the Divine Artist, for the creation of which all else was ordained,—“the Heir of all things.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MIRACLES.

“The deep philosopher sees chains of causes and effects so wonderfully and strangely linked together, that he is usually the last person to decide upon the impossibility of any two series of events being independent of each other; and in science, so many natural miracles, as it were, have been brought to light,—such as the fall of stones from meteors in the atmosphere, the disarming a thunderbolt by a metallic point, the production of fire from ice by a metal white as silver, and referring certain laws of motion of the sea to the moon,—that the physical inquirer is seldom disposed to assert confidently on any abstruse subjects belonging to the order of natural things, and still less so on those relating to the more mysterious relations of moral events and intellectual natures.”—SIR H. DAVY.

THE next aspect under which we may contemplate the character of Christ is in relation to those extraordinary works of power and benevolence ascribed to him. It is interesting to see how they illustrate his moral elevation.

As the difficulty which most minds find in admitting the reality of the Christian miracles, arises not from the peculiar character of these miracles, but from the idea of a miracle of any kind, I propose first to state what I understand by a miracle.

The word ‘miracle’ is derived from the Latin word ‘*miraculum*,’ which signifies simply a wonder. Taking the term in this sense exclusively, no one is disposed to doubt the reality of an event, solely on the score of *its* wonderfulness, because in this sense there is

nothing that is not miraculous. The existence of the merest atom, when we duly consider it, is an unspeakable miracle. The universe—all being—is miraculous. There is no presumption therefore against the truth of any fact upon this ground. The presumption would seem to be in the opposite direction, for all things are wonders, all are miracles.

But there is another idea that enters into the common understanding of a miracle, and hence arises the difficulty. Miracles are usually conceived of, and represented as, departures from the natural order of things,—interruptions, violations of the laws of Nature. They are so understood and designated by Dr. Channing in his *Dudleian Lecture*. And so regarded, they are defended in the following manner :

“ We are never to forget,” says this eminent writer, “ that God’s adherence to the order of the universe is not necessary and mechanical, but intelligent and voluntary. He adheres to it, not for its own sake, or because it has a sacredness which compels him to respect it, but simply because it is most suited to accomplish purposes in which he is engaged. It is a means, and not an end ; and, like all other means, must give way when the end can best be promoted without it. It is the mark of a weak mind to make an idol of order and method,—to cling to established forms of business when they clog instead of advancing it. If, then, the great purposes of the universe can best be accomplished by departing from its established laws, these laws will undoubtedly be suspended ; and, though broken in the letter, they will be observed in

their spirit, for the ends for which they were first instituted will be advanced by their violation. Now the question arises, for what purposes were nature and its order appointed; and there is no presumption in saying that the highest of these is the improvement of intelligent beings. Mind (by which we mean both moral and intellectual powers) is God's first end. The great purpose for which an order of nature is fixed, is plainly the formation of mind. In a creation without order, where events would follow without any regular succession, it is obvious that mind must be kept in perpetual infancy; for in such a universe, there could be no reasoning from effects to causes, no induction to establish general truths, no adaptation of means to ends; that is, no science relating to God, no matter, no mind; no action, no virtue. The great purpose of God, then, I repeat it, in establishing the order of nature, is to form and advance the mind; and if the case should occur in which the interests of the mind could best be advanced by departing from this order or by miraculous agency, then the great purpose of the creation, the great end of its laws and regularity, would demand such departure; and miracles, instead of warring against, would concur with, nature.

“ Now we Christians maintain that such a case has existed. We affirm that, when Jesus Christ came into the world, nature had failed to communicate instructions to men, in which, as intelligent beings, they had the deepest concern, and on which the full development of their highest faculties essentially depended; and we affirm, that there was no prospect of relief

from nature; so that an exigence had occurred in which additional communications, supernatural lights, might rationally be expected from the Father of spirits."

Nothing can be stated with more clearness and simplicity than the views here given. But I am bold to confess that, in my humble opinion, they savour too much of false analogies.

1. I cannot unhesitatingly assent to the sentiment, that order is beautiful, in the sight of God and man, only as a means to an end. If it have not a certain intrinsic worth, can it have any vitality as a means? And again, is not our perception of the orderly structure of the human frame, for instance, antecedent to any knowledge of the fitness of its organization for the purposes of life? When we contemplate the regularity of the natural world, can we help feeling that the Creator delights in order and beauty, and that when, as the account of the creation says, he pronounced all things good, it was not merely for the uses they would serve as means, but also for a certain intrinsic goodness?

2. That the divine methods might *clog* the divine purposes, and require to be varied and changed,—that exigencies might occur in the divine works and ways,—seem to me impossible and offensive suppositions. But much more offensive is it to hear it affirmed, in so many words, that nature has *failed* to accomplish aught.

3. I shrink, too, from the familiarity with the ways and purposes of the Infinite Mind implied in the foregoing statement. It may be admitted that there

is no presumption in regarding the improvement of moral and intelligent beings as the chief care of the Deity: but then, can we limit the existence of intelligent beings to this little corner of creation? Can we suppose that there are not multitudes of minds, of a higher order, and at every different degree of advancement, in other of the many mansions of the universe, and that the order of nature has reference to their education as well as to ours? At least, is it not presumptuous to decide that nature has failed, because within a period—which, though embracing some thousands of years, is still a limited period—a small portion of God's moral and intelligent family, a part of the race of man, has been wrapped in ignorance and error? By precisely the same mode of reasoning by which nature is affirmed to have failed, might we not maintain the insufficiency of the Christian revelation? Christianity has been in the world hundreds of years, and thousands have come and gone unblest by a single ray of its light. We see plainly enough that it would be unfair to draw any inference from this fact unfavourable to the completeness of Christianity; for this dispensation, we perceive, is expansive and progressive, and is destined in the course of time to be spread over the whole world. In the meanwhile, those who live and die without enjoying its light are still, we believe, the subjects of a wise discipline and an infinite Providence, and in another state they may indirectly enjoy the benefits of Christianity, through the ministration of minds which Christianity has enlightened and sanctified. And why may we not suppose that it is exactly the same with the great order of nature? How can

we deny—I had almost said, how can we doubt—that the grand system of creation, even though it have exerted no direct influence upon the interests of mind in this our sphere, “in a few computed centuries and measured square miles,” has been dispensing the most beneficent influences in other parts of the moral and intelligent household of Heaven,—influences destined to act, in one way or another, in the progress of time, upon this world, and of which, for aught we know, the Christian dispensation itself may be, in the infinite interchanges of the universe, the fruit and the embodiment? Is it explicitly affirmed that a case has occurred in which the order of nature has shown itself incapable of furnishing needed guidance? I am aware that a vast deal of erudition has been employed in support of this assertion. To establish it, the world before Christianity has been explored with immense labour. Still, I say, it is a mere matter of opinion. It has not been unquestionably proved that such is the fact. What if it were asserted, in direct contradiction to this opinion, that the order of nature had done wonders for the human mind before the appearance of Christianity; that it had prepared mankind for Christianity; that, considering its probable uses, ends, issues, in other, higher, and grander spheres and relations, it had at the same time had no slight influence in elevating the human race, and in disposing the human mind for the introduction of the Christian religion? I grant these are mere assertions; but, putting out of view all evidence of one kind or another, may we not contend that they are fully as agreeable to our best conceptions of God and his providence as

the opposite affirmations? At all events, admitting that the world was in the deepest moral darkness, unvisited by any spiritual light, before the coming of Christ, I still prefer to regard Christianity not as in any sense interrupting the order of nature, but as harmonizing with it, in all respects, in the letter as well as in the spirit.

4. But these are subordinate considerations. The chief objection to the reasoning upon which I presume to remark is, that it is based upon the merest assumption. It takes for granted, that the whole order of nature is known to us, that the limits of our knowledge are commensurate with all the laws and modes of existence. Because, if it is not so, if our knowledge is not thus complete, how can we presume so much as to speak even of a *violation* of, or a *departure* from, the order of nature? The truth is,—and it would seem only necessary to hint at it, to bring it to mind with overpowering force,—our knowledge, so far from possessing anything like completeness, is most imperfect. We stand but on the borders of the tremendous abyss of being;—we have caught but a distant glimpse of its great Author. “How faint the whisper we have heard of him!”* We see but a portion of nature, and that portion how superficially! We need not mourn over our ignorance, for the acknowledgment of it is the beginning of all sound wisdom. If we were only sensible of our ignorance, how should we be saved from that presumption which is the parent of countless errors! †

* Job xxvi. 14. Noyes's translation.

† The following passage, in which Bishop Butler furnishes a gene-

With our very limited knowledge of nature, how, I ask again, shall we pronounce an alleged fact a viola-

ral answer to objections against the goodness and wisdom of God's moral government, by reminding men of their ignorance, must have equal force in checking the haste with which we pronounce upon departures from the order or scheme of things. "In this great scheme of the natural world, individuals have various peculiar relations to other individuals of their own species. And whole species are, we find, variously related to other species upon this earth. Nor do we know how much farther these kinds of relations may extend. And, as there is not any action or natural event, which we are acquainted with, so single and unconnected as not to have a respect to some other actions and events, so possibly each of them, when it has not an immediate, may yet have a remote natural relation to other actions and events, much beyond the compass of this present world. * * * As it is obvious that all events have future unknown consequences, so if we trace any as far as we can go, into what is connected with it, we shall find that if such event were not connected with somewhat farther in nature unknown to us, somewhat both past and present, such event could not possibly have been at all. Nor can we give the whole account of any one thing whatever, of all its causes, ends, and necessary adjuncts; those adjuncts, I mean, without which it could not have been. By this most astonishing connexion, these reciprocal correspondencies and mutual relations, everything which we see in the course of nature is actually brought about. And things, seemingly the most insignificant imaginable, are perpetually observed to be necessary conditions to other things of the greatest importance; so that any one thing whatever may, for aught we know to the contrary, be a necessary condition to any other. The natural world, then, and natural government of it, being such an incomprehensible scheme, so incomprehensible that a man must really, in the literal sense, know nothing at all, who is not sensible of his ignorance in it, this immediately suggests, and strongly shows the credibility that the moral government of it may be so too. Indeed, the natural and moral constitution and government of the world are so connected, as to make up together but one scheme; and it is highly probable that the first is formed and carried on merely in subserviency to the latter, as the vegetable world is for the animal, and organized bodies for minds."—*Butler's Analogy*, Part I. Chap. VII.

tion of its order? Is it because it is referable to no cause but a moral and intelligent Being, a super-physical Agency, a Supreme Will? But to what else, pray, is any event, however common, to be ascribed; but an invisible, supernatural Power? We are accustomed, it is true, to ascribe power to physical causes; and because one phenomenon is always preceded by another of a certain description, to refer the former to the latter, as to its efficient cause. The sun shines, the rain descends, and the grass grows; and we conclude that the sun and the rain possess in themselves the power to cause the grass to grow. But there is no reason for this conclusion, except the familiarity of this sequence, which is no reason at all. For aught we perceive, the shining of the sun and the falling of the rain might have been followed by directly opposite consequences. All that we perceive, and all that we can affirm, so far as our perceptions go, is, that one event is invariably followed by another of a certain description. It is now conceded by eminent philosophical writers, that in what are commonly termed physical causes we perceive no inherent power to produce the effects by which they are followed. Hence has arisen the adoption of the terms *antecedent* and *consequent*, as more strictly philosophical than *cause* and *effect*, as applicable to physical phenomena. "The material world is often conceived of as a vast machine, constructed by the Deity with certain powers, and obeying certain laws by which he at the beginning directed its operations; but left by him, as it were, after its creation to produce such effects as would follow from the natural operation of those powers and

laws. But of matter we know nothing, except as a collection of certain powers, existing without us, in a certain part of space. I *perceive* what is called a portion of matter; that is, my senses are affected by a power, which produces a perception of colour, another power, co-existent with the former, which produces the perception of a certain form, another, which gives the perception of resistance, and so on. This is the whole. I have evidence for nothing but the existence of such powers. I receive fully the testimony of my senses as far as it goes; and they give testimony to nothing more than the existence of certain powers without them, capable of affecting them in certain ways. To these powers, coexisting as they do, together, I give the name of matter. But why should we not refer the powers themselves immediately to the Deity, rather than to some unknown being or substance, denoted by this name, *matter*, of which it is wholly impossible to form a conception; our conception being solely of the powers themselves, or, as they are commonly called, attributes. If we do thus refer them to the Deity, we shall regard matter and its phenomena, as nothing but a manifestation of his power in various modes and acts.”*

“The falseness of the analogy,” says Dugald Stewart, alluding to the opinion of those who conceive that the universe is a machine formed and put in motion by the Deity, “appears from this, that the moving force in every machine is some *natural power*, such as gravity and elasticity; and, therefore, the very idea of mechanism presupposes the existence of those active

* Christian Disciple. New Series. Art. Prayer, vol. 3, p. 405.

powers of which it is the professed object of a mechanical theory of the universe to give an explanation." (Active and Moral Powers, vol. 1. Note D.) How long oftentimes is the interval between the rejection of an error and the full admission of the opposite truth! We reject the mechanical theory of the universe: but how does it continue to vitiate our reasonings and deaden our sensibilities! The universe is not a machine, many are ready to admit, but then they turn away, as if this were the end, when it is but the beginning of the whole matter. If the creation is not a machine, what then is it? What do we see, when we look upon the objects and changes around us! 'Nothing,' so the reply is commonly expressed, 'nothing but Mind—nothing but the Agency of God!' Nothing but the agency of God! In the name of Heaven, what would we have more to stir up the deepest springs of curiosity, wonder, and awe, and make us feel that a new world of thought is opened before us! It must put all things in new lights. The familiar must become novel, the novel, familiar. Natural facts become supernatural, and miracles become natural, when all are regarded as manifestations of an Invisible Mind, an Infinite Will.*

* "To find no contradiction in the union of old and new, to contemplate the Ancient of Days with feelings as fresh as if they then sprung forth at his own fiat, this characterises the minds that feel the riddle of the world, and may help to unravel it. To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood, to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty, with the appearances which every day, for perhaps forty years, had rendered familiar,

With Sun, and Moon, and Stars, throughout the year,
And Man and Woman——

Or, again, do we pronounce a fact a miracle, using the word in the sense to which I object, on the ground of its wonderfulness? Do we, for instance, conclude the resurrection of a dead man to life, a violation of natural laws, because it is so astonishing? Upon this ground the whole order of nature is at once annihilated, for all things are wonderful. In strict truth, the restoration of a dead man to life is not in the least more wonderful than the birth of a human being. And if both events were now witnessed for the first time, they would alike appear unutterably strange, and we should be just as little or just as much disposed to refer the one as the other to a natural order of things.

Or, once more, do we decide a fact to be a violation of the order of nature because it is altogether new and unprecedented? This cannot be done, as I have already said, without assuming that the boundaries of human experience are co-extensive with the order of nature,—in other words, that all the modes of the Divine Power are known to us,—an assumption too extravagant to be consciously entertained for an instant. Upon this principle, every new fact or phenomenon in the physical world ought to be set down as an interruption of the laws of nature. It is found, for instance, to be a natural law, that all bodies are

*this is the character and privilege of genius. * * And so to present familiar objects, as to awaken the minds of others to a like freshness of sensation concerning them, (that constant accompaniment of mental, no less than bodily convalescence,)—this is the prime merit of genius, and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation.”—*
COLERIDGE.

diminished in bulk by the withdrawal of heat. But to this law water presents a remarkable exception. Within certain degrees of diminished temperature, it increases in bulk. This curious fact is usually represented as anomalous. But it is not meant that it is the violation of a known law, but that it is the result of an unknown law. It is not supposed to interrupt, but to disclose the order of nature. And yet it certainly is an interruption of natural laws, if the order of our experience is synonymous with the order of nature. Upon this supposition too, if a body were now discovered in the depths of space, if its direction and size were ascertained, and it were found that it would in its course inevitably throw the whole solar system into the greatest confusion, it ought to be regarded as menacing the integrity of nature. As well might the surge that dashes the canoe in fragments upon the rocks be so considered. True Science would not reason thus. It would find no faint consolation, under the awful prospect, in the sublime persuasion that a new development of the harmony of nature was at hand. In truth, it is now an established and indispensable principle in all inquiries into the physical world, to regard every new fact, when once fully attested, not as an interruption of natural laws, but as pointing to some law before unknown. It may infringe and throw into confusion all the little theories of man concerning the order of the universe, rendering them altogether worthless. But it comes to reveal that order more clearly, to assist the human mind to approach nearer to the grand harmony of nature.

Let us look now at the extraordinary facts related

in the New Testament. At the word or the touch of Jesus, diseases vanished, the lame walked, the blind received sight, and the dead were raised. Such, for the most part, are the wonderful works ascribed to him. When these facts are considered, under all the circumstances under which they are represented to have taken place, no man can affirm that they lie beyond the boundaries of possibility. They fall not, it is true, within the limits of our experience ; but it cannot be maintained that they are impossible in the nature of things, because the nature of the things concerned is but very partially known. For the same reason, they cannot be pronounced interruptions of the laws of nature. Before we pronounce the resurrection of a dead man to life, startling as it may be, an absolute impossibility, or a departure from natural laws, we ought to know what life* is, and death ; what the extent of the change to which we give this name, what are the relations between the body and the central principle of animation, the mind or soul, and how these relations are affected by what we call death. We are apt to fancy that we know a great

* " A savage, who saw the operation of a number of power-loom, weaving stockings, cease at once on the stopping of a wheel, might well imagine that the motive force was in the wheel ; he could not know that it more immediately depended upon the steam, and ultimately upon a fire below a concealed boiler. The philosopher sees the fire which is the cause of the motion of this complicated machinery, so unintelligible to the savage ; but both are equally ignorant of the *Divine fire* which is the cause of the mechanism of organized structures."—*Sir H. Davy*.—Surely, then, in the name of all philosophy, we should take care how we talk of impossibilities on the one hand, or violations of the laws of nature on the other, in cases where life and its functions and phenomena are concerned.

deal about these things. How very little do we absolutely know! We talk with a confidence as groundless as it is unconscious, about the spirit's forsaking the body with the last breath, or of its slumbering in the dust for ages. But these are the merest human suppositions. Every one who admits the authority of Christianity, and knows how to separate its substance from its forms, must be perfectly aware that our religion establishes nothing respecting death, save that it is not the extinction of our being. How it affects the mode of our existence is a matter, upon which the constitution of our spiritual nature and the analogies of creation may throw more or less light, but we have no direct information. We cannot tell the precise moment at which the connexion of our being with its material frame is dissolved, and the influence of each over the other is irrevocably terminated. "The natural world," observes Dr. Channing, in the Lecture from which I have quoted, "contains no provisions or arrangements for reviving the dead. The sun and the rain, which cover the tomb with verdure, send no vital influence to the mouldering body. The researches of science detect no secret processes for restoring the lost powers of life." If, as the language implies, by the natural world is meant only the physical world, these assertions may be admitted. But the physical world is but a very small, and an inferior part of the actually existing and present world of nature. But if in the natural world here mentioned, is meant to be included the moral and intellectual, or spiritual system, which exists in mysterious union and intimate fellowship with the

material creation, then I beg leave to say that these declarations are made without authority. For who has yet explored the spiritual world? Who hath scanned the laws of mind? Who hath weighed its mighty forces as in a balance? Who, for instance, will venture to set limits to the power of a mind of transcendent greatness, like that which was manifested in the humble form of the Man of Nazareth? These questions are not put blindly and at random. All will acknowledge—my respected friend, from whose views I presume to dissent, would be among the very last to deny—the existence and vastness of moral power. Is it not from the moral world that those demonstrations issue, which create in us the deepest, divinest sentiment of power. Does not all other force fade into a vision in comparison with moral force? Does not every thing intimate more or less directly to our minds, that the central and sustaining energy of the universe is of a spiritual nature; that He whom we call God, is God, Almighty and Everlasting, because He is a Spirit—a perfect mind,—and in his spiritual essence, in his rectitude, love, and wisdom is the hiding of his power? I say again, then, that we are not at liberty to pronounce the restoration of a dead man to life a natural impossibility, or a violation of nature, until we know what death is, and life; what the influence of the mind upon the body, and when that influence ceases, and, more than all, what are the limits of the power with which God may possess a mind of unequalled purity, wisdom and exaltation, like the mind of Jesus Christ, without any violation of the laws of its being. A

phenomenon, the elements whereof are but so imperfectly known, purporting to take place through the agency of such a being as the Man of Nazareth, is not to be regarded as essentially incredible on the one hand, nor as an interruption of the laws of Nature on the other, without—so I venture to conclude—a manifest disregard of the soundest principles of thought.

‘Such a being as the Man of Nazareth! But what sort of a being was he?’ is a question that will be asked. I admit, the exclamation of his disciples may well be repeated, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” There are a great many kinds of men. There is an immense variety of human spirits. As one star differs from another star in glory, so does man differ from man. What different and amazing powers have been exhibited in different individuals! What an unconscious intuition into the mysteries of numbers in one, and into the workings of the human heart in another! But Jesus Christ was such a man as has never existed before nor since. I grant this freely, fully. I can form no idea of an angelic existence, that transcends my conception of the moral elevation of his nature. I concede, also, with equal readiness, that there was nothing in the circumstances of the times at all adequate to the production of such a being. Then, it will be said, here was a miracle. It is a miracle—a mighty miracle; and I use this term not merely in the sense of a wonder, but as expressing a fact referable to no law, depending upon no condition, save the pure Free-Will, the immediate Volition of the Everlasting Father. However common it may be to think

otherwise, however plausible the appearances to the contrary, I do not believe that mind (understanding thereby moral and intellectual power,) is ever altogether the result of education, or the offspring of circumstances. These may modify its manifestations, but still, even in its humblest degrees, it must be accounted as a free gift, a direct inspiration of God. I believe that there is a spirit in man which is not manufactured by mechanism, but begotten of the Father of spirits. And I know not the laws or the conditions which limit the manifestation of this spirit in the flesh, or the intercourse it may hold with God. In plain terms, I know not how exalted a spirit the Almighty may send into the world in the person of a man, nor what degrees of spiritual light and power He may directly communicate to such a being when once ushered into existence. I dare not limit the power of God in these respects. Certain it is, that the diversity of minds—of spiritual natures—is endless. And every man, who solemnly consults his own experience, will confess that he has at times had thoughts and impressions—a clearness of vision, or a force of will, which seemed not to be his own, and which he could regard only as the immediate gift, the direct influence and inspiration of the Spirit of God. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”—every spiritual nature, every spiritual thought. I say, therefore, that I cannot see the suspension of any law—the reversal of any mode of the Divine Agency,

in the appearance in the world of such a being as the author of Christianity; one, who, by the native force of his own God-created spirit, or, if you please, by immediate communications of spiritual force, was able, by new demonstrations of power, to disclose the essential, natural sovereignty of mind over matter, of the spiritual over the physical. Rather does the whole course of things—the fact that the Almighty, in his free and unutterable goodness, hath, from time to time, raised up patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, glorious for the wisdom and power with which they were charged,—dispose us to believe in so grand a model of humanity as is presented in Jesus of Nazareth. But when such a being has appeared, as we know not the limits of the nature which God has given him, we misapprehend him very seriously, I conceive, when we represent the effects he produced as wrought by another, extraneous, interposing exercise of power reversing its own methods, instead of regarding them as illustrating the vital force of his own spirit, and of all spirits. Do I derogate from God in so conceiving of him? Oh, no! How is the Creator revealed in so Divine a Man, the Father glorified in so Godlike a Son!*

* It will be said, that if Jesus was so rarely endowed, he can be no example to us. To this I reply by quoting that noble passage in Dr. Channing's Seventh Discourse, which no one who has read it will forget, and the whole of which, did my limits permit, I would gladly transcribe. "You tell me, my hearers, that Jesus Christ is so high, that he cannot be your model. I grant the exaltation of his character. I believe him to be more than a human being. In truth, all Christians so believe him. Those who suppose him not to have existed before his birth, do not regard him as a mere man, though so reproached. They always separate him by broad distinctions from other men. They consider him as enjoying a communion with God,

If what has now been urged be sound, then the first step with regard to the remarkable facts recorded and as having received gifts, endowments, aids, lights, from Him; granted to no other, and as having exhibited a spotless purity, which is the highest distinction of Heaven. All admit, and joyfully admit, that Jesus Christ, by his greatness and goodness, throws all other human attainments into obscurity. But on this account he is not less a standard, nor is he to discourage us, but, on the contrary, to breathe into us a more exhilarating hope; for though so far above us, he is still one of us, and is only an illustration of the capacities which we all possess. This is a great truth. Let me strive to unfold it. Perhaps I cannot better express my views, than by saying that I regard all minds as of one family. When we speak of higher orders of beings, of angels and archangels, we are apt to conceive of distinct kinds or races of beings, separated from us and each other by impassable barriers. But it is not so. All minds are of one family. There is no such partition in the spiritual world as you see in the material. In material nature you see wholly distinct classes of beings. A mineral is not a vegetable, and makes no approach to it; these two great kingdoms of nature are divided by immeasurable spaces. So, when we look at different races of animals, though all partake of that mysterious property life, yet, what an immense and impassable distance is there between the insect and the lion. They have no bond of union, no possibility of communication. During the lapse of ages, the animalcules which sport in the sun-beams a summer's day, and then perish, have made no approximation to the king of the forests. But in the intellectual world there are no such barriers. All minds are essentially of one origin, one nature, kindled from one divine flame, and are all tending to one centre, one happiness. This great truth, to us the greatest of truths, which lies at the foundation of all religion and of all hope, seems to me not only sustained by proofs which satisfy the reason, but to be one of the deep instincts of our nature. * * * But, passing over this instinct, which is felt more and more to be unerring, as the intellect is improved; this great truth seems to me demonstrable from this consideration, that Truth, the object and nutriment of mind, is one and immutable, so that the whole family of intelligent beings must have the same views, the same motives, and the same general ends. For example, a truth of mathematics is not a truth only in this world, a truth to our minds, but a truth everywhere,

in the New Testament histories is, to determine whether they actually took place. Were the sick healed, the blind blest with sight, and the dead raised, at the word or touch of Jesus Christ? As these things are new and unprecedented, peculiar evidence may reasonably be required. We are not to admit them lightly and without proof. But when once fairly established, then the inference is, not that they interrupt, but that they reveal and glorify with new splendour the great harmony of things. They take a place among the various and unnumbered manifestations of the controlling forces or laws of the universe. **THEY ARE NEW FACTS**, of pre-eminent importance, far in advance of all other facts, but not in opposition to them. And they point immediately and with great significance, into the mysterious depths of the nature of him by whom they were wrought, and to the moral power resident there. Occurring, as they did, through the agency of an individual of unequalled moral elevation,

a truth in heaven, a truth to God, who has indeed framed his creation according to the laws of this universal science. So happiness and misery, which lie at the foundation of morals, must be to all intelligent beings what they are to us, the objects, one of desire and hope, and the other of aversion; and who can doubt that virtue and vice are the same everywhere as on earth, that, in every community of beings, the mind which devotes itself to the general weal, must be more revered than a mind which would subordinate the general interest to its own? Thus all souls are one in nature, approach one another, and have grounds and bonds of communion with one another. I am not only one of the human race; I am one of the great intellectual family of God. There is no spirit so exalted, with which I have not common thoughts and feelings."

But I must refrain. See the whole passage, Discourses by W. E. Channing, p. 202—209.

this, I believe it will be found, is the grand Truth which they pre-eminently illustrate, viz., the native, essential, absolute supremacy of mind. They teach us that the mightiest force in nature—the energy to which all things are, by the constitution of nature, subordinate,—is spiritual force; that this power resides to an unknown extent in the bosom of man, and under certain conditions will assert its supremacy. Is there not something in our hearts which has already whispered to us of this stirring truth?

The miracles of Christ, being regarded as new facts in the history of man, enlarge and regenerate that sublime idea which we express under the name of God, and give us a new, more intimate and kindling conception of the mode of the Divine Agency. There is much else upon which they throw light. If I do not greatly err, they have a bearing upon all philosophy and science. As facts simply, as parts of the immense sum of things, possessing innumerable bearings and relations, they must have a significance not to be fathomed at a glance. It is not for us to presume to enumerate all the ends and issues of any fact, any event in nature, however humble, much less of events of such magnitude as the facts of the life of Jesus. I have mentioned only one of the great truths which they establish—the light which they throw upon the Divine Nature. This is a great, a most needed light. What is it that, in all ages, man has so mournfully lacked, as a living persuasion of the reality and efficiency of moral force? what is it that has ever so obstructed the progress of reform, the great work of human regeneration, as a want of faith? I use not this term in

a theological sense, but as equivalent to a belief in the existence of moral power, and in the presence of this power in our own being, even in the loftiest sentiments and impulses of the human mind. We profess to believe in a God. But the God whom most men acknowledge is a distant, far off, shadowy being, a mere apparition at best. He only has a living faith in a God, who is conscious of a sacredness and an omnipotence in his own moral convictions; who believes that "GOD WORKS WITHIN HIM TO WILL AND TO DO." Now this consciousness is addressed and strengthened by nothing more effectually than by the miracles of Jesus, considered as the effects and illustrations of the moral force dwelling in him.

The view now suggested of the wonderful works of Christ receives great corroboration from the language of Jesus himself. How invariably did he refer them to the power of faith! How often, and in what strong terms, did he speak of this power, assuring his personal followers, those simple-minded men, that by means of it they also might do the works that he did, and even greater! How emphatic was his declaration to the individual who brought his sick child to him for relief. "If," said the distressed parent, "if thou canst do anything for us, help us." "What dost thou mean," replied Jesus, for so the original admits of being understood, "by asking if I can? Do thou believe. All things are possible to him who believeth." But it is unnecessary to adduce passages. No one can have read the New Testament without observing the mysterious influence ascribed to faith; faith as it existed in an unparalleled degree in Jesus, as it was

created in the minds of many around him, partly by the pressure of heavy personal suffering, and as it may be cherished in a greater or less degree, by all. Surely, as it has been observed, there is a meaning in these declarations, which points to a great principle, and is not exhausted by their original application.*

Is it said that Jesus referred his miracles to the direct agency of the Father? Undoubtedly he did so. And the way of viewing his wonderful works upon which I insist, is not inconsistent, nay it is identical with such a reference. The power of faith is the power and spirit of God. To God Jesus directly referred all power. And it is interesting to observe that, even when he states a principle of natural justice, a fact existing in the natural providence of God, his phraseology, taken to the letter, implies the immediate agency of Heaven. "Unto him who hath shall be given, and from him who hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Here we have the statement of a fact or principle existing in the nature of things. He who improves acquires more power; he who does not improve, loses the power he originally possessed. Here is the same truth stated in different words. But in the form in which it is presented by Jesus, the idea is given that power is directly communicated or as directly withdrawn by the immediate will or judgment of God.†

* See an article upon Swedenborg in the *Christian Examiner* (No. 59) for some striking remarks coincident with our views.

† See John vi. 44. "No man can come to me except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." This language certainly expresses the immediate agency of God, and yet it states a natural truth. No one

The manner in which the greater portion of the extraordinary works of Jesus are represented to have been wrought, is very remarkable. The modes in which he exerted his astonishing power may well arrest our attention upon any view of the case. But if I do not greatly err, there is much here that goes to confirm the present theory; much which intimates strongly, that the power of Jesus, new and astonishing as it was, was still a power analogous to all the other powers of nature, in that it appears to have been exerted under conditions. It has much of the appearance and character of a Law. It is not by any means necessary to the correctness of the views now offered, that we should be able to trace in every, or even in any, case the action of that moral force to which I believe the miracles of Christ are to be referred. It is enough if the presence of such a force is only established, and no limits can be assigned to it. Who shall set bounds to that agency of mind so manifestly concerned in their production?

But in the case of many of the miracles, a mental or moral influence is remarkably traceable. We have all heard of numerous and well attested cases, in which the body has been instantaneously relieved from some great infirmity by a strong mental impression. A sudden emotion of Fear, for instance, has frequently been followed by such a result. Shall we allow to so low a principle as this such extraordinary power, and be

can understand Christ unless he is actuated by those motives, that spirit of truth, by which God leads men to truth and goodness. See also Matthew xvi. 17. In this passage are we to understand Jesus as saying that Peter had had a special, *miraculous* revelation?

reluctant to grant, that higher, nobler, stronger mental convictions may have an influence as great, or even more vital? I have already in another connexion, and for a different purpose, referred to the instance of the woman who came behind Jesus and touched his garments, and was immediately cured of a disease under which she had laboured for years. In this case, as he expressly assured her, it was her own faith to which the cure was to be attributed. We can but faintly conceive how her mind was disposed by long physical suffering to be powerfully affected by the excitement his wonderful career had produced—by the reports of his astonishing power. On one occasion, as we read, there was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand who was instantly cured by Jesus. This incident illustrates other things besides the manner in which he exerted his extraordinary power, and I shall recur to it again for another purpose. For the present, is it not deserving of remark, that Jesus did not apply himself directly to the diseased limb, but to the *mind* of the man. He addressed himself to the individual. He spoke to *him*. “Stretch forth thine hand” was his command, and the sufferer stretched it out and it was made whole as the other. In the production of this effect there is ample room for the supposition of a powerful mental or moral influence. The individual cured could not have been a stranger to the extraordinary character and reputation of Jesus. He could hardly have been unconscious of that reverence which this remarkable personage had inspired. And even if he were, I can easily imagine that his mind must have

been powerfully impressed by the awful authority of the eye, the voice, the whole bearing of Jesus, and that, thus acted upon, his mind put forth a sudden and unexpected force, and sent life and vigour through the diseased hand. The authority of the mind over a healthy limb, saving that we are familiar with it, is not less miraculous and inscrutable than its influence in this instance over a withered member. Could the scales of familiarity fall from our eyes, could our minds only be emancipated from the thralldom of custom,

“ Heavy as frost and deep almost as life,”

the views now suggested might hope to find favour.

Even the case of the Centurion's son or servant, who was cured of palsy by Jesus while he was at a distance from him, which may seem to contradict our theory, admits, without any violence done to probabilities, of the supposition of a strong mental influence. The Centurion was a man of uncommon sensibility and faith. He was beloved by the Jews. His confidence in the power of Jesus astonished our Saviour himself, and drew from him that memorable declaration, “ Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. Many shall come from the east and the west and the north and the south, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven, while the children of the kingdom shall be thrust out;” a declaration which shows most impressively how comprehensive were his aims, and how instinctively his regards extended beyond the narrow limits of his own nation.

There must have been some congeniality of character between the Centurion and his favourite servant. The persons, who had gone to request the benevolent offices of Jesus, returned probably with the exciting intelligence that he was approaching. Who can doubt that this must have had a powerful effect upon the sufferer, connected, as it no doubt was, with the strong expressions of the Centurion's faith? Even if these suppositions may not be made, there remains the declaration of Jesus, "*According to thy faith be it done unto thee.*"

Again. The accounts of the cure of the demoniac of Gadara present some remarkable particulars pointing the same way. This case has occasioned much cavil, and it is not to be denied that it is pressed by difficulties. I have no explanation to propose which I can hope will prove satisfactory. But there are certain aspects under which it may be viewed, which wonderfully corroborate our doctrine. For instance, I do not know that it has ever been noticed, and yet it is a point well worthy of attention, that the evil spirits still held possession of the man, or rather he was still insane, even *after* Jesus had rebuked the demon and commanded him to come out of him. How is this circumstance to be reconciled with the idea that the miraculous power of Jesus was a power which had no regard in its exercise to conditions? Jesus commanded but he was not obeyed! The man was still crazy, he still spoke as if there were a legion of evil spirits in him, although his ferocity had vanished. In accordance with the foregoing representations, I adopt the following view of this case. I

suppose that the insanity of this man had been produced, or at least very much aggravated, by a fearful mental impression—the idea that he was possessed by evil spirits. In all ages popular superstitions and errors have had a large share in producing or confirming mental derangement. The belief of those days in the influence of malignant spirits must have had fearful effects upon excitable temperaments. The very circumstance that the Gadarene believed there was a *Legion* of demons in him, shows how strong was his conviction that he was possessed. Here then was the seat of his malady, in this fatal impression. And it had become so inveterate that it could be corrected only in a certain way and by means adapted to the nature of the case. Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, or in other words exerted his authority over the madman, and he became comparatively calm. And no doubt he would have remained so, as long as Jesus was present, but after his departure the man's derangement would in all probability have returned in all its violence. Jesus, perceiving that he was still possessed, or insane, asked his name, with a view no doubt to ascertain the state of the case. And here it does not appear to have been sufficiently considered, that the proposal to send the evil spirits into the swine did not come from Jesus but from the maniac. It was the suggestion of insanity, and it appears to me to be characterized by the cunning of insanity. While the unhappy man took care to speak in the character of the evil spirits by whom he believed himself possessed, it would seem as if he were actuated by a secret desire to have

decisive evidence, ocular proof that they had really forsaken him, and so he proposed that they should be sent into the swine. It was an insane proposal, but the result was exactly fitted to act upon and satisfy a diseased mind, to restore it to soundness and relieve it of the fatal impression under which it laboured. The fate of the swine was calculated to convince the man that the malignant influence was no longer exerted upon him. How the swine were affected I cannot tell. I see no difficulty in supposing that they were visited with sudden mania at the will of Jesus. Nor does this supposition militate against his benevolence. If, as it appears, such a demonstration of power were necessary to relieve the mind of the madman of a fatal delusion, surely the value of the swine was not to be weighed against the welfare of a human being labouring under a terrible disease, and the comfort of the whole vicinity endangered by the ferocity of the maniac. No man could pass that way because he was so violent and savage.

I am not attempting a complete solution of this case. I would only observe that, so far as I am capable of seeing into it, it appears to warrant, in a remarkable manner, the views of the miraculous power of Jesus, which I offer. Here, so far at least as the madman was concerned, this extraordinary power appears to have been exerted, not in violation of, but in accordance with, the laws of the human mind.

In the accounts of the miracles of Jesus we find that he continually employed means of one kind or another, means confessedly inadequate of themselves to produce the designed effects, but still means.

When the leper came to him, he did not merely say, "I will, be thou clean," but he extended his hand and touched the leper. In the case of the man born blind, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the eyes of the blind man. And in another case, when an individual was brought to him deaf, and with an impediment in his speech, he pursued a similar method, touching the tongue of the man. I am aware that it is said he did these things, in order to indicate decisively to those around him that the cures, the wonderful effects wrought, were produced by himself; that in the cure of the man born blind, which took place on the Sabbath, Jesus intended to discredit the childish tradition of the Pharisees, that forbade the use of any medicaments on that day, even so much as anointing the eyes with saliva. That these may have been his reasons for the methods he employed, I will not deny, and yet they do not wholly satisfy me. The naturalness and singleness of his character have been so mournfully obscured by his being so often represented as speaking and acting *for effect*, that I distrust every interpretation of his words or works, which goes not beyond this. Believing in the doctrine of his double nature and his absolute omniscience, men have lost all sense of the simplicity and sincerity of his character, and he has been regarded as speaking and acting, not from any vital healthy impulse of his own nature, but merely with a view to others. When, for instance, he marvels at the faith of the Centurion, it is not, if we adopt the common belief, to be imagined that he was really astonished, or that he was not previously per-

fectly acquainted with the character of the Centurion ; but that he affected to be surprised, in order to impress others with this uncommon instance of faith. In this way, let me repeat, the idea of Jesus has been divested of all naturalness, and it is no wonder that he does not move our deepest sympathies, and kindle our loftiest enthusiasm. My mind may be tending to an opposite extreme. Still I beg leave to say, that while I recognize in Jesus a constant regard to the circumstances and wants and feelings of those around him, I look always in every, even the slightest particular of his conduct, for some higher motive than a mere view to effect. When he was astonished at the confidence of the Centurion, he undoubtedly aimed to make an impression on the minds of others ; still, I believe, he expressed the sincere, strong, irrepressible emotion of his own soul—that he was unaffectedly astonished. And so, in respect to his miracles, when he touches the leper, accompanying the action with the words, “ I will—be thou clean,” I do not deny that he may have intended to show that the cure proceeded from him, and also, that he did not shrink from contact with that terrible disease. But then I must believe that he touched the leper *in order to his cure* ; that the contact, connected with the few words he uttered, was actually the means by which he inspired the mind of the sufferer with the faith essential to his cure, by which he excited in him that mysterious mental power which instantly communicated health to the body. We may wonder how an act so simple should have such an effect. But the efficacy of means is in all cases equally inscrutable.

We can have but a dim idea of the predisposition to believe in Jesus, produced in the leper by all that he had suffered, nor is it probable that we have been conscious of a state of mind, or of a degree of faith like that which he evinced, when he said, "Lord, if thou wilt," &c. In his state of mind, the word and the touch of one like Jesus, thrilling him to his inmost soul, were omnipotent. In the instance of the deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, he used saliva, and we are told that he took the man apart from the crowd, which would seem to show that he had no direct reference to the spectators, in the means which he used. Here again I believe, that the simple method he adopted was employed to express or communicate his own faith, the power and authority of his own spirit, to the spirit of the individual whom he relieved, and so to act upon his physical infirmity. That he should use such means, and that they should be effectual, will occasion but little difficulty, if we only bear it fully in mind, how miraculous it is that spiritual power, in the ordinary intercourse of life, ceaselessly passes from mind to mind through the utterance of a few articulate sounds. The influence of speech in imparting and awakening mental force, were it observed for the first time, would seem as inadequate, as amazing, as inexplicable, save upon the supposition of supernatural power, as the effect of the methods employed by Jesus to give health to the sick, hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind.

Agreeably to these representations, I believe that when Jesus stood before the open tomb of his friend, and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth,"

he did not utter this cry merely to indicate to the bystanders the connexion between the cause and the effect, but because he expected, he believed, he knew that Lazarus would hear him and awake, and that the body, re-animated by the awakened mind, would come forth. But Lazarus was dead! Yes, he was indeed dead. But then, most earnestly do I beg the reader to pause and ask himself, what is death? Do we know enough of this event to be able to say that a voice, inspired by such a spirit as that of Jesus of Nazareth, cannot, in the very nature of things, penetrate the ears of the dead, and awaken them from their mysterious slumbers? Remember, there was a spirit present here, a spirit of unknown powers, of unprecedented greatness. Just before Jesus summoned Lazarus from the tomb, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always; nevertheless, because of these here present I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." For what did he thank the Father? Not for a special communication of miraculous power at that moment, because the history of his life gives us to understand that this extraordinary power, whatever it was, was exerted by him at will. It was, I conceive, not for the power of working the miracle, but for such an opportunity as was then afforded him. Lazarus had been his friend, bound to him by those ties of faith and love, which no physical change can break. And we know not what influence this circumstance may have had in facilitating the exertion of his extraordinary power, except, that on all occasions faith was represented as an indispensable condition of its exercise.

But, as I have already said, it is not necessary to the establishment of our theory, that we should be able, in a given instance, to trace the influence of that spiritual force by which I believe these extraordinary effects to have been produced. These views cannot be dismissed as altogether extravagant and groundless, so long as it is admitted that there was concerned in the production of the miracles of the New Testament a power of unknown extent, a power intimately related to matter, and continually acting upon matter in unnumbered and inscrutable ways.

It will be objected to the mode of regarding the Christian miracles which I have now sought to unfold, that if it be correct, we should have had more numerous manifestations of the wonder-working power of the spiritual law. I observe, in reply, that as we cannot without presumption suppose that all the laws of nature have been made known to us, so there must be some of its laws, which have been only rarely, and at the remotest intervals, demonstrated. The wonder is, that a law, so grand and all enlightening, should have been revealed at all. And although, in the person of Jesus Christ, we have the only beautiful and consistent revelation of its agency, yet in all ages there have prevailed impressions and rumours which, rightly interpreted, obscurely intimate a transcendent power in the soul of man, in his inmost nature, a spirit of undefined authority. In the days of Jesus, there were those who regularly followed the profession of exorcists, undertaking to drive out the evil spirits by which the insane were believed to be *possessed*, by certain forms, medicaments, and incanta-

tions. Is it to be supposed that they were never successful, and if they were occasionally successful, is there any mode of explaining their success more rational, than by supposing that they gained an extraordinary influence over the minds of their patients, securing their confidence, and so operating upon the physical frame through the spiritual? How shall we solve the existence of empiricism, flourishing, in one form or another, in all ages of the world, but by reference to the mysterious power of mind over matter, of the thought over the body? Without the lucid demonstrations of this power in the introduction of Christianity, we have much in the history of the world that indicates its existence, although its nature, limits, and conditions have been wrapt in the greatest obscurity.

In denying that the order of nature has been violated, I may be charged with helping to perpetuate that narrowing influence which the observation of this order has sometimes exerted, and which Dr. Channing has so well described in the discourse already quoted. On the contrary, I maintain, it is the common idea of the Christian miracles, as interruptions or violations of the natural order of things, that contributes to this unhappy effect. It virtually concedes that a divine spiritual agency is in nature indirect. It allows nature to be conceived of as a sort of labour-saving contrivance, a machine without any intrinsic worth or beauty, going by itself, with only an indirect dependence upon a higher power. It promotes in men's minds the idea of a separation between the common works and ways of the creation and the Creator himself, and so induces them to contemplate the

former, without any necessary reference to the latter. Whereas, establish the miracles as demonstrations of a supreme spiritual force, existing in the nature of things, and acting in a manner kindred to, and in harmony with, all the other agencies that we witness; and then the power of physical causes over the mind is broken. God, who was afar off, is brought near and enthroned in Nature.

Finally, the theory now suggested of the miracles of Jesus Christ gives them a new and indescribable worth, rendering them as important, interesting, and enlightening as they are extraordinary. They become worthy the attention of the profoundest philosophy. It indicates a serious defect in the prevalent theory on this subject, that those who maintain it attach little value to these remarkable facts. At the best they are represented as mere evidences, valuable at the time they took place, but of little worth now; constituting, it would seem, a sort of argumentum ad hominem! But surely, if they are facts, if they are admitted to have occurred, they are a part of the great whole, and, like every thing else in the creation of God, they must have an untold variety of uses and ends; and it is the grossest arrogance in man to limit their value. As if any facts, much more such as these of the life of Christ, were ever to be exhausted of all meaning and power! It seems to me a very narrow and unworthy way of thinking, to represent God as doing anything merely to *prove* somewhat to the human understanding. It is beautiful, nay sublime, in an ancient poem like the book of Job, to describe the Deity as entering into an *argument* with man. But does it comport with an

elevated conception of a supreme and perfect Being, a being whose goodness is the fountain of his wisdom, the creator of the soul with its infinite aspirations, as well as the author of the understanding, to regard Him as an Almighty Disputant, aiming principally to convince the reason of his creatures? Undoubtedly every thing he has created or brought to pass does *prove* much to the mind. But I cannot believe that this is in any case the only or the chief design of the Infinite One. The understanding is not man's highest faculty, and it cannot be God's highest aim. The miracles of Jesus are great evidences. He himself referred to them as such. And yet we have good reason to believe that it was not only, or chiefly, for what they would *prove* that he wrought them. He would not condescend to work miracles to convince those who, by their hostile dispositions towards him, showed that they cherished no love of truth in their hearts. "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief," a remarkable declaration. Again and again he intimated, more or less explicitly, that nothing he did or said would have any effect upon men, save as they already possessed some feeling of the loveliness of truth. It would seem therefore that he appealed by his words and works not principally to the reasoning faculty, but to a loftier sentiment of the heart. Although the purest rationality (if I may so speak) characterized all that he uttered, yet he would not descend to debate and reason about the truth where the heart was not already disposed towards him, powerful as were the arguments, satisfactory as were the attestations he could bring. The

spirit which actuated him in this respect was akin to the spirit of God, and it illustrates the godlike dignity of his character and his aim.

The great doctrine I have endeavoured to set forth cannot be appreciated without *faith*; by which I mean that exercise or state of mind—that mental eye—by which we discern in all things a spiritual, supernatural, supersensual agency. We cannot see the miracles of Jesus as natural facts, except as we are ascending that eminence of Faith, from which we look abroad and recognize the supernatural everywhere in the natural. The common idea of the miracles is based upon a mechanical philosophy—a philosophy of the senses. We conceive of the universe as a piece of mechanism, going in some sort of itself; so our ideas of the divine nature and agency are fashioned upon a false, human analogy, which blinds that spiritual sense within us, the principle of faith, and impedes our approach unto God. We say indeed that all power was originally from God, but we conceive of him as having delegated certain measures of power to what we call the general laws, the order of nature, so that now, as things are, He stands in the same relation to his creation that a man does to the machine he has invented, and if any departure from our experience occurs, we set it down as a peculiar interposition—a stretching forth of the arm which otherwise hangs comparatively idle and at rest! Our ideas of the Divinity are thus narrowed, and we flatter ourselves that we know him when we know him not. “If any man shall think,” says Bacon, “by view and inquiry into these sensible and material things to

attain to any light for the revealing of the nature or will of God; he shall dangerously abuse himself. It is true, that the contemplation of the creatures of God hath for end, as to the nature of the creatures themselves, knowledge; but as to the nature of God, no knowledge, but wonder: which is nothing else but contemplation broken off, or losing itself. Nay further, as it was aptly said by one of Plato's school, the sense of man resembles the sun, which openeth and revealeth the terrestrial globe, but obscureth and concealeth the celestial; so doth the sense discover natural things, but darken and shut up divine. And this appeareth sufficiently in that there is no proceeding in invention of knowledge but by similitude; and God is only self-like, having nothing in common with any creature, otherwise than as in shadow and trope. Therefore attend his will as himself openeth it, and give unto faith that which unto faith belongeth; for more worthy is it to believe, than to think or know, considering that in knowledge, as we are now capable of it, the mind suffereth from inferior natures; but in all belief it suffereth from a spirit, which it holdeth superior, and more authorized than itself." (*Of the Interpretation of Nature.*)

[NOTE.—That the miracle of "the walking on the water" (Matt. xiv. 25—32) actually took place is not to be doubted, because it is so closely and beautifully connected with an illustration of the character of Peter. It may seem however, at first sight, to militate against the views I have advanced in this chapter. But in fact it confirms them. As soon as they who were in the vessel recognized Jesus, Peter cried, "Lord! if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." And Jesus said "Come!" Now if his word broke the laws of nature, could Peter have sunk, however great his terror? But as soon as he

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST ILLUSTRATIONS OF HIS CHARACTER.

“The combination of the spirit of humanity, in its lowliest, tenderest form, with the consciousness of unrivalled and divine glories, is the most wonderful distinction of this wonderful character.”—CHANNING.

IN the foregoing chapter I have ventured to express, and endeavoured to support, the opinion, that the miracles of Jesus were not departures from the laws of nature, but new facts in nature, demonstrations of the sovereignty of mind over matter; that they were wrought by a mysterious force dwelling in his nature, and in various degrees in human nature, and that they vindicate the vitality and supremacy of moral power. I have affirmed that we cannot pronounce an event a violation of the natural order of things, without assuming that we know the whole order of nature, all its forces and laws. Neither, without the same groundless assumption, can we term the resurrection of a dead man to life a natural impossi-

began to be afraid—as soon as his faith wavered—he began to sink—“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” thus intimating very clearly that it was by the power of faith—by *force of mind*—this miracle was to be wrought. The walking upon the water was not an infraction of the laws of nature, but a demonstration of the natural sovereignty of mind—that spiritual power upon which the mighty law of gravitation is in the nature of things dependent, and to which it must of course be subordinate.]

bility. We do not know what death is; nor have the secret powers of the human spirit ever yet been ascertained. How do we know but that it is in and through the human soul that the Infinite Soul reveals its highest glory, and puts forth its most awful power? No man therefore can refuse to examine the Christian miracles as if they were utterly incredible. Nay, we cannot refuse to examine any event, however strange and extraordinary, unless we know beforehand all the conditions and limits of the forces concerned in bringing it about. The miracles of Jesus have a claim upon our attention as things capable of proof, which we cannot reject without violating also the claims of candour and good sense.

The subject of the present chapter is, *the miracles of Jesus considered in relation to his character*. Here, if I do not greatly err, we shall find the grand test of their truth. If there is an indubitable harmony between them and the spiritual features of Jesus, I confess that, for my own part, I ask for no evidence of their reality more convincing. If they are mere fictions, the offspring of cunning or weakness, I maintain that it is impossible they should not obscure and deform palpably his spiritual beauty.

The merest glance at the extraordinary works of Jesus awakens within us a new sentiment of disinterestedness. How continually is the world's history teaching us what a dangerous, fatal gift to its possessor is any peculiar endowment of fortune or genius, though it be of quite ordinary worth! How quickly does the consciousness of the slightest advantage blind the mind to its true relations to mankind, and induce the idea

that its own glory should be its chief end ! The rich and great and gifted, comparing themselves, as they cannot escape doing, with other men, and perceiving their own superiority in certain respects more or less striking, have almost unconsciously adopted the pleasing conclusion that they must be of more value than the rest of the world, and of course they have come to claim as a matter of right that they should be magnified and made much of. They have fancied that they were sent hither, "not to do a great kindness, but to receive a great kindness;" to be the world's idols ; and so, instead of being benefactors, they have proved selfish, exacting oppressors, grinding their brethren in the dust, or drenching the earth with blood. Only a very few, at remote intervals, have shown that they interpreted any peculiar advantage of condition or any uncommon power of mind, as a peculiar and peremptory summons to every species of toil and self-sacrifice. Seldom, very seldom indeed, have those possessed of a higher wisdom, of an uncommon force of character, gloried in the possession because it enabled them to disregard all that the world most values ; to do and endure with an unconquerable and evergrowing patience, for the sake of some unworldly aim ; esteeming as their highest honour, their unutterable distinction, the ability given them to love man and labour and agonize and die for him, not the less willingly, but the more so, because he resisted their fraternal offices, and rejected their affectionate counsels, and would have none of their services, struggling with them even unto blood ! This spirit, I repeat, the world has seldom witnessed. When it has descended and dwelt in

some few bosoms, it has never for the time been to any extent appreciated. It has been denounced as madness and fanaticism. Still it has been secretly felt that there is something in it which is not of earth—'aliquid immensum, infinitumque.' And when it has wrought out its beneficent effects, then the human heart has been true to itself, and done homage to the rare generosity of those, who have flung behind them every thought of their own happiness, and been consecrated to an unselfish end. In individuals of this class, it has begun to be felt that we have the brightest manifestation of real greatness.

What an idea of this nobleness dawns upon our minds when, bearing in mind that the miracles of Jesus were acts of beneficence, we strive to conceive, as we can at best but dimly, what must have been his feelings in the consciousness of this stupendous inborn authority! He knew that he was possessed of a mighty wisdom of which the world was not aware. In comparison with all other men, he could not be insensible to his own vast superiority. And he was not. God alone, he says, knew him—knew what he was about, and he adds the all-elevating thought that he alone, in any worthy sense of the word, knew the Father. Does his bosom heave with pride at the thought? The very next language which he is recorded to have uttered is, "Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He declares himself a king, born to the divinest end. But under what circumstances is this declaration made? He is standing arraigned before the Roman governor, his mind made up to suffer most

ignominiously. Deep as was his conviction of the lofty height at which he stood, it never led him to misconceive in any one respect his true relation to the world. That selfish thoughts never suggested themselves to his mind we cannot affirm, for the history expressly states otherwise.

“ Evil into the mind of God or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind :”

But no idea of self-aggrandizement ever caused him to swerve a hair. Not one trace of that contempt which besets those who are able in any respect to look down upon their fellow men, is found in him. He walked not apart. He did not separate himself from a world whose unworthiness he must have felt, as it was never felt before. On the contrary, in among life's coarsest realities he entered, and found there a sphere for his victorious love.

I would not represent it as his highest praise that he never used his extraordinary power for any purpose palpably private—selfish—personal. For he must have been above being blinded by any such object. And besides, had he consciously attempted to work a miracle for some selfish end, his power would have gone from him instantly. It consisted, if I conceive his case rightly, in the very singleness and disinterestedness of his impulse. Here lay that transcendent energy that was within him. To suppose him to have been actuated by a different purpose, is to suppose him to be deprived of the very power by which he wrought miracles. But the unspeakable wonder is,

that his very benevolence never misguided him ; that the suggestions of personal ambition, disguised under the air of the most generous feelings, never blinded his judgment, nor narrowed his beneficent will. We gather from these histories that he was by no means insensible to indications of success—to the effects of his ministry. When the seventy, whom he had sent forth to announce the approach of the expected kingdom, returned and related the striking results of the annunciation, he broke forth in the triumphant language—“ I beheld Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.” A vivid vision of the overthrow of moral evil blazed before his mind. Again, at the well in Samaria, he sat down weary, hungry, and athirst. But in a little while, after some conversation with a stranger, a female whom he accidentally met there, and upon her exhibiting some signs of being impressed by the interview, he forgets his bodily wants. His spirit is refreshed, and the bodily craving for food vanishes. He sees the influence of his religion spread out visibly before him. He intimates that those who were to come after him, would have nothing to do. In the natural exhilaration of his mind, all obstacles for a moment disappear. When in connexion with this sensibility, we consider how rarely he was favoured with any decisive tokens of success, we are struck with the fact that he was never hurried into any doubtful and hasty use of his extraordinary influence. It was a fearful power in the hands of one living in a world like this. Most dangerous and awfully trying must have been the consciousness of authority by which it was attended. In the sensation which its

first exercise must have excited, in the breathless crowds which it collected, in the flood of human feeling which it caused to gush forth around him, and concentrated upon him, to what a soul-searching trial was he exposed! The humble peasant beheld men as wax in his hands, to be moulded at his pleasure. Why was he never betrayed out of the meekest self-possession by the dazzling thought of the influence which he might obtain? Never was he deluded into thinking how much good he might do by taking advantage of the impression he had made to exalt himself and fortify his own personal influence. This is the delusion to which men of the strongest minds and the purest intentions have fallen victims. By honest and enthusiastic promises to themselves of the good to be accomplished thereby, they have been hurried into a questionable use of their peculiar gifts, into the employment of very doubtful means. But no cloud of this sort ever dimmed for an instant the clear mind of Jesus, or alloyed that patient all-enduring love, in subordination to which his extraordinary opportunities were used. Imposing as were the demonstrations of popular favour at his astonishing career, the singleness of his benevolent purpose was never distracted by the least inclination towards human applause, by the least desire to excite and gratify human wonder, under the plausible idea of doing a world of good. Conscious, as he must have been, of an extraordinary authority, while he used it for no selfish end, he waited patiently, without weariness or haste, upon the providence on which he relied, never counting the cost to himself, nor caring how much he might be

misunderstood and misrepresented. He seems, once for all, to have "dismissed every wish to stipulate for safety with his destiny." He, who miraculously fed thousands, not only endured hunger and thirst without a murmur, but sought to avoid and allay the excitement of those very thousands, when it was tending to his personal elevation. He, at whose word sickness and death vanished, fainted and expired in the most excruciating agony. Inwardly conscious of glory which was from eternity and of God, he submitted to be enveloped in a cloud of shame, which only grew darker and darker as he advanced, and gathered in blackness round his latest moments. The outcast, loathed leper, the wretched maniac, the poor, and blind, and lame who lay by the way-side; these it was, and such as these, in whose service and relief this wonderful being used his extraordinary gifts. How simple and all-unmixed must have been the benevolence which was never diverted from its true objects, never corrupted by the ever-present, powerful, and unprecedented inducements to self-display.

The whole moral idea of the character of Jesus must, I conceive, be impaired—its intense glory fades away, when we consider it disconnected from his extraordinary power. It loses the greatness and depth it possesses as the character of a being of unparalleled endowments, consecrating his great gifts to the service of poor, ignorant, unworthy men; not only consenting to relinquish all the worldly power and influence which he might so easily have secured, but doing it with the utmost meekness; never magnifying the surrender, always apparently accounting it

his greatest privilege, his highest glory, that he was able thus to do and endure at every personal sacrifice. For my own part, I hold cordially to the belief in his miraculous power, not, if I know myself, from any fondness for the marvellous, not because the miracles, as mere instances of physical power, have any peculiar charm for me, but because the conviction of the indwelling of this wonder-working power in Jesus, heightens my sense of moral greatness. It is indispensable to the vividness and completeness of a glorious spiritual idea. I love to view him as one who, in the unequalled gifts and graces of his own nature, possessed the means of achieving for himself a magnificent destiny. Under the plausible idea of elevating the world, he might have justified to himself the employment of any measures for the promotion of his own power. But he went quietly and sublimely on, unconsciously foregoing every personal claim, consenting to be not only the active friend, but the meek, faithful, all-enduring, unrequited servant of his fellow-men, spending in their behalf not only his great power, but himself—his own precious life. It is this that renders his character unspeakably perfect and kindling. It is by far the noblest demonstration, yet given to the world, of love superior to the most cunning blandishments of power.

There is another trait of the miracles of Jesus which is worthy the deepest attention. It appears to me that they illustrate not more impressively the purest love than the profoundest wisdom. Every reader of the New Testament must have been struck with the importance which Jesus attaches to faith as

an indispensable preliminary to the exercise of his extraordinary power. He demanded that those who applied to him for relief should first have entire confidence in him. "Believe—all things are possible to him who believeth." He would not exert his power, where his authority was not first recognized. In one place "he would not do many mighty works because of their unbelief." In some minds, this mode of proceeding has awakened the suspicion that he did not dare to put his claims to miraculous power to a close and scrutinizing test.* And surely according to the usual representation of his miracles, considering them principally as evidences wrought to attest his divine mission, it may with no little plausibility be asked whether the unbelief prevalent in any particular place were not the chief reason why he should put forth his power, and not why he should forbear to exercise it. To my mind this question has no force, because it is urged upon a false, or at least a very questionable ground. It goes upon the idea that the miracles of Jesus were the merest evidences, wrought for no higher end than to *prove* his authority; for no greater purpose than to convince the understandings of those who chanced to be the spectators. This is the most common view of them I know. But I doubt very much its correctness. It is true, (as I observed at the close of the last chapter,) Jesus referred to his works

* How seriously this difficulty has been felt, and with what success it has been met, may be gathered from a discourse entitled, "On Christ's requiring Faith in order to his miraculous Cures," by Foster, immortalized in Pope's well known panegyric. See "Discourses on all the principal Branches of Natural Religion and Social Virtue," by James Foster, D. D.

as evidences and attestations of his divine commission. And they may be considered under this aspect. But to deem this the only, or the most important light in which they may be viewed, I hold to be the dictate of a narrow, finite, and superficial philosophy ; and it is fatal, in my humble opinion, to their truth to regard them thus. I should seriously doubt their reality, if they were capable of being considered from no higher point of view. When you describe them only as evidences, you represent them as wrought, not for their own sakes, not for any intrinsic worth, but—for it amounts to this—merely *for effect*. And although it is no less a faculty than the human understanding, which was to be wrought upon, still I cannot feel that they are truly and worthily apprehended, when they are so described. I am conscious of a nobler power, a diviner element in my nature, than that which concerns itself with arguments, proofs, reasonings. I have a moral or spiritual, as well as an intellectual faculty ; a sense of the lovely, the beautiful, the perfect. And whatever admits not of an appeal to that, lacks the strongest test of truth. I look forth upon the works and ways of God, and I perceive that every existing thing has a relation, not only to my understanding, but also to this higher principle of my nature—in popular language, to my heart, my soul. The flower is not merely an argument addressed to my reason. It has a moral, spiritual significance for my deeper affections. Everything that comes from God admits of being viewed in a light, which reveals in it a spiritual worth and beauty. So then, if you maintain that certain facts have taken place in the providence,

and by the design of God, which were intended to operate merely or chiefly as evidences, arguments, having no more elevated purpose, then I feel and say that they lack analogy—they exhibit no correspondence with the other works and ways of God. They want the divine signature. I cannot perceive that anywhere—in any department of nature, the Almighty does anything, or brings anything to pass, merely to prove somewhat. He always has a purpose infinitely higher. He addresses something within me, deeper, holier than my reason.

Cherishing these views, my attention is powerfully arrested by the striking intimations given here and there, in the course of the Christian Records, of this fact: namely, that in working his miracles Jesus did not pay exclusive, nor chief regard to the understanding. He recognized something else and something higher in man than the reasoning faculty. He did not work merely to convince others of his authority, for he explicitly demanded that his authority should be first recognized. According to the common notions on this subject, if all around him had believed in him, he would have wrought no miracles, whereas I believe that in this case, he would have wrought more and greater miracles. Nay, had he been alone in the universe, with no other than that poor leper, and *he* had been a perfect saint in faith, I feel that Jesus would have done what he actually did. He would have stretched forth his hand to the sufferer and said, “I will. Be thou clean.” His miracles were performed for themselves intrinsically, because they were true, right, beautiful. They were not put forth merely

for the sake of the influence they might have upon the understandings of others, but, like the glorious creations of genius, they were the simple, natural, irrepressible manifestations of that mighty spiritual force which was the inmost, God-inspired life of Jesus. As I cannot believe that he ever spoke merely for effect, neither can I believe that he ever acted for effect, especially upon those occasions, when his inspiration was the deepest and the strongest. *In fact, it is not until we take this view of his miracles, that we are able to appreciate a tithe of their weight, viewed merely as arguments.*

The wonderful works of Jesus illustrate his personal dignity. As the purposes for which they were performed disclose to us his self-forgetting spirit, his perfect wisdom, so the manner in which they were wrought, exhibits a corresponding elevation. There is a direct and quiet simplicity in the way in which he is described as producing these astonishing effects, that may without extravagance be characterized as perfectly sublime. There is no parade, no flourish of preparation, no childish and fantastic expedient, to catch the vulgar eye and startle the vulgar mind, and awaken the suspicion of fraud in the more enlightened. The Mosaic account of the creation of light, "God said let there be light, and there was light," has always been regarded as one of the most striking instances of sublimity on record. The accounts of some of the extraordinary works of Jesus are scarcely less sublime in their simplicity. "Lord, if thou wilt," said the leper to him, "thou canst make me clean. And Jesus extended his hand and touched him, saying, I

will. Be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

On one occasion, as we read, there was in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, a man with a withered hand. There were also present certain of the Pharisees and priests, who were jealous of Jesus, and enraged at the boldness with which he taught. They were seeking an opportunity to destroy him. And on this occasion they watched to see whether he would perform a cure on the Sabbath and so expose himself to the charge of violating the day. He perceived their motives, and after bidding the man with a withered hand stand forth in the midst of the assembly, he turned to the individuals who were watching him and said, "Is it lawful to do well on the Sabbath day, or to do ill? to save life or to kill?" There is a point in this question not perhaps apparent at first sight. Those whom he addressed were actuated by the most malignant feelings. They were thirsting for his blood, and, unconscious that they themselves were violating the Sabbath most grossly, they were undertaking to watch and accuse him. He asks them in effect, 'Is it lawful to do good as I am about to do it, on the Sabbath day, or to do ill as you are now doing? to save life as I intend, or to kill as you are eager to do?' They were silent. "And when," continues the narrative, "he had looked round about on them with indignation, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he said to the man, Stretch forth thine hand; and he stretched it out and it was made whole like the other." Does not this passage give us a new and vivid impression of the searching power of the address of Jesus?

The account of the raising of Lazarus has the same effect. There is nothing puerile about it, nothing that jars with the elevated feeling which on other occasions his words and conduct have inspired. Can any one read this portion of his history without having created within him a new sentiment of sublimity? It is full of the inspiration of Nature. The notices it contains of the sisters Mary and Martha have already been remarked upon. If we are not, I had almost said, overwhelmed with the thrilling greatness of those words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die," it is because we contemplate him who uttered them, at that elevated point at which he is seen, when we look at him through the vast and magnificent results of his life, as the Head and Founder of a widely established religion. Consider what he was at the moment he spake thus loftily, before the mighty change he has wrought in the world was realized. Then he was an humble, unknown individual, without name or visible authority, and a greater contrast cannot be imagined, than that which existed between his condition and his language. Thus viewed, his words stand out in wonderful relief, and he was either uttering the divinest wisdom or the wildest fanaticism. Again, the mysterious melancholy of Jesus, his deep, repeated sighs and tears, all give an indescribable interest to the scene presented at the grave of Lazarus; and make us feel the astonishing originality of his character, to say no more. The mental depression he evinced on this occasion shows

that the idea of the mighty work he was about to do, did not produce in his bosom the slightest throb of vain glory. Through those heavenly tears there beamed not the faintest look of a weak self-complacency.

In the performance of his extraordinary works, Jesus evinced no anxiety about his personal glory. His language continually is, "*Thy faith* hath cured thee," "*According to thy faith*, be it done unto thee." While he was far from disowning his own agency in the production of these astonishing effects, he still pointed into the souls of those whom he relieved. Thither he traced the wonder-working force. In thinking more of their faith than his own power, what power of self-forgetfulness did he evince! He took no particular care to make his personal agency prominent. When the centurion's servant was cured of palsy, he did not even go to the house. When he gave sight to the man born blind, he sent him to wash at the fountain of Siloam, and it would seem as if he thus sent him away, in order to make for himself an opportunity of retiring, and to leave the miracle to speak for itself. He relieved the suffering and the afflicted freely, but he did not insist upon publicity. Once and again he bade those, whom he had cured, to go home. He did not allow them to accompany him, to sound his praises and bear witness to his power. He forbade them to speak of him as the Christ. The reason is obvious, and it is worthy of him. He did not wish to increase but to allay the excitement his wonderful acts produced. The belief that he was the Messiah, getting abroad before he had made the pacific un-

worldly character of his office partially known, at least to some few minds, was calculated seriously to obstruct the great work in which he was engaged. The people would have broken all bounds, and either have destroyed him at once, or compelled him to assume the regal style, identified in their hearts with the idea of the Christ. What can be more simple and dignified, than the manner in which he is represented as producing the astonishing effects ascribed to him ?

There are two passages recording miracles of Jesus, which deserve particular attention. They both occur in the narrative of Mark. Once, as we read, when Jesus raised to life a young female, he approached the bed where she lay, and said, "*Talitha-cumi,*" that is to say, "Young maid, I say unto thee arise." Again, when a man was brought to him deaf, and having an impediment in his speech, after making clay of his saliva, and touching the tongue of the man,* he sighed, and, looking up to Heaven, said "*Ephphatha,*" that is to say, "Be opened." Now, here is a peculiarity in the narrative which requires explanation. Why, we cannot help asking, why did the narrator—no matter who he was—why did he introduce here the original—the precise words of Jesus? They are not singular words. They are among the simplest, and admit without the least difficulty of being translated. Nay, they *are* translated in the very next breath. How shall we account for this curious feature in the narrative? What is the cause of it? It admits of an explanation which is to my mind wonderfully natural. Imagine the utterance of these sim-

* With what view he employed this means, see ch. viii.

ple words to have been instantly followed by the effects which they are said to have produced, namely, the restoration of the girl to life in the one case, and the recovery of the powers of hearing and speech in the deaf and dumb man in the other, and we perceive what stupendous power must have instantaneously passed in the minds of those present into those brief articulate sounds that issued from the lips of Jesus, and the utterance of which naturally enough seemed to be the cause of the astonishing effects produced. What peculiar, supernatural, and untranslatable significance must these words have instantly been thought to possess, which wrought, or appeared to work, so mightily! In the minds of the bystanders, those few sounds were instantly divorced, as by a stroke of lightning, from all familiar associations. Their ordinary import was lost in the new, instant, and unheard of power which their utterance revealed. They no longer had any satisfactory correspondence with the articulations of any other language. No other forms of speech were felt to convey the same miraculous meaning—to possess the like force. I know not whether I make myself understood, but I recognize here, in this peculiarity of the narrative, an irresistible argument for the reality of the wonderful facts here recorded. That feature of these relations upon which I remark, discloses to me in a manner the most natural, incidental, and unconscious, a state of mind which could have been produced by nothing but the actual sight of a sudden miracle.

As I intimated in the commencement of this chapter, it is in the perfect correspondence of the miracles

of Jesus, both in spirit and in form or manner, with the simplicity, originality, and dignity of his character, that I discern an overwhelming evidence of their reality. If they did not take place as they are represented, then it must be supposed either that the accounts of the miracles were fabricated, and inserted into the narrations at an after-period by some other than the original writers of these histories, or else, that the original writers themselves, carried away by a love of the marvellous, or from ignorance or weakness of some kind, were led to misapprehend ordinary events, and without meaning to deceive, to describe as miraculous what was not miraculous.

That we have these histories substantially as they were originally written ; that no considerable additions or alterations have been made in them, is a point, I conceive, on which we may be abundantly satisfied. That these books have to any extent suffered from interpolation, is an opinion which has sometimes been suggested, but never, amidst all the disputes and controversies that have prevailed, seriously maintained. There are only a very few passages indeed, in which the original text is supposed to be corrupted, and those are passages relating chiefly, not to facts, but to speculative points. From the earliest ages of the Christian era, fierce controversies have raged. There has been an incessant, and oftentimes a bloody war of opinions, and every sect has laid claim to the peculiar authority of the Scriptures. If, therefore, they have been garbled and interpolated for any purpose, it must have been for the sake of opinions ; to favour one or another of the different tenets that have been at va-

rious periods advanced. But we may be confident that no interpolations of this kind have been made, because in examining these books, we find that they furnish no support—make no allusions to the doctrines that have been so zealously upheld. I find in them no trinitarian arguments, nor anti-trinitarian. They know nothing of any such questions. Only by implication, not by design, do they take part in our theological disputes. Here, by the way, what a decisive proof have we that the Gospels must have been written previously to the appearance of the doctrines referred to. Had they been the work of any period subsequent to that in which they purport to have been written, they would have borne numerous and unquestionable traces of the dogmas which, in one form or another, have ever since prevailed.

Besides, however anxious the different sects of Christians may have been to secure the authority of Scripture each for itself, there was but little temptation to corrupt and garble the text, when the arbitrary and fanciful methods of explaining these books, so early adopted, allowed almost any doctrine to be proved from almost any passage. The allegorical mode of interpretation, so much favoured and practised by the early Christian writers, fruitful as it was in errors, still served one good purpose. It protected the sacred text from all tampering and interpolation. There was little inducement to forge or corrupt a passage, when by the exercise of a little ingenuity, a favourite opinion might be discovered on every page, in almost every syllable.*

* The reader who wishes to see to what extent the Fathers carried

As there are few interpolations worth speaking of, calculated to affect doctrines, we may be very confident that there are none in the case of the facts related. But to perceive how utterly groundless is the suspicion, that the accounts of the miracles may have been inserted into these narratives at a period subsequent to that in which these books were written, we have only to glance at the Apocryphal Gospels. There is one, for instance, entitled, '*the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus.*' It is full of stories, the most childish and ridiculous; stories which satisfy us, at once, of the impossibility of fabricating miracles that should not betray their falsehood by their palpable inconsistency with the character of Jesus.

But none, not even the authors of the New Testament histories themselves, could have forged miracles that should harmonize with the Spirit of Christ. In him we have a new manifestation of moral beauty. So much is admitted, even by those who deny any extraordinary agency in the introduction of Christianity. To connect mere fabrications with such a character, without producing the most striking discordancy, would be combining the grossest delusions with the loftiest truths. Can the brightest light and the deepest darkness be so united that the eye cannot instantly discern the widest difference? Now to my mind it is wonderful enough, that the miracles attributed to Jesus, do not directly and manifestly militate against his character. But this negative evidence of their reality,

the allegorical method of interpretation, may be gratified by consulting a review of the "Publications of Bishop Hopkins."—*Christian Examiner*, 3rd Series, No. vi.

powerful, and altogether singular as it is, is not all. It is but the shadow of the argument which they carry with them. They not only do not violate the original beauty of that life, but more strikingly than anything else related of Jesus, they reveal, exalt, and perfect the moral idea which we form of him. They give us a conception of moral character, of the spiritual power and glory with which humanity is capable of being clothed, that we could not form by any other means. Nay, they harmonize not only with his life, but with the profoundest philosophy of our being. I cannot desire nor imagine any evidence for their reality more complete and satisfactory.

Every one feels the force of the internal evidence for Christianity, expressed in its moral lineaments, in the wisdom and benignity of its precepts, the purity and thoroughness of its rules of life, and the virtues of its founder. If I do not mistake, here lies the main foundation of every intelligent man's faith. The internal moral evidence the most sceptical have felt. Now what I say is this, that in no part of the New Testament histories is this moral power, in my view, more conspicuous than in the accounts of the miracles of Jesus. There is that in them, which goes to my heart as directly, creating faith there, as his eloquent recommendations of peace and love. In the exercise of his singular power, there is not only no display, nothing done for effect, no puerility, but a sublime majesty of action," a godlike singleness of purpose, perfect naturalness, in which the heart may behold, with awe and with tears, the crowning manifestation of Divinity. His authority over matter arrests my

attention, chiefly as it reveals his moral power, even in an entire freedom from pride and every selfish and the complete, yet calm devotion of his being, with all its unprecedented gifts, to the cause of truth and of God.



CHAPTER X.

JESUS AS A PROPHET.

“—Thou prophetic spirit that inspirest
The human soul of universal earth!”

WORDSWORTH.

My chief object in this chapter is, to show satisfactorily the great founder of Christianity as presented in the histories of his life, to have been possessed of an extraordinary knowledge of future events.

I wish first, however, to make some remarks on the nature of his Prophetical Gift.

Whether he pierced the veil of Futurity by some instantaneous inspiration of God, or by the natural intuition of his own wonderfully endowed being, I do not pretend to determine, I do not know. But the thing is very plain. I cannot shut my eyes to the analogy that presents itself between the prophetic power of Jesus and the very nature of all mind.

All things are in an infinite variety of ways woven with one another—great and little, high and low, past, present, and future. The knowledge of one thing involves an acquaintance with numerous other things. How far into the depths of the

hath the eye of science penetrated, simply by surveying the present appearance and condition of the earth! What mighty and remote revolutions hath the human mind predicted by observing the present positions of the heavenly bodies! Nay, is not our very nature as it exists in all men, in a feeble degree perhaps, but still in a certain sense, prophetic? What is this yearning that we have towards the future, or, to say no more, the bare idea of the future, what is it but the germ of prophecy in the human soul? It reveals at least the desire and capacity of foreknowledge—that faculty of our being, which, let us only advance as we may, and as we feel that we ought, will qualify us to receive whatever communications of foreknowledge may be made to us here or hereafter, and however they may be made. Beautifully, but not more beautifully than truly, has it been said,

“ Knowest thou *Yesterday*, its aim and reason?
Workest thou well *To-day* for worthy things?
Then fear not thou the morrow’s hidden season,
But calmly wait what hap soe’er it brings.”

But why fear not the future? Why calmly wait? Because to the mind that wisely listens to the past and faithfully uses the present, there must come the assured conviction that the future has in store for it no real evil. To know so much of futurity as this, though we should never know more, is it not prophetic knowledge? To know and feel that the everlasting future can do us no harm, surely this is to see with a prophet’s ken! But some minds have seen further and more clearly into the coming time than others.

Their knowledge of futurity was the result of no

process of reasoning—no weighing of probabilities. It was not the product of calculation. It was sight. And they saw not the visible world with the outward eye more distinctly than they foresaw what they foretold. Such were the ancient prophets. "Abraham," said Jesus, "*saw* my day and was glad." The eye of the body is but a dim type of the eye of the prophetic soul. But never in the flesh have we had such a manifestation of prophetic vision as in Jesus Christ. He has cast all other prophets into the shade. His prophetic ability came not by education nor by reasoning. It was a special gift of God. Still its whole manifestation in the life of Jesus is in perfect harmony with nature. It is new, unprecedented, but still analogous to all that we see and know of mind, of spirit. And thus it reveals upon itself the divine signature, and proves that it is the inspiration of the Father of spirits.

Wonderfully endowed as Jesus was, he could not but be a prophet. I pray the reader to ponder the case well. I would disclose to him new grounds of faith.

While on earth, as the Gospel of John declares, the Son of Man was in Heaven, in that spiritual and eternal world where no veils of time circumscribe the view. Having the purest moral sense, he saw the moral aspects, circumstances, relations, destinies, of the scene in which he stood. He knew himself and those around him. "I know," said he, "those whom I have chosen." Are we not able, therefore, to track, a little way at least, that mysterious power of intuition or inspiration—I know not its name, certain only that

it is divine—by which he foretold his own fate, the fate of his nation, even to many minute particulars, the treachery of one of his disciples, the cowardice of another, and the desertion of all? His foreknowledge was marvellously profound and accurate. How does it draw aside the veil which hides from us the wonderful powers of the spiritual world, revealing to us a spirit commanding disease and death, and penetrating into futurity! But altogether unprecedented as was the prophetic knowledge of Jesus, it was still limited. The precise time when that national catastrophe would take place which he predicted, he declared he did not know. It was known only to God.

This account of the prophetic power of Jesus will be regarded by most, I suppose, as a mere speculation; and, (it grieves me to say it,) a bold speculation. I strive to think freely, but I do not covet the reputation of boldness. The view I take of the prophetic character of Christ seems to me the simplest, most natural, and unspeakably the most vital, and to take much less for granted than the popular theory of the case. This, like the popular idea of the miracles, appears to be founded upon the unconscious, but most extravagant assumption, that the whole order of things, material and immaterial,—all the forces and limits of that mighty spirit, which is around and within us—are perfectly known; that God, instead of being ALL IN ALL, sits “outside,” having delegated the care of all ordinary matters to another power, the order of Nature; and that when anything occurs out of the little circle of the experience of man, child of

yesterday! then only is His arm stretched forth. According to this popular impression, the prophetic utterances of Jesus are not recognised as the natural issues and expressions of a mighty spiritual Power working in or with his spirit. But as such, we ought, by all sound principles of thought, to regard them, so long as the spiritual world to which he belonged, and which is all around and within us, remains an unexplored deep. That deep must not be hidden from us by a theory of the mode of the divine existence and government, constructed out of false, human analogies, and confidently reposed in by multitudes, among whom are many wise and many great, as if it were the living temple of truth, not made with hands! Rather does it become us to lie prostrate with trembling awe and humility, at the gates of the unknown world, which stand open within us, waiting for I know not what demonstrations of power to issue therefrom, and trying, by the light of their coming, to penetrate into the unfathomable abyss. An awful voice of power and prophecy has been heard in the world. We overlook the actual utterer. It is true he bore the semblance of a man, and human was the voice that spake. But there was in him, as there is in every human shape, the transcendent mystery of a spirit; and until we have solved that, and ascertained that the Almighty is not *here*, that his kingdom is not within us, his throne not in our hearts, we ought not to turn elsewhere to track the goings of his power.

In accordance with the foregoing views I remark, that the prophetic declarations of Jesus were among his most simple, natural, characteristic utterances.

They are not announced with any formal peculiarity of tone or manner. They illustrate him. "Why art thou not following me now?" said Peter, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" replied Jesus, "verily I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast disowned me thrice." How, save by the inspiration of God, he foresaw Peter's denial of him, I am utterly ignorant. And yet, though there were an immediate influx of supernatural light into his mind, I see no reason to decide that the laws of his spiritual being were interrupted. The divine inspiration, so far from overlaying, concurred with his native energies, and elevated them. All that I can see and know of the Man of Nazareth creates the presumption that he was fitted for extraordinary communications from Heaven. Being such as we all believe him to have been, with his piercing spiritual eye, his thorough knowledge of Peter's character, his frequent experience of Peter's weakness, how is it possible that he could have been without some foresight of the conduct of Peter in the approaching crisis? And his unsurpassed moral elevation prepared him to be the recipient of I know not what higher lights and aids; and this without the least violation of the laws of mind.

Again. When I consider the great end to which he felt himself—his whole being—irrevocably bound, and the numerous and overpowering manifestations of an opposing spirit, which he encountered at every step, it seems to me utterly impossible that the result should have been wholly hidden from his eyes. He knew his own unalterable purpose. He knew the

temper of the times. The very excitement he produced revealed the coarse worldly bent of the people; that inveterate Jewish hope, which he saw he must disappoint at the cost of his life. "Many," says John, "believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

Once more. The effect of his ministry—how must it have laid bare to him the inmost depths of the Jewish character, the Jewish national existence! He saw that the public heart was bound up in the hope of a grand outward political revolution. The transcendent power he was putting forth, though destined ultimately to triumph, in its immediate action had no influence but to excite the worst passions. He must have seen that the nation was rushing madly on into a collision with that mighty Roman domination, by the bare idea of which it was already so much chafed, a collision that would grind it to atoms. He saw that his country was animated by no principle that could control its destiny. If it had been, how was it that his mighty voice was powerless! A short time before his death, he approached Jerusalem, attended by a vast multitude. They rent the air with triumphant shouts, but he was not deceived. He saw that the popular feeling was excited by the belief that he would prove the great national Deliverer. And in this false expectation, he read the fate of the nation so clearly, that when he came in sight of the city, he wept, exclaiming, "O that thou hadst known, at least in this

thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days will come upon thee, when thine enemies will cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and enclose thee and thy children within thee on every side, and will level thee with the ground, and not leave in thee one stone upon another ; *because* thou knewest not this season of thy visitation."

I wish to be distinctly understood. I do not believe that any other man could have foreseen what Jesus foresaw. I doubt not that he looked into futurity by the inspiration of God. But then I cannot help thinking that we entirely forget the high spiritual eminence at which he stood, and his profound moral wisdom, when we deem it necessary to suppose that the laws of his spiritual being were suspended in order that he might receive these extraordinary communications of foreknowledge. The prophetic spirit in him shows itself in harmony with his whole nature. And herein, as I said, we have evidence that it was divine.

6. That a knowledge of future events was given to Jesus Christ somewhat in the way I have described, appears to be intimated by his expostulation with the Pharisees. 'What!' he does in effect exclaim, 'ye can understand the face of the sky and predict the changes of the weather. Pretenders ! Can ye not discern the signs of the times ?'

7. It is not, however, my chief purpose now to ascertain the mode in which the Founder of Christianity became possessed of a knowledge of events then hidden behind the veil of futurity. My present topic

is the fact that he did know the future—that he was a prophet, a great prophet, however we may conceive of a prophet. I wish to show how naturally and incidentally it appears in the records of his life that he was possessed of a clear and wonderful knowledge of what was to happen. This is our present point, the fact, and not any theory of the fact. And I say I know not which is more remarkable, the prophetic gift of Jesus, or the all-unconscious way in which his possession of such a gift is made known in the Gospels.

If an individual, wholly unacquainted with the New Testament, were simply told that Jesus Christ is described therein as possessing a singular knowledge of future events, he might naturally enough think and say that he was so described by his biographers, merely to magnify him. But this suspicion, natural as it may be in the first instance, must be felt to be wholly out of place, when we examine the records, and see how decisively the absence of any such intention is shown.

Shortly after the public appearance of Jesus, a Roman officer sent to him to come and heal one of his household, suffering severely with palsy, and he had turned his steps towards the centurion's house, when the centurion himself met him, and declared that he was not worthy of so great an honour as a visit from Jesus; that it was not necessary he should trouble himself to go to the house. For if he, the centurion, being himself under authority, could yet say to one servant, go, and to another, do this, and be instantly obeyed, surely Jesus had only to say the word, and

the disease would immediately depart. The faith of the Gentile filled Jesus with astonishment; he turned to those who were with him, and declared that he had nowhere, not even among his own nation, found such faith; and then follow the memorable words, "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into the darkness without." Here we may discern his prophetic inspiration. Through the faith of the centurion, as through a rent in the darkness around him, he gazed into futurity, and beheld what we all now see. This declaration has now become undisputed history. From all regions multitudes have been gathered under the Christian dispensation, brought into spiritual fellowship with the great and good—with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with the righteous of all times; while those, who in the days of Jesus deemed themselves the peculiar heirs of the heavenly gift, are standing without. In these words I hear the voice of a great prophet. By the kingdom of Heaven, it is hardly necessary that I should say, is not meant the future world of bliss, but the heavenly dominion of truth—in other words, the empire of true religion. It is spoken of under the figure of a kingdom, where the patriarchs are seated as at a brilliantly lighted festival, while those who refuse to enter and partake of the feast are represented as excluded, and enduring the misery of the darkness outside. This declaration of Jesus, eminently prophetic as it is, wonderfully verified as it has been, comes in, in the most natural manner imagin-

able, and has a living connexion with the passage where it occurs.

Again. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, we have the following: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Is it suspected that this passage is a mere fabrication, inserted into the history with a view to invest Jesus with the character and reputation of a prophet? Every trace of such a suspicion vanishes when we observe the beautiful, because unconscious, consistency of this portion of the history with what precedes and what follows. "From that time forth," so this passage commences, "began Jesus to show his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer and die." From what time? Why, immediately after he had ascertained that his disciples acknowledged him as the anointed messenger of God. As soon as he found that they explicitly recognized his authority, he began to disclose to them what was about to take place. So that this passage comes in just where it ought to come in, in order to harmonize with the connexion. But this is not all. The disclosure of his approaching sufferings and death on this occasion is incidentally connected with a striking and most natural illustration of the character of Peter. When Jesus spake of what he must suffer, "Peter took him," we are told, "and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be done unto thee.' But he turned and said unto Peter, 'Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-

block to me : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.'” What ! Is this Peter—the Rock, as Jesus a moment before named him, saying, that upon this Rock he would build his church, and the gates of hell should not prevail against it—is this the man who is now addressed in the severest language of reproof, and pronounced a stumbling-block, a rock of offence ?

O, tell me not there has been any garbling—any forgery here ! If this portion of the history had not its deep foundations in truth and nature,—if it were a fiction, its author would never have dreamed of venturing apparently so gross an inconsistency, or, if he had, he would not have permitted it to go unexplained. In reality, there is here not only no inconsistency, but the most exquisite keeping, as I proceed to show.

Shortly before, as we read in the same chapter, Jesus had inquired of his disciples what the people thought of him—whom they supposed him to be. They replied, “ Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets.” He then put the question directly to the disciples themselves, “ Whom do you think me to be !” Peter, with his characteristic forwardness, answers without hesitation, “ Thou art the Anointed, the Son of the living God.” It disclosed great openness to the truth in Peter, to have come so speedily and confidently to the conviction, that in the humble man of Nazareth he beheld the long looked-for, magnificent Messiah. There was nothing in the external appearance of Jesus which proved him to be that illustrious

personage, but much to the contrary. Since Peter then recognized him as the Christ, it could only have been through the moral, spiritual credentials which he gave in his beneficent words and works. Accordingly, Jesus breaks forth in blessing upon Peter, exclaiming, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas,* for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven!" *i. e.* "it is not from men, or from any earthly source, that thou hast discovered me to be the Messiah. It has been revealed unto thee by that true Spirit in thine own soul, which is the Spirit of God." How naturally must the warm commendation of Jesus have tended to elate the ardent mind of Peter! This it was, we perceive, that emboldened him to contradict and rebuke Jesus, when the latter immediately afterwards proceeded to speak of his sufferings. Although he acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ, he was not at all prepared to believe that the Christ could suffer indignity and violence. Therefore he sought to silence Jesus, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be done unto thee," and so drew upon himself that severe rebuke, "Away! thou enemy! Thou art a stumbling-block to me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

Thus we find that the prediction of his sufferings and death, which Jesus uttered on this occasion, is

* "Simon, son of Jonas." The intense fervour with which this benediction was uttered, is incidentally and strikingly displayed in this mode of address. How naturally, when a friend communicates any unexpected sentiment or intelligence, do we express our surprise in a similar way, uttering the whole name of our friend, with fervent emphasis!

vitaly connected with a portion of the history bearing the deep and living impress of truth, and it is impossible to doubt that he foretold his own fate to his disciples at this time.

But it is not from those passages alone in which he expressly predicts his own death, natural and consistent as they are, that we gather the most decisive evidences of his knowledge of the future. Most incidentally, and therefore all the more impressively, does it on many occasions appear that he was perfectly aware of what awaited him, and that he saw far and clearly into the depths of futurity.

Once two of his disciples, confident that he was about to establish a glorious worldly empire, induced their mother to solicit from him the favour that they, her two sons, might sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, when he should commence his triumphant reign. “Can ye drink of the cup,” he instantly replies, “which I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” How fully is the knowledge of his own sufferings here revealed in the unconsciousness with which they are taken for granted! The two brethren little dreamed what the nature of that distinction was which they sought, or how it was to be obtained; and, in the unthinking simplicity of their hearts, they answer that they are able to do whatever he was about to do. Their Master observes, in return, “Yes, ye shall drink of the same bitter cup, and pass through the same fiery baptism; but to sit on my right and on my left, —to share so fully in the power and distinction thus

to be obtained, I can give only to those for whom it shall hereafter be found to be prepared in the providence of God."

How undesignedly is the knowledge which Jesus had of his own death laid bare to us in that beautiful incident which took place at Bethany! Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came, and, standing over him, poured upon his head an alabaster box of very precious ointment, an act according with the customs of the times, that authorized the free use of precious perfumes and ointments upon occasions of hospitality, and whereby Mary gave expression to her deep personal reverence for Jesus. Some present were, or pretended to be, shocked at her extravagance, and exclaimed, "Why is this waste? This ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor." But Jesus said, "Why trouble ye the woman? She has performed an appropriate office for me. Ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. In that she hath poured this ointment on my person, she has done it for my burial—to embalm me." I have no idea that Mary had any thought of his death or burial, or that Jesus meant to imply that she had. But this was simply the way in which he interpreted her act. How delicate and touching his allusion to the approaching termination of his career! "But me ye have not always." How naturally is the state of his mind revealed to us! How clearly do we see that he was fully possessed with a knowledge of his impending fate! When the mind is deeply engrossed with any subject, it readily discovers or creates a connexion between every thing that occurs and the absorbing topic of

its thoughts. So was it with Jesus. Impressed with the conviction of his awful fate, so soon to be consummated, he received that expression of Mary's respect, the outpouring of the costly ointment, as a funeral office. To him it had the odour of death and of the tomb. Had he been actually dead, no one would have objected to the use made of the ointment which now descended upon his person, for the customs of the day sanctioned a liberal expense of spices and perfumes upon the dead. So near and so certain was his death to Jesus, that he speaks of himself as already dead, and represents this token of Mary's homage as a funeral office. Indeed, so much was his mind impressed with the coincidence between this act of Mary's, and the near approach of his death, that he declared in the full spirit of prophecy, that wherever the history of his life should be told, this incident should be related also. And so in fact it has happened. The prophecy, which he needed no special inspiration to utter, has been fulfilled. "The odour of that ointment," as it has well been said, "was not confined to that lowly Jewish dwelling. It has filled the world."

In a like incidental manner, the fact that Jesus knew he was to die, and that he was also aware of the manner in which he was to suffer, is revealed in the very form of that event upon which the commemorative service of the Lord's Supper is founded. When seated at table with his personal friends, a short time before he was seized by his enemies, he broke bread and distributed it among those present, as a symbol of his body soon to be broken, and poured out wine

and gave it to them as a like symbol of his blood. I do not believe, and I deem it of the first importance to a just appreciation of this rite to consider it, I do not believe that Jesus was conscious on this occasion of having formed a deliberate design to establish a particular service or institution. He spoke and acted, I think, from the simple and natural impulse of a touching sensibility. With his mind filled with the images of death and suffering, we have seen how naturally he associated the ointment which Mary poured upon his person with his embalming. So when he was seated for the last time with his disciples, the same state of mind—the same principle of association led him to see in the broken bread, and in the flowing wine, the symbols and mementos of his own body and blood. Thus hallowed by the deep sensibility of Jesus, shall they not be everlasting mementos! Shall not our hearts melt with answering tenderness, and can we disown or cancel the vows of gratitude and remembrance which Nature herself prompts?*

* When I contemplate Jesus breaking the bread, and pouring out the wine, in commemoration of himself, I cannot conceive of him as deliberately instituting a positive rite. It is his heart that seems to me to be appealing to the universal human heart, and therefore this observance secures my cordial regard. When it is thus considered as originated, not so much by the understanding as the affections of Jesus, a service of commemoration having him for its special object, appears to be among the most significant and affecting of our religious institutions, and to have an imperishable basis in the heart. It is too common to represent the Lord's Supper as a mere *means* of improvement. It is a means, a great means, but only because it is a great end. He who eats and drinks worthily at the Lord's table, eats and drinks not for his own sake, but for Christ's, and therefore he receives divine nourishment.

We cannot fail to perceive here how incidentally his prophetic knowledge is revealed. It is not explicitly and purposely disclosed. It appears only by implication. And this is the most satisfactory way possible.

But we have not by any means fathomed the depth of the miracle ; we have caught but a glimpse of the real greatness of the prophetic character of Jesus, when we have seen simply that he foreknew his own death. He possessed a far deeper knowledge still. Everywhere throughout the histories of his life, we are given to understand, naturally, undesignedly, that he cherished a calm and perfect confidence in his own ultimate success. He saw and knew that futurity was his. To what is this unparalleled faith attributable but to the profoundest prophetic inspiration ? Here we have the fact of a young man, in a dark and corrupt age, of obscure birth, in the bosom of a bigoted nation, separated from all other nations by a great gulf of political and religious hatred, and on the brink of ruin—a young man without education or wealth, backed by no imperial warrant, not only unassisted by the spirit of the nation, and the age in which he appeared, but directly and vehemently opposed by the prevailing sentiments of the day, and the whole temper of his countrymen—we have, I say, the undisputed fact of an individual thus situated, unknown, friendless, powerless, and without any traces of human philosophy about him, undertaking a work of revolution, the most noble and comprehensive, a work tending to nothing short of the thorough illumination

and improvement of the whole race of man, a purpose of creating the world over again, and converting its savage tribes into beings dignified by knowledge, refined and blessed by affection and kindness. I say nothing of the wonder that such a thought should have been entertained at such a time, and under such circumstances, although the bare conception of the thing, the mere expression of belief in its practicability, might well have been recorded among the inspired sayings of human wisdom, reflecting immortal honour upon any one who should have uttered it. But the circumstance that absorbs our attention is the quiet confidence, all so unobtrusively evinced, with which Jesus Christ lived and spoke and died in accordance with an aim so vast, that we should be almost ready to pronounce it chimerical, had not the lapse of ages begun to furnish some testimony to the possibility of its accomplishment. The great revolutions, commenced by other men, have, in the course of a century or two, exceeded in their actual results all that was contemplated by their original movers, spreading farther and going deeper than their authors dreamed. But not so is it with Christianity. The world has not yet realised the purpose of its founder, although it has so nearly approximated it, that we cannot but feel that he was inspired with a mysterious and far-reaching wisdom.

The work which he began and so steadily pursued is no less astonishing for the originality of its methods, than for the comprehensiveness of its objects. Under the greatest disadvantages, disregarding all ordinary means of success, committing nothing to

writing, elaborating no system, and with a world, in all the pride of its philosophy and all the glare of its power, arrayed against him, he proceeded to fulfil his aim with a confidence as sublime for its calmness, as it was mysterious for its strength. If every human hand had been extended to aid him, and every human heart sealed to his service, he could scarcely have spoken and acted with a more unfaltering assurance that his labour would not be in vain, that the objects at which he aimed must be fulfilled. He went forth on his lonely and untried path, as if he were placed upon a mountain top, and saw his success written out upon the world lying at his feet; as if every word that he uttered, instead of being caught up and perverted and turned against him as it was, were a spell, operating with magical rapidity and resistless power. Had his career been one unbroken triumph, he could not have exhibited a more settled conviction of ultimate success. Among a people burning with the fiercest passions, with the impatient hope of national dominion, he announced an empire whose glory is righteousness, whose laws are peace and love. In an age when religious worship was, in most places, scarcely better than a pageant, and religion was a thing of costly temples and long processions and glittering rites, he taught that the object of worship is a pure spirit, and that the service of God consists not so much in calling on his name, as in doing his daily will. Upon a corrupt and licentious world, he inculcated a purity of mind with which a look tending to sin is inconsistent. At a time when military prowess was the first of virtues, and heroes and conquerors

were the world's saints, he exhibited a new model of greatness, revealing man's highest honour in humility, in forgiveness of injuries, and in sacredly abstaining from all violence. In opposition to superstitious observances and artificial duties, he vindicated the simple and despised laws of nature; teaching that to relieve a fellow-creature is more holy than to observe sabbaths, and that to a child the comfort of a parent should be more sacred than the treasures of temples. His own nation was prostrate, and writhing under the oppression of Rome; and, although he raised no banner and mustered no armies, yet he uniformly asserted that a kingdom was to be established into which multitudes from the four quarters of the earth should be gathered. Thus he lived, wrought, and died, never deserted by that faith in the future, which is one of the most imposing, most mysterious traits of his character.

But the wonder is not even yet exhausted. He not only foresaw his own death, and the ultimate triumph of his religion, he saw so clearly into futurity that he discerned the connexion between these two events. It was not a blind assurance of success that he cherished. He knew that he should soon be put to death, under circumstances the most painful and ignominious; that he should die misrepresented by the most, fully understood by none. And he felt that he should finally triumph, notwithstanding these circumstances apparently so fatal to every hope of success, ay, and in consequence of these very circumstances. He not only perceived that his death would not obstruct, he saw that it would directly and most gloriously aid the

progress of truth. He foreknew his own fate, and, what is far more astonishing, he understood and interpreted it. He discerned its end and issue. Here, I say, he evinced a depth of prophetic power altogether without precedent. "If I be lifted up," that is, on the cross, "I will draw all men unto me." Again, in that answer to the two brethren who wished to sit on his right hand and on his left in his kingdom, to which I have already referred; how clearly does he show that he understood the purport and result of the sufferings he was about to endure! "Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" How plainly does this language prove that the kingdom *he* was thinking of—the power which *he* sought, was a power to be gained over the affections of mankind, over their deepest sympathies, by the patient, voluntary endurance of suffering in their behalf! In immediate connection with this passage, he gives that fine definition of true greatness, a definition to whose perfect truth, the progress of government and society has borne most expressive testimony—"He who would be greatest among you, let him be your servant." To reign most gloriously over men, we must be ready to serve them even to the loss of every earthly blessing—of life itself. Consecrating his whole being to the service of man, prepared to pour out his blood like water in the cause of truth, he saw with the clearest prophetic vision, that a glorious and everlasting dominion must be his. He trusted not, he needed not to trust to perishing paper and parchment to perpetuate his name and influence in the world, for he was writing out his laws

upon the living tables of the heart, in his own life-blood. He knew that by drinking the bitter cup of death—by submitting to that fearful baptism, he was immortalizing his power; he was making an appeal to the sympathies of the human soul, which could not be in vain. Those steps of suffering, which to all other eyes seemed to lead down into utter darkness, in his illuminated vision were seen to be a glorified ascent to the right hand of Eternal Power.

Again. Listen to that most remarkable language of his upon the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem, shortly before his death. “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” To those who heard these words they could scarcely have been intelligible. And yet we may perceive a deep and natural meaning here. The glory with which his mind was engrossed was the pure moral glory of an entire self sacrifice. It was as evidently necessary in his view that he should suffer and die as he was about to die, as that the seed should be buried in the earth and undergo that natural, familiar, but mysterious change by which it is converted into a fruit-bearing plant. The process of vegetation was not more natural to his mind, than the dark and painful method by which he was to be glorified, and the triumph of his religion—the establishment of his kingdom consummated.

Once more. Let me remind you of that remarkable declaration of his, uttered just after Judas had left him, to go and execute his traitorous purpose.

The departure of Judas upon this base errand naturally enough caused Jesus to feel most vividly that the great crisis was at hand, that in a very little while his fate would be fulfilled. Does he shrink at the dark prospect thus brought distinctly before him? Oh no! he beholds in it only the manifestation of his glory and the glory of God. "Now is the Son of man glorified," he exclaims, "and God is glorified in him." The elevation of his mind and his language could not have been more remarkable, if a visible spectacle of the wide spread of his religion had at that moment been accorded him. This is to me the stupendous wonder. He not only knew that he must die, but it is shown beyond all doubt that he knew his death would be the instrument of his signal success, that by dying as he was about to die he would be glorified as no other ever had been, and God would be glorified in him. Here is a depth and extent of inspiration to which the whole world can bring no parallel. This it is that attests him as the first and greatest of prophets. And then too how astonishing is it that, possessing this extraordinary knowledge, he was not elated by it, nor the balance of his mind in the slightest degree disturbed. He was still the most patient, the meekest of beings. There is nothing excited, nothing hurried, nothing incoherent in his manner. The present was not lost sight of in the near and familiar view of the vast future. He was still the most practical of teachers.

[NOTE.—I do not know whether any illustration I have adduced of the foreknowledge of Jesus be more striking than that presented in his answers to those who, on different occasions, demanded of him a sign. When he drove the money-changers from the Temple, and

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAGNANIMITY OF JESUS.

“To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart, amidst the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it must be the rarest endowment of humanity.”—FOSTER, *Essays*.

I BEG leave here to admonish the reader, that I do not aim at anything like completeness in the repre-

was immediately asked to produce the sign of his authority for doing what he had done, his reply is, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up.” In this obscure allusion to his death and resurrection, how undesignedly is his foreknowledge of these events revealed! Again, when at another time a sign was demanded, his answer is, “An evil and adulterous generation is seeking after a sign, but no sign shall be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Here again how unconsciously is his knowledge of his death and resurrection implied! Had the narrators designed to ascribe to him a foreknowledge which he did not possess, they never would have wrapt up the evidences of it in such obscure allusions. The reference to the prophet Jonah, by the way, is wonderfully pointed; if, as we may with great probability suppose, those, who asked for a sign, desired to witness some dazzling exhibition of miraculous power. It is as if he had said, ‘You are seeking a luminous and overpowering display of my authority. I tell you, that the true sign of my authority will be given in events shortly to occur—(my death and resurrection,) which, so far from corresponding to your ideas of the Messiah’s glory, can be likened to nothing among all the splendid signs and wonders of your history, so appropriately as to the humiliation of the prophet Jonah.’]

sentation I have undertaken of the character of Jesus Christ. To prove the honesty of this disavowal, it is not necessary that I should indulge in any of those expressions of self-disparagement, by which one so seldom convinces others, and so often deceives himself. It is enough to say that since, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, the moral significance of the life of Jesus remains unexhausted, I do not believe that it is now to be fathomed at a glance, even by the best and wisest. Nay, after a period of equal length a thousand times told, I am persuaded the treasures of moral life, truth, and beauty, hidden in Jesus Christ, will remain absolutely inexhaustible. The least of the things of God in the humblest department of his universe presents an infinite variety of aspects, and opens an unfathomable depth for contemplation. It is not therefore to be for a moment supposed that, within any definite space, the character of Jesus will be so understood and appreciated, that little will remain to be told of it.

It would be easy enough to enumerate the virtues, and ascribe them all to him in a mass; to heap upon him the phraseology of panegyric, and then fancy that we have completed his portrait. But the effect of his character has been injured by nothing, scarcely, so much as by the loose and indiscriminate manner in which it has been described. It has been divested of all vitality, by the general and unqualified language of praise, and converted into a dim and lifeless abstraction, a feeble personification of Virtue. It seems to have been thought that extravagance is impossible when Jesus Christ is the theme. And yet

it may almost be questioned, whether those who have lavished upon him the loftiest terms of commendation, going the length of literally deifying him, have even caught a glimpse of his real greatness. It may be—I have no doubt that it is—beyond the power of language to do him justice. Still we are extravagant when we speak of him in terms that exceed our own distinct impressions, and allow ourselves to deal in vague generalities; and the effect cannot but be injurious. It is very difficult, I know, to avoid falling into an exaggerated tone, when the heart has been touched in the slightest degree by pure moral beauty. I cannot flatter myself that I have wholly escaped this difficulty, I can only say that I endeavour anxiously to guard against it, and to justify the expressions of my reverence for Jesus by numerous and decisive facts, being chiefly desirous to see clearly so far as I see, and recognizing discrimination as of the first importance.

I have entitled this chapter “The Magnanimity of Jesus.” The true greatness of his mind has already been shown in his use of the extraordinary gifts with which he was endowed, and in the calm and steady confidence with which he cherished a lofty purpose. I wish to pursue the illustration of this quality, because it is so uniformly disclosed through the whole tenor of these narratives of his life. In all the relations in which he is placed—under all the circumstances detailed, the same noble being appears, and, on the part of the historians, all is related quietly, unostentatiously, unconsciously.

For the most expressive manifestations of the man-

tal and moral greatness of Jesus, I do not refer to those precepts of his, in which he inculcates universal charity and benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries, and the overcoming of evil with good. The verbal lessons which he gave of these virtues are doubtless emphatic and eloquent. Still in no case are the words of an individual, taken by themselves, a decisive index of his spirit. It is possible to express the most comprehensive benevolence, and at the same time to be enslaved by the narrowest prejudices. Numerous enough are those who are happily described by the author of the History of Enthusiasm as "closet philanthropists, dreaming of impracticable reforms and grudging the cost of effective relief." I do not therefore appeal to the precepts of Christ, clear and beautiful as they are, to demonstrate the quality of his spirit.

In that prayer which burst from his heart amidst the agonies of crucifixion, what a greatness of soul is revealed! "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Oftentimes as this passage has been commented upon, I have sometimes thought that it has never been fully felt. The deep, natural, inextinguishable generosity of feeling which dictated it, appears to me to be enfeebled in the general apprehension, through the absence of a distinct impression of the persons for whom Jesus uttered this prayer. He is commonly supposed to have made this generous plea in behalf of the whole multitude assembled around him, or of the Jews in particular. I will not deny that it was so. Still, when I attempt to picture the

circumstances of that terrible occasion, I cannot feel that it is altogether a fanciful conjecture, especially since the connexion does not discountenance it,* to imagine that this prayer was uttered at the moment when the Roman soldiers were nailing Jesus to the cross; and that it was under the torture which this operation caused, and with immediate reference to those savage executioners, as ignorant as they were cruel, that the sufferer prayed. I do not mean to imply that any present were excepted in his mind from this plea. But the incident receives new point and power in my view, when I consider this sublime ejaculation as bursting from his inmost soul, under peculiar and intense agony, and as referring immediately to those by whom this agony was inflicted. O what a heart was that upon which the acutest suffering had no effect, but to cause it to feel, and pray, and plead for those by whom the suffering was caused ! Not in corroding bitterness, but in cleansing, healing streams of mercy, did the sensibility of that heart flow out over the very hands which were seeking to crush it, and were already stained with its blood ! "Forgive them, for they know not what they do !" They must have been forgiven. If "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much," this, the divinest prayer that God ever heard,

"Hymn'd by archangels when they sing of mercy,"

could not have ascended in vain. At some period of their existence in this state of being, or in another, the true knowledge of Jesus, as I cannot but believe, must dawn upon the minds of those savage men, and

* See Luke xxiii. 33, 34.

with that knowledge must come his unparalleled generosity, to dissolve their hearts in a saving, though bitter repentance, were those hearts harder than adamant. Thus we may see how the prayer of the Crucified secured its own fulfilment.

I have commented upon this passage first, because it affords the most obvious and impressive instance of that trait of the character of Christ, upon which I am now remarking.

Between the Jews and the Samaritans, there subsisted a spirit of the fiercest animosity. They agreed in acknowledging the authority of the Mosaic law, but they differed about the spot upon which the public religious ceremonies and services of their faith were to be observed; the Jews insisting that Jerusalem was the place to which the followers of Moses should resort to worship, while the Samaritans were equally zealous for their consecrated Mount Gerizim. This comparatively insignificant difference became a peculiar fountain of bitterness. It is the nature of religious hatred, as all experience testifies, to rage the most furiously between those sects that approach the nearest to each other, without entirely coalescing. It would seem that bigotry grows fiercer as its food is diminished. So at least it was in the case of the Jews and the Samaritans. They looked upon each other with the greatest dislike. It is interesting, therefore, to observe how Jesus is represented as bearing himself in this state of things. Here we have new and natural illustrations of the characteristic elevation of his mind. It was to a woman of Samaria, who, per-

ceiving that he was no common person, asked his opinion concerning the true place for public worship, the ever-vexed point of dispute between her countrymen and the Jews, that he announced the only acceptable worship to be the act and service of the spirit. Once when he was going through Samaria, the Samaritans would not receive him, because it appeared that he was going to Jerusalem, passing by their consecrated mount. His disciples, enraged at the inhospitality of the Samaritans, wished to call down fire from Heaven upon them. "Ye know not," said Jesus, "what manner of spirit ye are of. The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." This incident needs no comment. On one occasion a Jewish teacher came to Jesus proposing the great question—"what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" In reply Jesus asked, "what is written in the law? how readeest thou?" The teacher replied, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." To this Jesus rejoined, "thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live." But the teacher of the law, desirous of justifying himself, and showing that the question he had put to Jesus was not so easily settled, asked in return, "who is my neighbour?" In answer to this query, we have the parable of the good Samaritan, as it is called,—the story of a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and falling among thieves, and left by them half dead. A priest and a Levite pass by him without rendering him any assistance. But a Samaritan coming that way stops and binds up his wounds, and carries him

to the nearest inn, and provides for his entire relief. Jesus concluded this parable by asking the teacher of law which of these three was neighbour to him—the man from Jerusalem, the Jew—who had fallen among thieves. The reply of the teacher is, “he that showed mercy on him.” Thus was he forced to confess that the Samaritan was neighbour to the Jew; and if so, then the relation was reciprocal, and it became the Jewish teacher to regard the Samaritan as his neighbour, the despised, hated Samaritan. How strikingly is the largeness of the mind of Jesus, his superiority to Jewish prejudices, revealed in this passage—in the bare idea of representing Jews and Samaritans as neighbours! When Jesus asked the Jewish teacher which was neighbour to him who fell among thieves, he replied, “he that showed mercy on him.” I perceive, or fancy I perceive, here, an incidental illustration of the prejudice of the Jew. He did not care, in answer to the question of Jesus, to say outright “the Samaritan.” It went against his pride to utter that despised name—to acknowledge one bearing that name, as his neighbour. So he compounds with his pride, and adopts, very naturally, a circumlocution, avoiding the mention of the Samaritan under that title, and replying, “he that showed mercy on him.” It was obviously the intention of Jesus to make him confess that the Samaritan was his neighbour. The appeal was absolutely irresistible, and although it was but little that he could do, yet he did what he could to save his own pride.

The fact that Jesus was on one occasion stigmatized as a Samaritan, would seem to be a tribute to his liberality; to his freedom from the bigotry with which

his countrymen regarded the inhabitants of Samaria. I want no more expressive evidence of the vitality and comprehensiveness of the philanthropy of Jesus, than the way in which he is described as conducting himself towards those against whom the bitterest prejudices were cherished. That he recognized none of the artificial distinctions which control and contract human affections, I gather most decisively, not from those precepts of his which enjoin universal love, immortal as they are, but from his disregard of those divisions which existed immediately around him. It is easy enough, we know, to love distant and barbarous nations, or to cherish an interest in a remote posterity, and at the same time to foster a thousand narrow feelings towards those who are nearest to us. This is, unhappily, so much the character of the benevolence that we witness in modern times, that it is not until I see, as may be seen clearly, how free the author of Christianity was from the bigotry which infected his nation and his time, that his precepts become to me genuine and authentic manifestations of his spirit. Let it only appear that he regarded those whom his countrymen most vehemently hated and denounced, the Samaritans,—let it be seen that he recognized them as men, as brethren, as objects for human sympathy and respect, then do I see in him the spirit of universal love. Then do I know by the most indubitable tokens, that his charity knew no artificial bounds; that it was a healthy and vigorous spirit flowing in every natural channel.

We talk about the plan of Christianity—the Chris-
—scheme or system, as if its author had pursued

the great work in which he was engaged, with a formal and conscious recognition of a previously arranged plan. It is scarcely necessary to say that the Christian records produce no impression of this sort. Nothing can appear more unsystematic and immethodical than the whole proceeding of Jesus. Although general principles are directly deducible from the language which he uttered, and although his language is itself not infrequently general in its form, yet, as I have had occasion more than once to observe, he almost always spoke and acted with direct reference to local and particular circumstances. Even when he expressed himself in universal terms, and appeared to be enunciating abstract principles, there is reason to believe that he was moved to speak by some special instance, to which his language is to be particularly applied. His instructions were pervadingly unpremeditated and occasional. No inference, however, unfavourable to the comprehensiveness of his spirit, is to be drawn from the absence of all traces of system in his ministry. For although this characteristic of the founder of Christianity may at first sight appear to intimate that he taught and laboured without law, order, or purpose, it really results from the very clearness and vastness of his aim. When, in any department, whether of art, literature, politics, or religion, an individual formally announces a theory, and keeps it industriously in sight, there is always produced the impression of something defined, circumscribed, narrow. Whereas the highest achievements of man—the productions of genius, always appear, at first sight, erratic and lawless. But when closely

studied, they exhibit the greatest perfection of purpose, illustrate the most comprehensive laws of nature, and show that either consciously or unconsciously there has been the finest observance of method. The wildness of genius, as it has been termed, has turned out to be the most consistent wisdom. What has appeared to be a sudden impulse, has in the end tended to demonstrate the most consummate policy. "Where the true poet seems most to recede from humanity, he will be found the truest to it. From beyond the scope of nature if he summon possible existences, he subjugates them to the law of her consistency. He is beautifully loyal to that sovereign directress even when he appears most to betray and desert her."

To prove the largeness of purpose by which he was actuated by whom our divine religion was first taught, it is not necessary, then, to show that he wrought with particular and laborious regard to a plan formally devised and set forth with logical precision. If there were any appearance of this kind, it would be impossible to avoid an impression of narrowness, let the terms in which his system is announced be ever so general and unqualified. We should see the difference and the contrast between a plan thus conceived and followed and "the infinite complexities of real life," between his system and the vast system of nature, and an air of artificialness would be more or less discernible in the former. The very idea of a scheme, as I have said, implies something mapped out and bounded. But as the case actually stands, we see no traces of system in the ministry of Jesus; to the ever-changing details and relations of life, to the unnum-

bered occasions of Providence, he adjusted himself, his words and works, without a moment's hesitation, and with the most admirable effect. The coincidence, therefore, between the spirit or aim by which he was actuated, and the grand laws and principles of life and of providence, becomes an impressive attestation to the comprehensiveness of his purpose. It shows that his life and ministry were conducted upon a method so perfectly identical with the grand method of nature and reality, that he was scarcely conscious of it. He laid down no formal and elaborate plan of benevolence, but his whole being lived, moved, and wrought, in a sphere of universal love. This was his element, in which his affections breathed and flourished with that silent and unconscious ease which accompanies all true vitality and health. It is my object in these remarks to show what an evidence we have of the real greatness of Jesus, of the grandeur and infinitude of his ruling spirit, in the remarkable absence of all traces of a laboriously constructed plan in the history of his ministry. His purpose is nowhere minutely defined nor elaborately developed; not because he had no definite purpose, but because it exceeded the power of the understanding to comprehend, and the resources of language to describe it. Like the great system of nature, the significance of the life of Jesus may be partially penetrated, but it cannot be completely set forth in words. It is not the less interesting and influential, but infinitely the more so, because it cannot be adequately understood and described. It is felt only the more powerfully by the heart.

The moral greatness of Jesus is shown in his singular freedom from that sectarian or party spirit which has been in all times the crying sin of his followers. He stood alone, and must, on this account, have been not a little desirous of securing the countenance and encouragement of others. The genius of Christianity, as I have already remarked, shows us that its author must have been possessed of great sensibility, and capable of the deepest sympathy and affection. Christianity is eminent for the tenderness of its spirit, and thus it discloses the character of its founder. To him therefore human co-operation must have been peculiarly dear, and if he had attached an undue value to human aid, it would not have been surprising. But the strong humanity of his nature never betrayed him into weakness, never broke in upon that uncompromising spirit with which he scrutinized the claims of all those who sought to be his disciples. While he publicly announced himself to the world as its leader and light, there are the most expressive evidences that he never tried to form a party. I cannot express the sense I have of the greatness of his character in this respect. Let me refer to one or two instances illustrative of this point.

On a certain occasion, when he was passing along the highway, attended by an immense concourse of people, he turned and said to them, "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." I have briefly alluded to this incident before, but to perceive the deep significance of these words, let the reader call up before his imagination the circum-

stances under which they were uttered. Look at that strange and wonderful peasant of Nazareth, surrounded by that excited Jewish throng. Listen to the tread of innumerable feet. Observe those countenances kindling with intense expectation, and reaching forwards to catch a glimpse of the individual upon whom the public attention was now beginning to be fixed as the promised king, the heaven-sent deliverer of the nation. How do the hearts of that crowd beat quickly with hope, waiting only for a signal from him to muster round his banner! But look! he turns and is about to speak. The multitude heaves with curiosity. How mysteriously must those words have sounded in their ears! "If any man will indeed follow me, let him take up his cross and come after me!" The cross is now a consecrated symbol, and we cannot, without an effort, distinctly conceive the deep infamy and agony once associated with that instrument of death. It was the custom of those condemned to be crucified, to carry their crosses to the places of crucifixion. To this custom Jesus alludes. And the sentiment he expresses is in effect this: "He who really means to follow me must be as fully prepared to suffer and die, as if he were already condemned, and were carrying his cross to the place of execution." Such a sentiment at such a moment—how convincingly does it show that he did not aim to bribe or flatter the populace! If they could take in his meaning, they must have been shocked beyond measure. Not for a moment did he lose sight of his true position. What an elevation of mind is there in his perfect superiority to popular adulation!

Again, when one came to him offering to follow him whithersoever he might go, he does not eagerly accept the proffered service. "The foxes have holes," he replies, "and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He perceived that this ready professor expected temporal advantage, and he undeceives him in the outset. He checks his ardour by reminding him that he had nothing to give. And no doubt the man went away chagrined and disappointed.

At another time a young man ran to Jesus, and kneeling before him asked, "Good master ! what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" How exceedingly prepossessing must have been the appearance of this young man, which made an impression upon Jesus so strong and evident as to cause it to be remarked that "Jesus loved him!" But not the winning openness of the young man's countenance, not his posture of reverence, not his respectful address, could dim the bright spiritual vision, or sway the unerring heart of Jesus. His reply is, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God." These words we commonly hear read as if they were uttered with some degree of sternness. But, bearing in mind the strong favourable impression made upon Jesus by the young man, I cannot help thinking that they must have been spoken in a tone somewhat deprecatory. It seems as if the delicate sensibility of Jesus apprehended some moral danger in being called good by one, who himself appeared so good and amiable, and whose voice was no doubt modulated by the sweetness and ingenuousness which his whole appearance exhibited so attractively. And observe, he does not instantly bid the

young man come and enroll himself among his followers. He simply tells him to go and obey the commandments. He does not say, "You cannot inherit eternal life unless you immediately and publicly profess yourself a follower of mine," but "keep the commandments." The applicant says in return, "I have kept them from my youth, what lack I yet?" Then says Jesus, "*If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me.*" This requisition may seem severe and exaggerated, but it is in natural keeping with the circumstances. They who became fellow labourers with Jesus at that day, exposed themselves to the certain loss of property and life. Hence arose an obvious necessity for the young man's disposing of his possessions before he became an adherent of Jesus if he were so inclined. Besides, the great reformer wanted men, not their wealth. The prospect of gaining a rich and youthful partizan made no impression on him, neither did it prompt him to abate one jot of his demands. How singular in Jesus is the alliance of an interest in the cause of truth so strong, that he cheerfully yielded up his life for its sake, with an entire freedom from all undue anxiety about the number of his personal followers! It was upon the departure of the rich young man, who was unable to follow the self-denying directions of Jesus, that the latter broke forth (how naturally!) with that exclamation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" How peculiarly must this conviction have been impressed upon him, when he saw one like the young ruler, so amiable and well disposed, to all

appearances so unexceptionable, incapacitated by the influence of wealth to enter into the service of that divine kingdom whose cause required the greatest self-sacrifices.

Once and again, those whom Jesus had relieved from some distressing infirmity by his extraordinary power, would gladly have attached themselves to him, and gone about sounding his fame, but he desired no such heralds. He bade them go home and tell their friends what had been done for them. He directed those who came to him, to obey the Law. If this were done, he had no fear that his pretensions would not be appreciated. With a uniform liberality and wisdom, he distinctly and cheerfully appealed to the good and the true. 'If any man will do the will of my Father, so far as it has been signified to him, he shall know of my teaching, whether it be true and from God, or whether I speak of myself.' "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

The passages which I have just quoted are interesting for the light they throw upon the quality of the faith of Jesus. He virtually appealed to the judgment of all good men to decide the truth of his teaching: He does not address and bribe the passions. He does not seek to intimidate. There is nothing overbearing in his tone. The doer of God's will—to him he speaks. *He*, he says will discriminate—*he* will know whether he spake truly. I know not how this mode of proceeding may strike others, but to my mind it is peculiarly original, magnanimous, and calm. It satisfies me perfectly that the faith which Jesus had in his own authority, and in the truth of his teaching, was a true;

genuine faith, and no delusion. Had he been carried away by a blind enthusiasm, he would have been impatient and peremptory. There would have been a feverish anxiety to produce conviction. But we witness nothing of this kind. All is composed and serene, and he quietly awaits the judgment of all good men, never hasting, never resting.

As a general remark it is undoubtedly true, that the truth of any statement is not established merely because its author is proved to believe it. He may deceive himself. But if his faith bears all the tokens of a true and healthy faith, of being based upon true grounds, if there is nothing narrow, incoherent, hasty, or exaggerated in it, then, though we see not the foundations upon which it rests, yet we know that it is not an air-castle, but a true temple not built with hands, whose builder and supporter is God. Such, it seems to me, was the faith of Jesus. And for my part I freely say, that, even were all other evidence wanting, I should believe Christianity to be of divine origin simply because its author believed it, and feel that I stood upon no doubtful ground. His faith shows itself in every feature to be a true faith, the offspring, not of the imagination, but of living truth. It was no hallucination of mind, but true conviction.

“If any man come to me,” said he, “and hate not his father and his mother, he is not worthy of me.” This passage, I know, has been the cause of some cavil. It furnishes powerful evidence in favour of the New Testament as an honest narrative. If Jesus Christ did not actually utter these words; if the historians had been eager to embellish their accounts of him; had they had any object but to tell the truth, they would

hardly have thought of putting such language into his mouth. That he uttered it, I cannot but believe ; and it must satisfy the intelligent and candid to consider that it is a strong oriental expression of an impressive truth, namely, that no one was worthy to co-operate with Jesus in the arduous work of regenerating the world, who was unable to rise above the strongest ties of nature and affection. He who could not surrender father and mother, and all earthly friends for truth's sake, was unfit to be its advocate and servant. Thus fully and faithfully did the Founder of Christianity depict to those around him the perilous nature of his service. He represented all the trials that awaited his adherents, in the strongest light. He manifested no concern to collect a party and build up a sect. "Not every one," said he, "who saith unto me ' Lord, Lord,' shall be admitted into my kingdom, but those only who do the will of God." His practice, as we have seen, conformed with this declaration. And, though longing intensely for human sympathy, and full of those affections which yearn after human fellowship—affections not superseded or overlaid, but invigorated by high communion with the Father of Spirits—and regarding man with a more than brotherly interest, yet not every one does he seek for a friend and follower. The few who attended him deserve not the name of a party. They were to him more like a family circle, bound to him by no oath of allegiance, but by the informal, natural bond of reverence and affection. As to the highest and dearest purposes of his soul, he lived and died a solitary being. No one understood him. As he himself said, he came not to be ministered unto, *but to minister*—not to be magnified and worshipped

as a master, but to labour and bleed as a faithful and unwearied servant.

I have already referred to the passage which records the utterance of a voice from heaven, as an illustration of the perfect honesty of the narrators. But how strikingly was the greatness of his mind shown on that occasion! Whether it were an articulate voice that was heard, or, as was said by the people that stood by, only thunder, natural enough would it have been, had Jesus taken advantage of so remarkable an occurrence to magnify himself, and increase his own influence. But with that disposition to put himself aside, which was one of his most original characteristics, he instantly declared, "This voice came not for me, but for your sakes." The circumstance is related with such unconscious honesty; it is identified with so fine an illustration of the moral greatness of Jesus, that it is impossible to doubt that something extraordinary did actually occur. Which it was, a supernatural voice, or a peal of thunder, I do not pretend to determine. If only the latter, it would be sufficiently startling, occurring at the moment it did, and in an age when thunder and lightning were among the most mysterious phenomena of nature. Still that this is the record of a fact, the whole structure of the passage shows. Were it a mere fiction, it is impossible to conceive how a writer, so much under the influence of a love of the marvellous as to think of exalting Jesus by fabricating a miraculous circumstance, could ever have dreamed of putting into his mouth such an interpretation of the event.

His conduct towards the disciple who betrayed him,

the disciple who denied him, and the magistrate who, against his own convictions, condemned him to death, is marked by the same magnanimity.

Whether Jesus was perfectly acquainted with the character and destiny of Judas in the first instance, may admit of a doubt. I cannot believe, as it sometimes seems to be supposed, that this wretched man was chosen as a disciple for the express purpose of doing what he did. I should prefer to conjecture, in the absence of direct testimony, that Jesus cherished the hope of exerting a beneficial influence upon Judas. One thing, however, is clear, that he, who knew what was in man, could not long have remained ignorant of the besetting sin of his traitorous adherent. His crime, great as it was, was not unaccountable. That he was not devoid of sensibility, his awful fate, revealing the poignancy of his remorse, proves plainly. It was the common vice of avarice that was his ruin. And it was probably by expectations awakened by the love of money, that he was induced to adhere to Jesus. He was exasperated, because this low craving, so far from being gratified, was continually rebuked by the words and spirit of his Master. The waste of that costly ointment, which was poured upon the person of Jesus by Mary, appears to have been the proximate cause of that treacherous bargain which he made with the priests. Possibly he flattered himself that, if Jesus were really the Messiah, he would suffer no harm, and if he were not, then it would be an honourable service to deliver him over to punishment and death. But we are interested now in observing how he was treated by him he used so basely.

At the Last Supper, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter of John, the feelings of Jesus towards the traitor are incidentally and most touchingly disclosed. That the confidence which his disciples cherished in him might not be shaken; that they might, after his death, know that nothing had befallen him for which he had not been prepared, he deems it right and necessary to tell them, what then certainly he had perfect knowledge of, namely, that one of them would deliver him into the power of his enemies. At that moment, his popularity was so great that the priests did not dare to attempt to seize him in public. They gladly availed themselves of the assistance of one of his followers, who knew the places to which he was accustomed to retire. Of the plot which had been laid Jesus was fully aware through his extraordinary knowledge; and, as I have just said, he makes known his acquaintance with it to his disciples, that they may afterwards perceive that he was not taken by surprise. But he communicates to them no more than was barely necessary to produce this effect. He does not taunt Judas. He takes no pleasure in showing that he was aware of his treachery. On the contrary, he approaches the subject with most evident reluctance. He alludes to it twice very obscurely, once when he was washing the feet of his disciples, when he said, "And ye are clean, but not all," and again, a few moments afterwards, observing, "I speak not of you all. I know those I have chosen." And at last, when he explicitly declares that one of them would betray him, saying outright, "One of you shall betray me," he is "troubled in spirit," agitated, distressed. When

they severally exclaim, in answer to this last observation, "Is it I? Is it I?" he answers not; only to his favourite disciple John, who, in accordance with the reclining posture in which it was customary then to sit at table, leaned on the bosom of Jesus, does he designate the individual to whom he referred. Even to John it appears that he must have spoken in a whisper, for none of the rest heard him. And to John he did not breathe the name of Judas. It would seem that he knew he was watched, by Peter especially, who had beckoned to John to ask to whom Jesus alluded. He therefore adopts a sign, and directs John to observe to whom he was just about to give the morsel which he had dipped into the dish. He knew the excitable nature of Peter and the rest, and he avoided stirring up their wrath against the traitor. When Judas, stung with mortification and rage, left the place, Jesus did not take the opportunity of his departure, to disclose the name and purpose of the traitor, but he shows the elevation of his mind by that burst of mingled sublimity and pathos, to which the Scriptures themselves scarcely afford a parallel. He seems instantly to forget the treacherous disciple. The departing steps of Judas, going to consummate his base purpose, sound in his ears like the approaching steps of his own fate. The end was now beginning. His death he felt was then close at hand, but as it drew nigh, it shone with a celestial glory. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." From the contemplation of the glory that awaited him in that sublime, self-sacrificing death of the cross, he

turns to his disciples with words of melting tenderness. "My children!" * says he, "in a little while I must leave you, and, as I said to the Jews, I now say to you, whither I go ye cannot come. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." With what exquisite truth did he, under the circumstances, call this a new commandment! The thought of his death, brought vividly home to him by the departure of Judas, brings along with it the thought that he was about to be separated from his friends, and instantly his heart overflows with tenderness. It seems as if, at that moment, the strength of his affection for them was laid bare to his own eyes. So deep was the love of which he was then conscious, that it seemed to him like a new feeling, and as if he had never before commanded his disciples to love one another. In order to perceive the fine working of nature revealed in that phrase 'a new commandment,' the reader has only to reflect, how often in his own experience, the most familiar thoughts, the strongest affections, have been suddenly brought over him with such force, that they seemed altogether new.

I beg the reader to study again and again this most remarkable chapter, the thirteenth of John. The writer shows himself utterly unconscious of any design

* In the Common Version it is, "Little children," which is a literal, but not the true translation. The word in the original is evidently a term of endearment, and should be rendered by a term of corresponding import. When moved by tenderness towards one or a number of our friends, we say, "My child!" or, "My children!" not "Little child," or, "Little children."

but to state, with all directness and brevity, what took place on the occasion specified. He stops to make only one or two brief comments. He says nothing of the extraordinary moral beauty which he depicts. And yet everything is in the profoundest harmony with the greatness and tenderness of the character of Jesus. If all the rest of the history were pronounced false and fabulous, here, on this portion of it, we discern the deepest impress of life and nature. How wonderfully natural that remark of John's—“After the sop Satan entered into him.” John knew not until that moment the traitorous design of Judas, whose whole appearance and expression, even if he did not betray his malignant passions in his features, must have been instantaneously changed in the eyes of John. John then saw the demon in his countenance, and in perfect accordance with nature, says, that after Judas had received the morsel from Jesus, Satan entered into him.

We perceive the same nobleness of mind in the bearing of Jesus towards Peter. Jesus was apprehended at night in the garden, and carried thence to the house of the Jewish High Priest. There, after a hurried examination and a pretence of judgment, the high council of the nation declared him worthy of death. The council then broke up, leaving Jesus in the hall of the High Priest's house, in the custody of an unfeeling crowd, who immediately began to offer every indignity to his person, spitting upon him, blind-folding him, and then striking him suddenly with the palms of their hands, and in mockery bidding him use his extraordinary knowledge and tell which it was that

smote him. It pains us to refer to these details,—to think of Jesus of Nazareth, that generous and exalted being, subjected to this brutal treatment. While these things were going on, Peter, who had had the courage to follow his master to the High Priest's house, was accosted by some one, who said, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." Peter probably had supposed that his master might not receive any injury. Unprepared for what was now taking place, and alarmed at the violence which was used towards Jesus, his courage suddenly dies away, and in his terror he is driven to declare to the woman who had expressed her suspicions of him, that he knew not what she meant. Finding himself suspected, he endeavours, as we may surmise from Matthew's narrative, to leave the place.* This movement awakened suspicion anew. Again it was said, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." Still more terrified by the repetition of the accusation, he declared with the solemnity of an oath "I know not the man." Finding that in attempting to leave the hall he had exposed himself to suspicion, he seems to have returned and stood or sate by the fire which had just been kindled. But he could not escape observation. Some of them that stood by turned to him, and said, "Surely thou art also of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee." It is probable that, in his agitation, the wretched disciple said much more than is recorded, and by the peculiarity of his dialect showed himself to be a Galilean. "Then he

* See Matth. xxvi. 71. According to this account, the second time Peter was charged with being a follower of Jesus occurred *when he was gone out into the porch.*

began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man." The language of the original implies that his curses were pronounced, not upon his accusers, but upon himself, as if he had said ' May I perish if I know anything about this man. God is my witness, I am not this man's friend. I know him not.'

While Peter was uttering these asseverations, his master was suffering the greatest indignities. The cruel hands of boisterous men were raining blows upon him, accompanied by every species of insult. In the midst of this violence, his ear caught the sound of a familiar voice, pouring forth oaths and curses. It was Peter, the affectionate, forward, boastful Peter, who, in this violent manner, and in the presence of that brutal company, was denying all knowledge of Jesus. Judging from his recent professions, we should expect that, at the first blush of insult offered to his master, he would have sprung forward, and defended him at the hazard of his life. But this he did not do. He swore solemnly, and repeatedly, that he knew not Jesus, and was no friend of his. Had not his generous master known him better than he knew himself, this cowardly and faithless conduct of a friend must have been a severer blow to him than any inflicted by his unfeeling tormentors. But he was prepared for it. He knew the weakness of Peter. He uttered no exclamations of surprise, no reproach at his faithlessness. This was a time to try the character of Jesus. Had he been any other than the perfectly magnanimous being that he was, he would naturally have contradicted the shameless falsehoods of Peter. He would have sought to avert

the blows of the cruel men around him, by pointing out to them another, and a worthy object of their mockery. But so far was he above everything of this kind, so far above all selfishness and anger, that he merely turned and looked at Peter. Those eyes, through which beamed the most generous spirit that ever dwelt in a human bosom, were turned full in all their awful clearness and serenity upon the apostate disciple, and they dissolved his heart in the tears of an agonizing repentance. No word was spoken, for Jesus thought not to implicate others in his sufferings, no, not even one who at that moment seemed so richly to deserve to suffer. Who can be insensible to the magnanimity here exhibited! To adopt the eloquent remark of a most eloquent writer,—“When Peter had denied him thrice, the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. If that look taught Peter to repent, it may teach us to believe: the fraud and the folly, which we witness, have no such singleness of heart, and such plain majesty of action. Whenever we behold such signs as these, we hail them as the marks which God has put upon truth and good faith; premeditated sophistry may destroy the first burst of nature, but in reading the history of Christ's death, the fresh and sudden feelings of the heart all acquit him, all praise him, all believe in him;—we all feel as Pontius Pilate his judge felt, who, when he had looked at him, and heard him speak, broke from the judgment seat, and bathed his trembling hands in the water, saying, ‘I call you all to witness, I am guiltless of the blood of this innocent man.’”*

* See Sydney Smith's Sermons, vol. i. p. 178. Sermon “On Good Friday.”

What a strong and cheering light does the character of Jesus, as revealed in his treatment of Peter, cast upon the character of God! It may not be denied that the Deity is frequently represented as a stern and repulsive being. But would we know how God regards the sinful, we must turn to Jesus Christ. He declares himself *one* with the Father. Would we learn what the Supreme Spirit is, we must study the spirit of Christ; for they are one. They who believe that this Oneness is literal and personal must feel the whole force of this argument. For the Supreme is unchangeable. And if Christ was full of consideration, then surely this must be the character of God, and we may well believe that every allowance is made for us, by him who knows our frame, and remembers we are dust. If any conduct justifies indignation, it is such conduct as Peter's. But how did Jesus treat the faithless apostle? He only turned and looked upon him! looked upon him no doubt with undiminished affection, and with a countenance beaming with pity. Here then, in the hall of the High Priest's palace, and amidst that dark and brutal throng, streams forth a sublime revelation of the unutterable mercy of God, who "hath shone into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST." In that look which was turned upon Peter, there is a beam that, issuing from the Spirit of all light and love, illuminates the upturned features of penitence, and directs her to God as to one, of whose mercy a father's affection, and a mother's fondness, are but dim and imperfect types!

The conduct of Jesus, when he stood before the Roman Governor, is marked by the same elevation, which we have observed in so many instances. He betrayed not the slightest symptom of fear, or of any emotion inconsistent with his usual dignity of mind and manner. He calmly declared that his kingdom was not of an outward, political character; if it had been, he would have had adherents to fight for him. But as he had used no violence, it was evident enough he had not sought worldly power. "Art thou a king, then?" asked Pilate. "Yes," is the reply, "I am a king. For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth; and every true man is my subject." Such was his sublime definition of his regal character. After Pilate had put him to the torture of the scourge, with the probable hope, as I have already intimated, that this might satisfy the Jews, it became evident to Jesus that Pilate was too weak to save him, and of course that words were of no avail. And when Pilate began again to question him, repeating the same inquiries, he made no answer. The governor then menaced him with his power. How justly does Jesus appear to have estimated the character of Pilate! He neither weakly defers to the imbecile magistrate, nor does he utter one upbraiding word, but simply observes that Pilate had no power of his own; that he was but an instrument, and that the principal guilt of the transaction rested with others. The injustice with which he was treated disturbed not, for a moment, the clearness and calmness of his mind. It neither intimidated, nor exasperated him.

It cannot be that we have hearts, and that they are to remain cold and insensible to all these various and touching manifestations of the mingled tenderness and wisdom of the Man of Nazareth. Who can help feeling that he must come hither—to this, the heavenliest model of all virtue, to kindle his best sentiments, to elevate and refine his sense of truth and rectitude, to feed his imperishable soul? Who so high in rank, so gifted in intellect, as to refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Master? In all that elevates human nature, he is the master of us all. There is nothing humiliating—oh no—it must be our delight and honour—it must all-ennoble us to accord him this title. The words of the fervent old poet—have they now no music in our ears?

“ How sweetly doth MY MASTER sound! MY MASTER!
 As ambergris leaves a rich scent
 Unto the taster:
 So do these words a sweet content,
 An oriental fragrancancy: MY MASTER!”

The instances I have adduced in this chapter to illustrate the moral greatness of Jesus Christ, I have arranged with very little order. I knew not how to do otherwise, or better, or where to begin. And I know not now where to end. There are numerous other occasions upon which the wonderful beauty of his moral being is disclosed. I must break off with the hope that the illustrations of this great subject, which have been specified, have been stated at least with some distinctness and discrimination, not altogether from hearsay, but with some personal feeling of their truth. If this hope be not justifiable, it would be in

vain to say more. But if I have been at all successful in what I have attempted, then enough has been said to show how abundant are the materials which the Christian Records have furnished us, whereby we may construct in our minds an idea of moral greatness, to which history affords no equal. Not a trace appears in these writings of any design to work out the uniform consistency, apparent in this respect. The writers appear to be occupied with nothing but a statement of facts; of facts which, however, they do not enlarge upon, nor make the least effort to combine into a whole. They pass abruptly from one incident to another, entirely different in its details, unconscious of the beautiful and godlike spirit which they portray. Not that they were insensible to the power of the character of him, whose words and works they relate. They could not possibly have given stronger proof of their being thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Jesus, which was the spirit of truth, than they have given in their simple, unvarnished narrations.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

“Auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat.”—TACITUS ANN. lib. xv.

The leader of this denomination was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, suffered punishment under the procurator Pontius Pilate.—*Trans.*

THE marks of truth and nature upon the accounts of the death of Jesus and his rising from the dead are so numerous and impressive, that I propose to make this portion of the history the subject of particular examination. It is precisely such a relation of these most interesting events as we might naturally expect, supposing them to be true. The whole style of narration, the discrepancies between the different accounts, the very errors and mistakes apparent in some subordinate particulars, all indicate precisely such a state of feeling as must have been produced in the eye and ear witnesses, if the things related actually took place. It is in this perfect truth of feeling, so abundantly disclosed, that I find an impregnable ground for my faith. The testimony of one man, giving indubitable tokens of a true spirit, is absolutely decisive in itself, admitting of no comparison with the testimony of men in whom no such spirit is discernible, even though they were numberless. It is not therefore upon the number of the witnesses in

the present case that I rely, but upon the overwhelming evidence given that these histories are the productions of truth and honesty. It is true, we are extremely liable to be deceived as to the indications of the presence of a true mind in any given instance. But what does this prove? Not, surely, that there is no such thing as a true mind, but that truth of feeling is so powerful to impress and convince, that the slightest appearance of it carries with it the greatest weight.

Jesus was tried and executed on the day preceding the Jewish Sabbath, of course on a Friday. Respecting the precise hour of his crucifixion the accounts vary.* Various methods of reconciling the statements of Mark and John have been attempted, but it seems to me scarcely necessary. It would be very strange, and not at all natural, if the power of noting the lapse of time had not been disturbed in the minds of the spectators and participants in the scene, while events were taking place so intensely interesting.

From the time Jesus was nailed to the cross until he expired, it appears from the different accounts that he spoke seven times. We are not able to determine with certainty the precise order in which the various sentences and ejaculations ascribed to him were uttered. The following, however, appears to me their most probable sequence. As they were nailing him to the cross, or just as that terrible office was completed, he breathed forth that sublime prayer upon which I remarked in the foregoing chapter, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they

* See Mark xv. 25, and John xix. 14.

do." After he was crucified, they immediately began to jeer and ridicule him. And then it was that the brief conversation passed between him and one of his fellow-sufferers. "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise"—in other words, 'thou shalt immediately be with me in the condition of the virtuous dead.' The individual to whom these words were addressed, in his ready appreciation of the character of Jesus, whose meek and touching demeanour he had observed, in rebuking the other criminal who had joined with the crowd in ridiculing Jesus, how impressively did he show that he was already, spiritually speaking, on the very threshold of heaven! Already was he in paradise. Shortly afterwards, Jesus, recognising among the multitude his mother and his favourite friend John, signified his wish that she should regard John as her son in his place, and that John should consider her as his mother. The thirst naturally attendant upon the intense agony which he was enduring soon became so severe that he could not help giving expression to his feelings. He exclaimed "I thirst," and one of the crowd brought, fastened upon the end of a reed, a piece of sponge which had been dipped into a mixture of vinegar and myrrh, a preparation used on such occasions, out of mercy to the crucified, to stupify and deaden their sensibility. A portion of this mixture was offered to Jesus, just before he was crucified, and he refused to drink it. He would not avail himself of any such means of escaping the torture that awaited him. Just before the sponge was lifted to his lips, his sufferings were so severe that for a moment he seemed to be overwhelmed with a feeling of

desperation, which burst forth in the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" For an instant his agony was intolerable. Still even his momentary despair is expressed in the devout language of scripture. These words are the commencement of one of the Psalms. The sharp paroxysm of pain appears to have been soon succeeded by a feeling of relief, and life began rapidly to ebb away. At this moment he exclaimed, "It is finished," or 'it is over.' This exclamation is sometimes interpreted in too formal a manner, as if Jesus referred to the completion of his great mission, whereas it is more natural and simple to suppose that he alluded to the excruciating pain he had just suffered. His last words were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." With this expression of filial trust, his head fell and he expired.

Thus died the Man of Nazareth, not with stoical insensibility, but with natural indications of the extremest suffering. Who does not prize his expressions of forgiveness, filial affection, and piety, more deeply, as bursting from a heart palpitating and almost broken with mortal agonies, than if he had maintained a stony indifference, or exhibited the demeanor of one steeled by a peculiar temperament or a stern purpose against the betrayal of the least sign of suffering? In the latter case we could not have had a manifestation of character at once so elevated, and yet so perfectly natural. We could hardly have avoided the impression of something forced and artificial. It would have seemed as if he were actuated by some sentiment of human honour,

or some desire to triumph over his tormenters, and baffle their malice. He did triumph over them gloriously. But then his victory was the more complete, his glory the more signal, on this very account, even because he never struggled for victory over men, never sought the faintest shadow of human glory. He was influenced by no narrow reference to human standards of thought and judgment. He felt and spoke and acted under no constraint. To every deep feeling of his heart he gave free expression. When he suffered, he showed that he suffered. And though his whole soul is laid bare, and we see that his agony was extreme, we discover no trace of fear. His emotions were natural, but never unworthy of him, and his predominant feelings were of the most generous and exalted character. For my own part, I could more easily doubt the plainest evidence of my senses, than the reality of the scene which I have now briefly reviewed, and from which I gather so vivid and consistent an impression of the most perfect beauty and the most perfect nature, without any design apparent on the part of the historian to produce this impression.

Jesus breathed his last very soon, in a few hours after he was fastened to the cross. It was not unusual for persons in that horrible situation to survive for days. It was natural, therefore, that Pilate should be surprised at the speedy termination of the sufferings of Jesus. But when we consider all the probable circumstances of the case, it can hardly surprise us that the vital principle was so soon extinguished. I cannot but believe that there was the greatest physical

difference between Jesus and those who usually suffered death by crucifixion. The latter were generally men of the lowest description, of a coarse, rugged temperament ; while with the thought of Jesus is naturally associated in the mind the idea of an almost feminine susceptibility. As I have more than once had occasion to observe, the whole tenour of Christianity intimates as much. But the acuteness of his sensibility to pain is explicitly shown in the accounts of his death. How fearful and overpowering were his agonies, that cry of his, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me !” proves very clearly. The generous affection, the filial love particularly, to which he gave expression on the cross, reveals the depth of his sensibilities. I beg to observe by the way, that the full beauty of the incident to which I now allude, the manifestation of his concern for his mother, does not appear to have been perceived. In our version the passage runs thus : “ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son ! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother !” But the slightest glance at the original shows that the words of Jesus were, “ Woman ! behold ! thy son !” and when he spoke to John, “ Behold ! thy mother !” The difference between the two readings is more important than it may at first seem. The reading of the common version presents us with a complete sentence, while in the original the utterance of Jesus appears to be broken and ejaculatory. In this case, there is a fine and touching accordance between the brief imperfect mode of expression, and

the physical condition of the speaker—a condition of mortal agony. Parched with thirst, and almost in the very pains of death, he was able to utter himself only briefly, and at intervals, and to signify his affectionate wishes with regard to his mother, by a word or two, which he accompanied, possibly by a look, or an inclination of the head, or some slight movement, such as his confined and agonizing posture allowed, relying upon the quick-conceiving affections of his mother and John to make out his meaning. The noise and the crowd may have required a considerable effort of voice from Jesus, to make himself heard by his mother and John, who probably were not able to approach very near the cross. There is an impression of deliberation and formality produced by the common and erroneous reading of this passage, which does not correspond so naturally with the circumstances. How profound must have been the sensibility of that heart, whose filial affection the distracting pangs of a most terrible death could not quench! It is impossible that one so constituted could have long endured such fearful sufferings.

When I consider the character of Jesus, his astonishing elevation of mind, his lofty aims, his laborious life; when I think how successfully he sustained himself, at a point where the tremendously exciting circumstances, to which he was almost every hour exposed, could not reach him, I cannot but feel that all the energies of his physical temperament, were it of the most finely organized character, must have been tasked to the uttermost. The real ground of surprise, I am persuaded, is, not that he died so soon after

being suspended upon the Cross, but that he did not expire sooner. Nay, we may almost wonder that he lived to be crucified. With a nature singularly fitted to find strength and satisfaction and happiness in this world, in human aids and supports, he lived deprived of all these. Once and again, the thought of his peculiar destiny, elevating as it usually was, seems almost to have overpowered him. The dreadful baptism, as he termed it, which he was about to go through—how did he long to have it over! Consider, too, how much he had suffered, just before his crucifixion. The night before, in the garden, the agony of his mind was so exhausting, that as he himself said, it seemed to him as if he should die—as if he could not live. Recollect the brutal treatment to which he was exposed, at the house of the High Priest,—and then again at the rough and savage hands of the Roman soldiers! He had bled, too, beneath the tortures of the Roman scourge, an instrument of pain so severe, that ancient authors pronounce it *horrible*.* How greatly he was exhausted, the circumstance that another was seized and compelled to carry his cross for him, intimates very probably. This would hardly have been allowed, if the appearance of Jesus, weak and fainting, had not awakened in the minds of the Roman soldiers the fear that he might die, and that so they might be disappointed of their barbarous sport.

Bearing all these things in mind, I cannot wonder that he lived upon the cross only a few hours. And

* See Wakefield on Matthew, who quotes Horace, and refers to Juvenal.

I can scarcely bear even for the purpose of confirmation to allude to the suspicion which has sometimes been expressed, that he did not actually die, but only swooned. I cannot but regard it as utterly incredible that so much agony should have resulted in anything short of death. As the Sabbath, and it was a special religious observance, was near at hand, the Jewish elders, with a characteristic scrupulousness, anxious that the festival should not be defiled by the unsightly and unclean spectacle, requested Pilate to cause the crucified to be put to death, and their bodies to be removed. In compliance with this request, the Roman governor directed that the legs of the sufferers should be broken. This would appear to be a usual operation in such cases, and the effect of it, or of some blow by which it was accompanied, was to put a speedy termination to life. When the persons entrusted with this office came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead, and surprised at his having expired so soon, and doubtful of the fact, a soldier pierced his side with a spear. This was undoubtedly done to make it certain that he was dead. If, as we may suppose, the soldier stood before the cross, and held his spear in his right hand, he most probably plunged the weapon into the left side, and so reached a vital part. I know not whether it is so by design, but in Rubens's celebrated picture of the Descent from the Cross, the mark of the spear is shown on the right side of Jesus. From the wound made by the soldier there issued "blood and water."*

* It is worthy of note, that John accompanies the record of this circumstance with a solemn asseveration of its truth: "And he that

have in these words a Hebrew form of expression, equivalent to bloody water, or watery blood,—water more or less discoloured by blood. The heart is always surrounded by a small quantity of water, apparently designed to lubricate it, and facilitate its motion. It is said that in cases of persons who die after extreme suffering, this water is considerably increased in quantity.* If the history had stated simply that blood flowed from the side of Jesus, there might be some plausibility in the suspicion, either that he was not really dead, as blood does not usually flow from a dead body, or that this circumstance was fabricated for the sake of showing that Jesus was actually dead, although it would have

saw it bare record, and his record is true." We cannot help suspecting that the historian had reference here to a sect that appeared very early, the Docetæ, who maintained that Christ came only in *appearance*. There is, at least, a singular coincidence between the importance attached to the discharge of blood and water by the Evangelist, and the language of the historian Gibbon: "*While the blood of Christ yet smoked on Mount Calvary, the Docetæ invented the impious and extravagant hypothesis, that, instead of issuing from the womb of the Virgin, he had descended on the banks of the river Jordan, in the form of perfect manhood: that he had imposed on the senses of his enemies, and of his disciples; and that the ministers of Pilate had wasted their impotent rage on an airy phantom, who seemed to expire on the cross, and, after three days, to rise from the dead.*"—(The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chapter xxi.) In more than one instance the Gospel of John appears to have reference to cotemporaneous opinions.

* "The 'liquor pericardii' is, in general, in such small quantities that its effusion is scarcely evident; but when the death is slow, and even in the case of a person who is hung, it accumulates rapidly, as well as in all the pectoral vessels, besides the pericardium."—(Michaelis on the Resurrection.)

proved no such thing. But putting out of view all anatomical considerations, it is impossible to account for the mention of "blood *and water*," (a phrase which may mean merely discoloured water,) save upon the supposition that there was actually such a discharge. There is no conceivable inducement for the mention of water, but its actual appearance. In this case I know not how there can linger the least doubt of the death of Jesus.

The crucifixion of Jesus was attended by certain appalling circumstances. "Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land, unto the ninth hour.—And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who slept, arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many."*

Whether the earthquake which is recorded to have taken place was miraculous, using the word in its popular sense, and was caused as an expression of Divine displeasure, admits of a very serious doubt. Thus regarded, it surely does not correspond with the spirit of mercy and forgiveness which glorified the agonies of Jesus. Besides, it certainly admitted of a double interpretation; and his enemies may have understood it as a token in their favour, against him. The darkness by which it was preceded, and which came on some hours before he breathed his last, was certainly calculated, if construed as a sign from

* See Matthew, xxvii. 45, 51—53.

Heaven, to aggravate the gloom and horror of dying.

But however we may regard the earthquake, the fact that there was an earthquake, appears to be most evident from the manner in which it is mentioned. If these extraordinary circumstances were fabricated, it must have been for a certain purpose; to express the horror excited by the wickedness of those who had put Jesus to death. And the writers, who entertained so great an abhorrence of the destroyers of Jesus as to invent such an extraordinary physical phenomenon to express their indignation, would certainly not have contented themselves with such a naked statement of the fact. They would have made some remark explanatory of the convulsion of nature. They would have accompanied the account with some expression of their own feelings, which must have been strong indeed to lead them to imagine or to invent what did not really take place.

And besides, when the occurrence of the earthquake is admitted, all the other circumstances mentioned admit of being accounted for in a very natural manner. The rending of the veil in the temple which hung before the Holy of holies, and which was probably worn by time, the splitting of rocks, and the opening of the graves, which, like the sepulchre in which Jesus was laid, and like the grave of Lazarus, were usually caves with stones rolled at their mouths to close them—all these may have been caused by the agitation of the earth. Now I beg the reader to pause, and picture to himself the then state of things, and he will discern an impressive manifestation of

truth and nature in this portion of the history. The individual who had just expired on the cross, had everywhere produced the greatest sensation. The intense interest which the leading men of the nation had taken in putting him to death, proves that he could have been no common person. Everywhere the people had flocked round him in multitudes, and he was very generally regarded as a Prophet. His benignity, his wisdom, his unwonted air of authority, his extraordinary powers, had moved the public mind deeply. And now that he had just breathed his last upon the cruel cross, darkness had overcast the heavens, and the earth had trembled so violently that rocks had been rent, and the stones which closed the sepulchres had been moved from their places, so that the remains of the dead were exposed to the view of the alarmed passers by. The history does not say that at the time of the crucifixion the dead arose, but that "after his resurrection" they awoke, and came into the city and appeared to many. The third day after the death of Jesus, he rose from the dead. The knowledge of this startling event must have been rumoured abroad, whispered over the city, through the guard, and among the disciples of Jesus, with the greatest rapidity, some time before the full evidence of the fact was published. Consider how the public heart was throbbing with excitement. Think how fearfully the minds of the tender and susceptible, of those especially, whose thoughts, from one cause or another, as from the recent loss of near friends, were dwelling upon the mysteries of the other world, must have been agitated by all that Jesus had said and done, by the

awful circumstances of his death, by the darkness and the earthquake and the rending of rocks and the opening of tombs and the sight of the dead, and then you will see how impressively it accords with the perturbed state of men's imaginations, that there should have been visions, and stories and rumours of ghosts and apparitions. Observe, the historian does not say that he himself, or any of the disciples, saw the dead who awoke, but that they "were seen by many." It is not merely to meet the difficulty which serious and well-disposed minds have found in this portion of the history, that I suggest this view of the case. It goes infinitely farther. It reveals a world of truth, nature and evidence. It not only furnishes the strongest presumption of the truth of the great central facts, the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it also reveals the tremendous depth of the impression which his life and death had made. It discloses undesignedly the existence of precisely such a state of feeling as must have been produced by the events previously narrated, if these events really took place. In a word, it is in beautiful and unconscious accord with the nature of the human mind, and I cannot express the strength of conviction which it adds to my faith.

It shows what an interest Jesus had awakened, that persons so eminent as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, members of the Jewish Sanhedrim, should have been solicitous to see him decently interred. They went to the Roman Governor and obtained permission to bury Jesus. The body was taken down from the cross about sunset on Friday, and laid in a new

tomb belonging to Joseph, near the place of execution. The female friends of Jesus, whose affection was less alloyed than that of the other disciples by selfish ambition, were still faithful to him. They watched the body while it remained on the cross, and took care to see, when it was removed, where it was deposited, that they might pay to the precious remains every possible office of respect. His other followers evidently regarded his death as the utter ruin of those high hopes he had inspired. If it be doubted whether he actually predicted his own death and resurrection, then it must be admitted that his disciples had no expectation of these events. Or, if we credit the history, as I think we must, when it informs us that Jesus told his followers that he was to be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day, then also the reason is manifest why the prediction made no impression on their minds, and retained no place in their memories. They believed him to be the Messiah, that magnificent Prince. The idea of his dying the death of a common malefactor was of all things the most shocking to their minds. They must have rejected it with an instinctive horror. A great deal of his language sounded very enigmatical on account of their strong prejudices. And it is highly probable that when he spake of his death, they supposed he was speaking figuratively, and that his words had some other than their obvious meaning.* That they had no dis-

* It deserves attention for various reasons that his predictions of his death and resurrection appear always to have been uttered upon those occasions when the earthly hopes of his disciples must have been most strongly excited. See Matt. xvi. 21, Mark x. 32, and

tinct idea of what was to happen, appears from the circumstance that only a few hours before he was seized by his enemies, while he was observing the Passover with them, they disputed which should take precedence in that temporal kingdom, whose establishment they fondly expected. When at last he was hung upon the cross, when he expired there, they were overwhelmed by the terrible fact. They cared not to recur to his words for comfort and light, for they felt that all was over. The hopes he had built up were shaken to their centre.

The near approach of the Sabbath caused the

Luke ix. 43. The passage in Luke is particularly remarkable. "And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not; and they feared to ask him of that saying."

1. Through no weakness did he ever lose sight of his awful fate. While all around him were magnifying him, filled with amazement at his extraordinary power, the tumultuous feeling that heaved in all hearts shook not him. Not for an instant was he blinded to his true and fearful destiny.

2. We see here why it was that his personal disciples failed to comprehend at the time what he meant, when he spake of his sufferings and death. How strange and inexplicable must his language have appeared to those who were confidently expecting him to assume a princely state and authority, and never more confidently than after he had wrought some mighty work!

3. The utterance of such language under such circumstances, even though it was not rightly understood at the moment, was strikingly fitted to make an ineffaceable impression on the minds of the disciples, and the words of Jesus must have recurred to them afterwards, when subsequent events began to interpret their meaning, with a distinct and overwhelming force.

burial of Jesus to be brief and hurried. The Jewish priests and elders, holding him to be an impostor, and therefore not having the same difficulty in understanding his predictions, which his disciples had, recollected that he had said he would rise again from the dead on the third day. They caught eagerly at his prophecy, in its literal sense, and trusted to disprove it. Accordingly they procured a guard of soldiers to be stationed at the place where the body of Jesus was laid, and thus they expected by the event to destroy his credit for ever.

The account which I shall here insert, of the circumstances which took place on the third day after the death of Jesus, is, with considerable additions, the same that originally appeared in the *Christian Examiner*, (Jan. 1834.) As some, whose judgment I respect greatly, were pleased to characterize it then as more ingenious than true, I have been led to review it more than once with particular care. The only consequence has been an increased conviction of the substantial truth of the following explanation of this portion of the history. The reader will perhaps think this result natural enough. Still I may be allowed to say that my respect for the opinion of those, who are unable to assent to my representation of this memorable event, is so great that I cannot but think I should have relinquished the peculiar views I have suggested, or at least looked upon them with diminished interest, if they did not rest upon grounds of no ordinary strength. I solicit attention to one or two preliminary considerations.

I will first, however, for the convenience of the reader, insert here those portions of the four Gospels, which relate to the subject.

Matth. xxviii. 1—11. " In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake ; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow : and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye ; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here ; for he is risen as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead : and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him : lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy ; and did run and bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, All hail. And they came, and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid : go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done."

Mark xvi. 1—8. " And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre, at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre ? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away : for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified : he is risen : he is not here : behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly,

and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid."

Luke xxiv. 1—12. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold two men stood by them, in shining garments; and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven and the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, who told these things to the Apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter and ran unto the sepulchre, and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass."

John xx. 1—18. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie; and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple who came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the door of the sepulchre, weeping: and as

she wept, she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and said unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, my master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her."

1. Presuming the reader has read over these passages with care, I beg him to observe, in the first place, that they all state that the particulars related took place *very early* in the morning, and that the last account, the only one that purports to be the testimony of one of the individuals personally present at the sepulchre, (John,) states that it was *yet dark*. Surely this is a circumstance that should be allowed some weight, even though the witnesses were the keenest observers. Add to this the circumstance that the light in the sepulchre could not have been the strongest, as it appears that they who went into it were compelled to stoop. It must have descended more or less abruptly into the earth.

2. It deserves serious attention that it was not Peter nor John, nor any of the male friends of Jesus, but *women* who saw *angels* at the tomb. Is the constitutional difference of the sexes—the peculiar sen-

sibility and imaginativeness of the female character to be wholly disregarded by a sincere seeker after truth?

3. Not only were they women who reported the appearance of angels at the sepulchre, but women, of whom we are expressly told that they were startled and hurried into a false conclusion the moment they perceived that the stone had been moved from the tomb, and were afterwards so affected by affright and joy, that they trembled and bowed their faces to the earth, and were almost speechless with amazement.

4. It must not be overlooked that two of the historians in the foregoing passages make no mention of *angels*. Mark says that the women saw a *young man in a long white garment*, and Luke says that they saw two *men* in shining garments.

5. The above-mentioned circumstances affect the accounts now to be examined, as mere human accounts. A due regard to these circumstances is not at all inconsistent with a full acknowledgment of the moral and intellectual competency of the persons concerned. When in accordance with the foregoing considerations I venture to doubt whether the women saw angels at the sepulchre, I *do not distrust their statement of the testimony of their senses, but only the inferences which, in the agitation of their minds, they drew from that testimony*. And this distrust, I maintain, is dictated by the soundest principles of thought and interpretation. I do not say that the women thought they saw angels when they saw nothing, but that they misapprehended what they saw. Most assuredly I treat them with no disrespect. In the accounts of this very scene, we are expressly told of two

mistakes which they made. When they saw the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, they instantly, without the slightest appearance of misgiving or doubt, caught at the idea that the body of Jesus had been stolen away. This mistake does not affect their testimony as to the fact that the stone was removed. On the contrary, it is so natural a mistake in the then state of their minds, that it goes to prove the reality of the fact of the removal of the stone. Nothing else could have suggested it. Again, Mary Magdalene saw Jesus and mistook him for the gardener. In view of these things, is there not room, in all candour and honesty, nay, are we not bound by a sincere anxiety to ascertain the real state of the case, to question the inferences which the women drew from what they saw?

6. The misapprehension into which I am led to believe the women most naturally fell, not only does not affect the reality of the one great fact, the re-appearance of Jesus alive after his death, it lays bare a mass of the most powerful evidence in its favour. Nothing accounts for the misapprehension but the actual presence of Jesus, and this accounts for it in a way the most natural and wholly undesigned. Thus nature, unconsciously working in the hearts and the imagination of the women, becomes a witness to the truth, and evidence of this kind produces a depth of conviction which the concurrent testimony of a thousand express assertors of the fact never could create.

Let us now, keeping the records before us, mark the circumstances that occurred, and the order in which they took place.

Matthew gives us to understand that, after the women reached the sepulchre, "there was an earthquake, and an angel, with a countenance like lightning, and raiment white as snow, descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." But all the other accounts state that, when the women reached the tomb, the stone was already rolled away. So that the story of the earthquake, and the descending angel with a countenance like lightning and raiment white as snow, must have been told by the soldiers stationed as a guard at the sepulchre, who, it is said, were so terrified, that "they shook and became as dead men!"* There can be no reason why we should not carefully sift the statement of these men, particularly as it is said they were overpowered with fear—a passion which more or less disturbs the power of correct observation, and always disposes to exaggeration. Whether they were understood, or whether they meant to be understood as saying, that they saw the angel descend *visibly* from heaven, is by no means certain. If they believed that they saw an angel, they would naturally suppose that he came down from heaven, and express themselves accordingly. It is worthy of notice, that the earthquake is first mentioned, though it appears to be represented as if produced by the angel. The fact which most obviously and naturally explains this story of the earthquake and the angel seems to me to be this: before it was light, and before the women

* If the women were present when the stone was rolled away, the suspicion would scarcely have been entertained that the body had been removed.

reached the sepulchre, and when there were no persons at the spot but the guard, Jesus, restored to life by the extraordinary power with which he was gifted, rolled away the stone, and came forth from the sepulchre, clad in the long white habiliments of the grave. The motion of the stone, which was "very great," shook the earth, and, as there had been an earthquake the day but one before, the idea of a similar occurrence at once and naturally suggested itself to the minds of the soldiers, who, notwithstanding their violent and daring mode of life, were no doubt, as such men frequently are, very susceptible of superstitious fears, and likely to be panic-struck by a circumstance in itself so startling. The sudden motion of the stone, and the appearance of a figure clad in white, filled them with a mortal dread, and they fled in haste and affright to the city, reporting that an angel had descended from heaven with a countenance like lightning, and *raiment white as snow*; that the earth had shaken, and this supernatural messenger had moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb and sat upon it. If we take the report of the soldiers to the letter, then we make no allowance for the strong tendency of fear to exaggeration. That fear always magnifies its object, is a fact as certain as any pertaining to the constitution of man. And to attach no importance to this disturbing influence in the present case, is as unphilosophical as, in calculating the orbit of one of the heavenly bodies, to make no account of the forces of the other bodies which most nearly approach it.

It is interesting to observe how much the story told

by the soldiers proves when thus understood. It may be asked, how do we know but that this whole account of a guard stationed at the sepulchre is a mere fabrication, designed to make the resurrection of Jesus appear more marvellous and true? It is found in only one of the four histories. The others say nothing of any soldiers at the tomb. In reply, I observe that the very fact that only one of the histories makes any mention of the guard, shows that no great importance was attached to their presence on the spot by the personal followers of Jesus. The disciples, it is most probable, knew nothing until after his resurrection about the tomb's being watched.* And then the evidence they had of this fact was so full and satisfying, that it was a small matter to them what the guard said, or whether there was any guard at all at the sepulchre. But this is not all. The very story which the soldiers told, bearing all the natural marks of exaggeration, showing so undesignedly that it emanated from minds overpowered with terror, establishes, in a manner unspeakably impressive, the fact that there were persons there, human minds and human senses, thus to be acted upon.

Immediately after the departure of the guard, some women, friends and relatives of Jesus, approached the sepulchre. They brought spices with them to embalm the body. They came before the dawn of day, partly perhaps to avoid observation, and partly, that no time might be lost in the performance of the sacred offices of humanity. As they drew near the spot,

* The women certainly did not. Otherwise they could hardly have visited the tomb with the object they had in view.

questioning among themselves, whom they should procure to roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb, they observed that it was already rolled away. Taking alarm at this circumstance, they instantly and most naturally surmised, having so recently witnessed the relentless hatred of his enemies, and thinking of him as the unresisting object of the bitterest persecution, that the body of Jesus must have been removed from the place where his friends had laid it. Without waiting to ascertain the correctness of the inference, Mary of Magdala rushed back to the city to inform the disciples. John, who alone relates the circumstance of Mary's immediate return to the city, does not mention that any other women accompanied her to the tomb. Still, in the most incidental manner, it appears even from his narrative, taken by itself, that others had gone with her to the sepulchre. He tells us that upon her arrival in the city, Mary said to Peter and himself, “They have taken away the master out of the sepulchre, and *we* know not where they have laid him.”

After Mary had left the place, the other women who stood at the mouth of the sepulchre, full of surprise and wondering what the removal of the stone could mean, were unexpectedly accosted by what appeared to them, as Mark says, ‘*a young man in a long white garment,*’ or, as Luke says, ‘*by two men in shining garments,*’ or, according to Matthew, by the angel, ‘with raiment *white as snow,*’ that rolled away the stone. This person, as I suppose, was Jesus himself, just restored to life, and still arrayed in the long white linen in which his body was wrapt when it

was taken from the cross. In the dimness of the light, the long white garment of this unknown person, "the fine linen," was the most prominent circumstance. Accordingly we find it mentioned in all the accounts. But Luke mentions two persons clad in white. Were there two? I am aware that the mention of only one by Matthew and Mark does not prove positively that there were not two. As a general rule, the omissions of one witness do not negative the assertions of another. Still in the case of such extraordinary appearances, the omission is not so natural as if the facts related were of a more common character. Besides, if there were two, although only one spoke, he would have spoken, or he would have been reported to speak, in the plural. But there is no use of the plural in what was said by this unknown person as reported by either of the historians, and Matthew represents the angel as using the first person singular.* And further, the tendency of fear is to magnify. So that on the whole, if we had no other means of settling this difficulty, it seems to me more natural that two should be made out of one than that the contrary should have been the case. But there is another circumstance that throws light on this point. When Jesus came to life, he must have thrown off the cloth that was wrapt over his face, and it probably lay near the place where his head had rested. When we recollect how often, in a dim light, white objects

* Although John omits to mention the women who accompanied Mary to the tomb, yet he reports her as saying upon her return to the city, "we know not where they have laid him." Here is an instance illustrative of the above remark.

have been converted into apparitions by the imagination, and how our ideas of the costume of spirits are unconsciously connected with the habiliments of the grave,* is it difficult to conceive that that part of the grave-clothes which Jesus had put off from his head, lying by itself, may have appeared to the highly excited imaginations of some, or all the women, as another person? Suddenly addressed by a person in white, they may have been led, in the bewilderment of their minds, by the proximity of another white appearance, to conclude there were two persons present in white. Let me repeat here, it is not the senses of the women whose evidence I am questioning, but the inferences which, in the precipitation of their terror, they drew from what they saw and heard. From the circumstance that the person who spoke to them knew them, and knew the object which brought them to the place, they as naturally believed that they were in the presence of supernatural beings.

How do the lights of truth and nature break upon us as we proceed! That we should ever have questioned the inspiration of these histories! They are full of it to overflowing,—the divine inspiration of Nature.

Before Jesus addressed the women, he may have discovered from their voices—from their exclamations of surprise—that they were friends of his. Possibly the sound of their approach had caused him to retire into the tomb, from which he had issued a little while

* “*Antiquissimæ enim hoc apud ipsos est consuetudinis in vestimentis albis tumulto mortuos mandare.*” Vide Johann. Buxtorfii Synag. Jud. p. 700.

before, to the terror of the soldiers. With that perfect collectedness which marked his conduct even in moments when all around him were excited, he does not attempt to make himself known at a time when the dimness of the light rendered it at least doubtful whether the women would recognize him, when their coming to the spot showed that they had no idea of seeing him alive, and when, more than all, he does not appear to have been prepared to disclose himself. He speaks of himself in the third person and seeks to allay their alarm. "Be not afraid. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here:* behold the place where they laid him," that is, see, the tomb is empty. "But go your way. Tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." These words are differently reported by the three historians. The agitation of the women, which was so great that, as we are told, "they bowed their faces to the earth," accounts for the variation. The introduction of the name of Peter is touchingly characteristic of Jesus, and betrays the speaker. Peter had basely denied all knowledge of his master, and well might he doubt, when he should hear that Jesus had risen, whether he would be forgiven an act, which he could bring himself to forgive only at the price of a long and bitter repentance. Well might he fear that those eyes would be coldly averted from him, the awful calm-

* It may be objected that, if it had been Jesus speaking, he could not have said with truth, "He is not here." The meaning of these words evidently is, the dead body is not here, here in the tomb, as you expect to find it. But it is not necessary to suppose that the precise words are reported.

ness of whose glance, the last time they were turned upon him, had sent into his soul the sharpest agony of remorse. But this most generous friend hastened to assure his unhappy disciple that the past was forgotten. The women, having received this message, and believing they had received it from an angel, returned with great haste to the city. Let the language of the history be remarked: "they trembled and were amazed, neither said they anything to any one: for they were afraid."

After their departure, Peter and John, to whom Mary Magdalene had carried the intelligence of the removal of the stone, or rather of the body, for so she construed what she had seen, arrived at the sepulchre. Before they reached the spot, Jesus having found some garments belonging, it has been conjectured, to the gardener,* put off the linen clothes in which his body had been wrapt, throwing off, as I have already said, the cloth which was about his head, so that it lay near where his head had lain, while the remainder he left at the foot of the place where his body had been deposited. John informs us that when he reached the spot, which he did before Peter, he did not dare to go in. A natural feeling of hesitation came over him, and he waited for Peter, who, with characteristic

* If it be considered a question of any interest or importance, how Jesus obtained other and more appropriate clothes, more than one method of solving the difficulty might be proposed. But perhaps it will suffice to remark that the loose garments of the East were easily put on and off, and that there had been a number of persons in the vicinity of the sepulchre, Joseph of Arimathea with his attendants, and afterwards the Roman soldiers. So that it is easy to conjecture how some garments might have been left there.

ardour, as soon as he reached the sepulchre, went boldly in. John followed him. They saw no angel. But John mentions with remarkable particularity how they found the grave-clothes,—“the cloth that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” This minuteness, although the reason of it is not at once obvious, is very natural, and strikes my mind with great force. These two disciples had run to the tomb under the impression communicated by Mary, that the body of Jesus had been removed. Full of this idea they were greatly surprised at seeing the grave-clothes; and it perplexed them to understand why, if the body had been taken away, the grave-clothes had not been taken also—why they should have been left folded up with the appearance of so much deliberation. It may be thought strange that the recollection of their Master’s prediction did not at this moment flash upon them, and lead them to suspect that he had risen. In the entire absence of any such suspicion, I recognise the unequivocal working of nature. Peter and John were excited by surprise. Now, every one knows that, when any strong feeling is awakened and we are deeply moved, we are not only incapable of calm and connected thought, but the most obvious conclusions are generally the first to be overlooked; and when our emotion subsides, we are accustomed to find nothing so wonderful as our own want of thought and recollection. This was, I conceive, precisely the case with the two disciples. The quick belief of Mary that the body had been removed, communicated to them with every look and tone of certainty, had full possession of

their minds. This idea they ran to the tomb to verify or to remove. They did not go to see whether Jesus had risen, but to ascertain whether the body was there. Intent upon this one point, in their hurry, when they found that the body was indeed gone, then, as John informs us, they "*believed*,"—not, certainly, that Jesus had risen, but that what Mary had said was true, that the body was gone. "For as yet they knew not the Scripture that he must rise from the dead."*

After examining the sepulchre, Peter and John returned home, and left Mary standing near the sepulchre, weeping. We may suppose that Peter and John, running very swiftly, reached the tomb before Mary, and that when they came out, they said nothing to her except to intimate that it was even so—that the body had disappeared. Possibly they uttered not a word. But she may have gathered from their looks and manner that they had found it as she had said. "And as she wept," one of the accounts informs us, "she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the

* The editors of the Improved Version (following Newcome), have introduced the negative in John xx. 8, "he saw and believed *not*," in order to accommodate the text to an interpretation which the slightest glance at the ninth verse shows to be an improbable interpretation, to say the least. The authority of Griesbach is in favour of the common reading. Even Gilbert West, in his well-known "Observations on the History and Evidence of the Resurrection, &c.," refers the belief of John to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and not to the report of Mary that the body had been removed. See Watson's Tracts, vol. v. p. 320. Priestley also makes the same reference.

head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’ She saith unto them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’” This passage is very curious, and I intreat the close attention of the reader.

In the first place it is to be considered that the sepulchre was dark in a degree, and that Mary’s eyes were dimmed with tears.

2. If what she saw were really angels, it deserves notice that they served no purpose. They communicated no intelligence.

3. If, the moment she caught sight of them, they spoke to her, it is somewhat strange and unnatural that she should have answered them with so much collectedness.

4. On the other hand, if she had a full and deliberate view of them, it is equally or more strange that she should have answered them as she did, retaining the impression that the body had been taken away, when the supernatural vision before her was so powerfully calculated to check her tears instantly, and to suggest the idea that God and not man had visited the sepulchre.

Finally, it is remarkable that, as soon as she had answered the question, she turned round and saw Jesus standing near her, not knowing that it was he. Are we too bold in suspecting that she mistook what she saw in the sepulchre, a dark place comparatively, when, at almost the same moment, she mistook the familiar countenance of one standing in the open air, and in the morning light? If she had seen angels in

the tomb, would she have turned away so readily? Would she not have been prepared to recognise Jesus? Would she have turned round immediately, forgetting the angels apparently, still persisting in the idea that the body of Jesus had been stolen, and said to him, in reply to his questions, 'Woman, why weepst thou? whom seekest thou?'—supposing him to be the gardener!—"Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away?" I do not suggest these questions captiously, but with a desire, which no apprehension of being misunderstood can repress, to ascertain the truth.

From a careful consideration of these circumstances, I arrive at the following view of the case. I suppose that as Mary stood weeping by the sepulchre, she stooped down and looked into it. Her attention was immediately arrested by the white appearances—the grave-clothes which lay there. I do not suppose that she knew what it was she saw. As she believed that the body had been taken away, she must have presumed, before she looked into the tomb, that the grave-clothes were taken away also. I do not imagine that she was alarmed, but only perplexed, somewhat surprised, as Peter and John had just been before. I doubt whether she thought at the moment that she saw angels, as the two disciples had just come out of the tomb, and though their appearance may have indicated concern and perplexity, they had shown no signs of having seen anything supernatural in the sepulchre. Just as she looked into the tomb, and caught sight of the white objects, a voice addressed her, producing a slight bewilder-

ment, but hardly fear. Before she had finished answering it, her ear caught the sound of some one approaching behind her, and she immediately turned round and saw Jesus, but did not at once recognise him. Not dreaming of seeing him alive, she did not turn fully round at first,* she merely glanced at the person who spoke to her. Natural enough, too, is it to suppose that in telling the cause of her grief, in alluding to her lost friend, her tears burst forth afresh, until she was almost blinded with them. I suppose that the first question, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' which in the history is attributed to the angels, was put by Jesus, who, unobserved himself, had approached her and seen her attitude of grief. It may be doubted whether at the moment Mary supposed that the first question came from the sepulchre. I presume that at first she did not exactly know—scarcely thought from what direction it came. Before she finished her reply, she heard some one near her. As soon as she turned round, Jesus repeated the question, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' adding, 'whom seekest thou?' This addition countenances the conjecture that the question, which Mary afterwards supposed came from the angels, was in fact put by Jesus standing behind her, unobserved. Nothing is more natural and common, when we have addressed an interrogatory to another, and received no direct reply, than to repeat it with additions in a varied form.

When Jesus perceived that Mary did not know

* 'She did not turn fully round at first.' This appears from the circumstance that shortly afterwards, when Jesus said unto her "'Mary,' she turned herself, and said," &c.

him, he said unto her “ Mary ! ” The tone of that voice thrilled her whole frame. How simple and touching—how true to nature and to the character of Jesus was this mode of making himself known ! There is a divine simplicity here which the heart feels, but the pen in vain attempts to describe. How vividly does the scene present itself before us ! We hear that beloved voice uttering in a subdued, half-inquiring tone of tenderness and solemnity, the simple name of Mary. We see her countenance and whole frame suddenly convulsed by the most powerful emotions of amazement, awe, and delight. At one moment she shrinks back with uplifted hands, and with eyes starting from their sockets, and at the next falls clasping his knees and gasping out the exclamation, “ Rabboni ! ”* .

When Mary had recognised Jesus, he said unto her, “ Touch me not ; for I am not yet ascended to my Father : but go to my brethren, and say unto

* See page 184. The remarks there made upon the retaining of the original in the case of two of the miracles, are applicable to the same feature of the narrative here. The word “ Rabboni ” is a common word, and the narrator translates it immediately. But words are often untranslatable, less for the want of terms significant of the same meaning in the language into which the translation is made, than from the absence of some strong but indefinable associations which give to the original a peculiar expressiveness. Hence it is that poetry so seldom survives translation. The exclamation “ Rabboni ! ” was the inspiration of the moment, the symbol which was seized by nature, working mightily in and through the deepest emotions of Mary, whereby to express itself. Thus this particular sound had to Mary herself and to those who listened to her story a power of expression, which no other articulate sound could convey. What volumes does this one word speak for the reality of the great fact, *the appearance of Jesus alive*, which produced such overwhelming emotion !

them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." These words are obscure. But a natural explanation results from a reference to Matthew's account. Matthew says that Jesus appeared first, as they were returning, to *all* the women who visited the tomb. It is natural that such a mistake should have arisen in the hurry with which these exciting events followed one another. Shortly after the women had come into the city, saying they had seen angels at the sepulchre, who said that Jesus had risen, Mary came in saying she had seen Jesus himself. Now as, in the first instance, all the women, Mary with the rest, had gone out to the tomb, it is natural that the story of the women should have been blended with that of Mary, and that it should have been understood by some, that all the women had seen Jesus. Matthew tells us that when the women saw Jesus, they fell down and *held him by his feet*. Now as it was Mary only to whom Jesus appeared, it must have been Mary who held him by his feet. He said unto her, therefore, in effect, 'Detain me not, do not stop now to embrace me, for I do not yet ascend to my Father. You will have other opportunities of seeing me; Go now to my brethren and tell them, &c.' When Mary told the disciples she had seen their master alive, as they were incredulous, they intimated, in all probability, that it was an illusion of which she had been the subject, that she had seen a spectre. She would naturally insist, in reply, that she had not only seen him, but that she had *touched* him,—that she had held him by his feet, and knew that it was real flesh and blood. Hence the phrase

in Matthew, 'and they held him by his feet.' As upon this act of embracing the feet of Jesus much stress must have been laid, as an evidence of the touch to the reality of his appearance, it is possible that the exact words addressed to Mary by Jesus may have been altered, and he may have been made to say "*Touch* me not," when he used a term nearly synonymous, but less obscure.

After Mary had seen Jesus, she returned to the city. There she met the other women, and found that they had seen what they considered as angels. Was it not very natural that she should instantly conclude that the white objects, which she had seen in the sepulchre, were the very angels who had been seen by her friends, and had spoken to them? The appearances which had startled her were now explained. And when afterwards she related her part in the exciting scenes of that eventful morning, she hesitated not to say that she had seen the angels.

Throughout these portions of the New Testament which we have now examined, there is the fine working of nature, free, true, and unsophisticated. But it is not ostentatiously pointed out and displayed. The writers of the histories seem utterly unconscious of it. It is revealed wholly without design. The fact of the re-appearance of Jesus alive is involved in this seamless and living web of Nature, not woven by hands, to which it gives beauty and perfection, and in which it is arrayed, so that this great fact of the Resurrection comes before us clad in the graceful and imperishable garb of Truth. In a word, the unconscious naturalness of the states of mind disclosed in the partici-

pants of these thrilling scenes, is revealed by the supposition of the unrecognised presence of Jesus, and this again is in its turn corroborated by all the nature which it reveals.

At first view the four accounts of the resurrection of Jesus appear to be altogether irregular, brief and fragmentary. And so perhaps they are when tried by the formal and narrow principles of human systems and tribunals. When these historians are treated as witnesses in human courts sometimes are, subjected only to such interrogatories as one and another may be disposed to put to serve some private cause—some partisan purpose—it must be confessed they make but a poor appearance. Oftentimes they are but dumb witnesses, and again their answers appear vague, wandering, and aimless. But let them be questioned by a simple love of truth, mingled with a wise reverence for nature, and then they are transfigured, and truth and nature recognise in them their own inspiration. And these writings in the most important and interesting sense are wonderful for the harmony and completeness they display.

Even if we had no knowledge of the precise circumstances under which the first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection took place, that he did re-appear after his death I could not doubt, not merely because so many instances of his presenting himself to his disciples are expressly specified, but because, without any effort or design on the part of the historians, the identity of his character before and after his death is so perfectly preserved. It is impossible that any one

could have fabricated a personage whose tone of sentiment and expression should be in perfect accordance with that wonderful being who had a little while before expired on the Cross. No human art could have added another chapter to that life. How characteristic in its simplicity the manner in which he made himself known to Mary! We recognise him almost as readily as she did. Again, how like Jesus those words addressed to the incredulous disciple, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Once more, that thrice repeated question addressed to Peter,* 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' how wonderfully is it in keeping with the character of Jesus, and with all that had gone before! How delicately, and yet how powerfully, was it fitted to induce Peter to search his own soul, and abate something of that self-confidence which had, on former occasions, been so fatal to him. Besides, if Jesus had not reappeared, I am wholly at a loss to conceive how his religion could have escaped being buried with him. When he expired on the Cross, there was not a single human mind that at all appreciated his purpose or cherished his spirit.

Here, in its obvious necessity to give light and impulse to his followers, do I discover the principal object of his resurrection. I am aware that the general belief is that he rose from the dead to establish the doctrine of the life beyond the grave. But it is not in this way that Christ confirms my hope of immortality. I behold in him, in all that he said and

* See John *xxi.* 15—19.

did, the exhibition of a spiritual and immortal nature. If he had appeared in an angel's garb, and with an angel's wings, I could not have evidence that he belonged to another and imperishable world, so strong as that which presents itself not to my eye but to my soul—my consciousness—in his moral lineaments. In his spiritual truth and greatness I behold an unearthly halo, the living light of eternity; and as I discern and feel that, I feel and know myself to be possessed of a like immortal nature. So that it is not by the bare fact of his resurrection that I am convinced of another and unending existence. His resurrection, as it is a part and a prominent part of the grand spiritual manifestation, has its office in revealing the eternal world. But the primary purpose of his rising from the dead, as he himself more than once declared, was, like a sign from Heaven, to vindicate his authority. His authority it did establish gloriously, so far at least as his immediate followers were concerned. Although they continued to cherish the Jewish hope of an outward kingdom, still his death and resurrection wrought with them to induce them to postpone that fond hope, and though they never appear to have relinquished it altogether, yet it gave way in their minds to the authority of him who had given such glorious attestations of the divinity of his mission and office.

I do not intend to dwell upon his ascension, because there is no language in any of the Four Gospels, that necessarily implies that he ascended *visibly*. Matthew and John do not say a word about his final

disappearance. Mark says, "so then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." We might with as much reason infer from this language that they saw him seated on the right hand of God as that they saw him received up into heaven. When he bade them farewell, they concluded of course that he had gone to heaven, and that he was placed at the right hand of the eternal throne, and they express themselves agreeably to this impression. And so Luke says, "and it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." That he was separated from them is clear. They would so naturally conclude that he was carried up to heaven, that we cannot determine from this language whether they mean to say that they saw him carried up, or whether it was only their inference. I can only say that I am deeply struck with the silence of these accounts as to the mode in which Jesus came and went on the various occasions on which he presented himself to his disciples. That he did appear again and again to different individuals, and to large numbers, they fearlessly declare. They are not deterred from stating the fact of his appearance at different times by any apprehension of the doubts that might be started as to the manner in which he appeared and disappeared. If they were conscious of any difficulty on this point, they still do not hesitate to say that he did appear. But I imagine they were unconscious of difficulty. When he was present, they were too much filled with awe, too tremblingly impressed, too anxious to catch every word

that fell from his lips, to speculate about the way in which he came and went. There is to my mind a sublimity in the darkness which wraps the close of this history, analogous to what we perceive in the ways of Providence and nature.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

“ If thou ask to what height man has carried it in this matter, look on our divinest symbol ; on Jesus of Nazareth, and his life, and his biography, and what followed therefrom. Higher has the human thought not yet reached. This is Christianity and Christendom ; a symbol of quite perennial, infinite character ; whose significance will ever demand to be anew inquired into, and anew made manifest.”

IN works upon the Evidences of Christianity, the question commonly discussed concerning the Four Gospels is, ‘ were they written by the persons whose names they bear ? ’ as if the settlement of this point were the strongest possible confirmation of our faith. But, I confess, all that I can learn of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, does not give me so lively a confidence in the authors of these histories as is created in me by the histories themselves. To say merely that they are honest and impartial, appears to me most inadequate praise. By studying them in the manner which I have now attempted, I find my conceptions of the honest, the true, the candid, en-

larged and enlightened. The character of Jesus is not more truly a revelation of moral greatness than these wonderful writings are, in their style and structure, of the quality of truth. That this is strong language I am aware; and perhaps there is little in the foregoing pages that seems to justify it. Still I do not wholly despair of having given the candid and intelligent reader some idea of the grounds upon which rests the conviction I have already expressed, that nowhere in the writings of the dead, or in the characters of the living, do I discern evidences of integrity and singleness of mind so luminous and affecting as those presented in the Four Gospels.

I beg the reader to pause for one moment, and consider the character of the events which constitute the sum and substance of these narratives. How tremendously exciting must they have been! The blind seeing, the lame walking, the dead raised, the wretched and the profligate collected in crowds, listening to words of mercy and hope, multitudes thronging the highways bringing their sick, and pressing upon one another like the billows of a heaving sea! If Jesus of Nazareth spoke and acted and suffered as he is here represented, how must the minds of men have boiled around him! How closely and with what power must he have approached their passions, prejudices, sentiments! How must he, as with a giant's hand, have broken up all the fountains of wonder and fear and awe and hope, and made all hearts overflow with one or another passion!

Could you have been present, and by some strong philosophic effort, could you have torn off your atten-

tion from the absorbing interest of those scenes, and asked yourself the simple question, how can any idea of these things ever be communicated to those who do not see them, you would have exclaimed at once and aloud, "It is impossible!" You might have glanced around upon those eager multitudes, but where would you have discovered a single calm observer? Where would you have seen a single eye that was not like a burning coal, a single bosom that was not heaving in tumultuous and overpowering sympathy with the unprecedented spectacle? You would indeed have seen One there, all calm and collected, the producer of all this emotion; but the dovelike serenity of his demeanour would only have tended to deepen in your eyes the mystery and excitement of the scene. I repeat it, you would have felt that it was impossible that any accounts could ever be given of events so exciting, save such as were wretchedly inadequate, or so coloured and exaggerated as to convey no just conception of the truth. When we witness anything that stirs up our feelings—any uncommon burst of eloquence, for instance—we either give up in despair every attempt to describe what we have witnessed, or, in the attempt to describe it, the reality is most sadly marred and dwarfed, and we take that single step which separates the sublime from the ridiculous.

Look now at the accounts which have come down to us of the wonderful words, works, and sufferings of that unrivalled being who appeared some ages since in Judea. Perhaps they give us but a faint idea of the strange and stirring events of which they treat.

and with all our efforts, our impressions, in distinctness and intensity, must fall far, very far short of those which were made upon the actual witnesses of the life of Jesus. The power of language was not equal to so great a subject. Still from these records, such as they are, we derive ideas of moral beauty and greatness, to which no page in the world's history furnishes anything that we can compare. An instance of moral life is disclosed to us which stands alone and unapproached in its wholeness and symmetry. At the same time, abundant evidence is afforded in the course of these narratives that all around Jesus were more or less the creatures of feeling, ignorance, and prejudice, fettered by superstition, beguiled by coarse hopes and dreams of outward splendour. Who were they,—our curiosity is immediately aroused to ask,—who were they that, among those excitable and excited crowds, were able to observe so calmly, and report so correctly; to look on and listen with eyes and ears and hearts so true, that, with a slight effort, we are able, in some few instances at least, to feel almost as if we were present on the spot, and the things related were passing visibly before us? To this question there is only one answer. *The character of Jesus must have created his biographers.* Whoever they were, whatever were their names, they must have been persons who by intimate association with him had imbibed some measure of his spirit, and that spirit, calm and true, had wrought upon their minds, to subdue the tumults of feeling, to chasten their imaginations, to subordinate their sensibility to the Wonderful to their sensibility to the True; in fine, to

qualify them to see and hear aright, and to impart what they saw and heard. Upon examination we find, throughout these writings, the most touching indications of precisely that calm and elevated tone of mind and feeling which association with such a one as Jesus was fitted to produce. In their unguardedness, in their unsuspecting simplicity, in their pervading unconsciousness, we see that these authors had completely lost themselves, lost all anxiety about effect, every disposition to embellish, in the abiding and absorbing sense of truth. The facts—facts of which they had such full knowledge,—filled their minds to the exclusion of all self-reference, all fears and misgivings. They tell right on what they know, taking no credit to themselves, and unconscious that there can be anything meritorious in a faithful relation of what so entirely possesses their minds. To the authors of the Gospels, so far as they are disclosed in their writings, may be applied the language of Wordsworth in his Ode to Duty.

“ There are, who ask not if thine eye
 Be on them, who in love and truth
 Where no misgiving is, rely
 Upon the genial sense of youth ;
 Glad hearts ! without reproach or blot,
 Who do thy work and know it not.”

Not indeed “ upon the genial sense of youth ” did the Evangelists rely, but upon a kindred spirit. Between him and the young, of whom he said, “ of such is the kingdom of heaven,” there was the greatest congeniality. His spirit had gradually infused itself into the mind of these writers, until it became as their

life-blood, unconsciously animating all their thoughts, inspiring their words, and producing in them the simplicity, the "unchartered freedom" of childhood. It cost them no effort to tell the truth. They could as well have ceased to breathe, as ceased to tell it, let the objections and difficulties it created be what they might. Their reverence for Jesus was so great, their confidence in him so entire, that they never appear to have thought that the most imperfect representation of any part of his conduct was not enough—that he could ever need to be indebted to their pens to save him from being misunderstood. With the poet just quoted, they seem to have thought that their theme

" — might demand a seraph's tongue,
Were it not equal to its own support ;
And therefore no incompetence of *theirs*
Could do it wrong."*

Accordingly they never think of explaining or setting off anything they relate concerning him. Thus they show how genuine was their love of their master. This love it was which was their "unerring light," their security against every false bias, enabling them to see what they saw so nearly at the true point of view.

That these writers could not have invented the extraordinary character which they have portrayed is, I trust, abundantly clear from the whole structure of their narratives, wrought all over and inlaid with the characteristics not of fiction but of truth, and especially from the unconscious manner in which the character of Christ is described. The ability, if it

existed, to produce so remarkable an invention; necessarily involves qualities of mind and heart, a fine sense of moral truth, utterly inconsistent with the delusion or fraud which such a fabrication would imply. But the ability did not exist. True and single-hearted as the authors of these biographies of Jesus show themselves to have been, still on more than one occasion it appears that there was a spirituality in his sentiments, a meaning in his words, which none of those around him, not even the best disposed, were able to fathom. But further. While it is impossible to conceive how the biographers could have created such a character, it is easy to see how such a character produced the biographers. So far from supposing that they fabricated what they have told, the question is, how with their Jewish prejudices, with their human sensibilities, rendering them liable to be bewildered, carried away, and deluded by their feelings, they were able to attain to such a pervading truthfulness, and to represent Jesus, so nearly as they have done, to the life. That they have committed some errors and mistakes, I do not deny—I believe. That these are so few is the wonder. That there is so much truth in these narratives, so simply and truly exhibited—this it is that should surprise us, and for which we should seek a cause. The influence of Jesus at once adequately and naturally explains the character of these writings; and shows us how their authors became the honest, fearless, single-hearted men they have shown themselves to be. Where else but from him could they have derived the spirit that they breathe? In this way these histories are, in the truth of their

structure, a tribute, none the less expressive because wholly undesigned, to the force of that remarkable character with which they bring us acquainted. In their general tone and spirit they are as truly an illustration not merely of the existence but of the moral influence of Jesus, as any of the particular facts which they contain.

I admit that there are errors and mistakes in the Gospels. This, I suppose, will be deemed a dangerous admission. But let me not be misunderstood—I will not say misrepresented, for I love to believe that these pages “will come under the perusal of ingenuous eyes and be felt a little by the hearts that look out of them.” Let me not be misunderstood. I say there are mistakes in the Gospels. But they are precisely such mistakes as were occasioned by the truth. Where there are misconceptions there must be something, some reality, some fact, to be misconceived. Error implies truth, as the shadow implies the substance. Such at least is the character of the mistakes which we discover in these writings. They result from the substantial truth of the main facts recorded, and they are undesignedly the most decisive evidences of the truth. For instance, these accounts differ as to the hour at which the crucifixion of Jesus took place. Mark states that Jesus was crucified at the third hour. According to John, he was not given up by Pilate until about the sixth hour. Now admitting, as I conceive we must, notwithstanding the attempts which have been made to reconcile this difference, that one or the other of the narrators is in error, what does the error show? Not that Jesus was not crucified at all,—it

goes to establish the fact by new and most cogent evidence. The existence of the error discloses precisely such a state of mind, such an inability to note the lapse of time, as must have been produced in those nearly interested in an event so exciting. So also in the case of the resurrection of Jesus, the mistakes made by the women at the sepulchre furnish evidence undesigned and unanswerable to the reality of the main fact, the actual presence of Jesus alive. This it was that produced the mistakes, and produced them in a perfectly natural way. In short, I conceive it may be confidently affirmed, that no error can be detected in these narratives which does not tend directly and decisively to establish far more than it does away.

The books which we have now been examining are invaluable for the saving knowledge which they give us of Jesus Christ, of whose life they are the record, and of whose spirit they are an unconscious illustration. In him I see a revelation of religious truth, and consequently a disclosure of the will of God, a representation of the perfection and destiny of man. When we see Jesus Christ as he is, we have come to the knowledge and possession of Christianity. He shows us what God is and what He would have us to be. In the spiritual and immortal lineaments of Jesus, we discover our own immortality, and in sympathy with him we come to feel and know ourselves to be immortal. To estimate him is to grow in Christian knowledge, and to become worthy of the Christian name.

It is a character of no ordinary force which has for

eighteen hundred years commanded the respect of the world. Christianity, in the forms in which it has been for ages extensively represented, has shown but few features of a heavenly origin. It has been set forth before the world as a religion identified with a most magnificent and complicated structure of outward ceremonies. Its sanction has been claimed for the exercise of a power, which knew hardly any limit, over national affairs and the rights of private opinion. At one time it was promulgated by bishops clad in mail and demanding faith at the point of the sword. And in all periods of its history, the appeal for its security and its triumphs has been directly made to the civil arm, or to those prejudices and passions which for ever war against human liberty. Under the banner of the Cross, that symbol of the divine power of an unresisting spirit, acts of the bloodiest violence have been perpetrated, the most merciless persecutions have been carried on. Opinions concerning God and man have been published under the name of Christianity, contradicting not only the first dictates of the understanding, but every natural sentiment of justice and mercy; and the terrors of this world and the next have been threatened upon the faintest whisper of dissent. In fine, that which has been called Christianity, instead of taking its place in the van of human interests, has been found opposing the progress of our race by all the weapons which ignorance and passion could supply. Not by one only, but by all denominations of its friends, has our religion been made to occupy more or less decisively this position. When these things are considered, the question

arises, "how comes it—by what means—by what principle of vitality—has Christianity maintained itself for long ages in the world? Forced, through the unwise zeal of its friends, to ally itself with the worldly interests and passions of men, taking so little pains to address the better principles of our nature,—how is it that amidst all vicissitudes and the various and increasing lights of civilization, it has not long ago been shaken to its foundations, levelled with the dust, and swept away with the fragments of many preceding and contemporaneous empires?" I find the principal answer to this inquiry in the person of its Founder, in the simple force of his character.

It was this which wrought the most powerfully for Christianity at its first introduction, when it came, unarmed with any worldly power, to rebuke the passions of the selfish, and dissipate the darkness which men loved. The great spring of action in the hearts of the first promulgators of our religion was the sentiment of ardent affection and reverence with which Jesus Christ inspired them. The love of Christ constrained them. It was for his sake that they accounted it joy and triumph to toil and suffer, and with the kindling idea of him were blended their best hopes and aims. And this it was, by the way, which constituted the wide difference between him and them, and which makes his fortitude so much more wonderful than theirs. He had no human precedent to which he could look, and from which he might draw strength and animation. No one had gone before him by whose memory his human sympathies might be encouraged, and whose example might cheer him onward.

Only the highest source of Inspiration was open to him—the simple thought of God; and to appreciate this so that it might stand in the place of all other supports, an elevation of mind was necessary of which we can but faintly conceive. His successors, on the contrary, were aided by all those human affections which found an all-animating object in him, and the devoted love which he awakened was their efficient motive to do and endure.

It may be asked whether those who were active in the first establishment of his religion, were not moved by those great moral principles which he taught. Undoubtedly they were. But then it was these principles, not merely, nor chiefly, as they were presented in words to their understandings, but as they were far more divinely expressed in his character to their hearts. Truth, not abstractly, but as it filled and transfigured his whole being—this it was that kindled in them a noble zeal, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” What words could convey to them such a sentiment of love as was expressed in his Cross!

Or, again, it may be intimated that it was the miracles he wrought, that operated so powerfully in convincing and urging onward his followers. It is true his works of power did much; they filled an important and indispensable place in producing that state of feeling in his disciples, requisite to qualify them to carry on what he had begun. But then the main power of his miracles lies not in their mere power, but in their relation to his character, which they help far more strikingly than anything else to glorify.

What a depth of tenderness is laid open; how touching his meekness, what a new lustre is added to all the virtues he exemplified, when we consider them as the virtues of one, endowed with more than regal gifts; with powers exceeding all that Fortune or Genius has ever bestowed on man! Look at the case whichever way you will, the result is the same. It was by the force of his character that the apostles were swayed.

And so it has been and must be always. No cause, religious or political, good or bad, has ever gained a foot-hold in the world, except by the impulse of a leading mind, the energy of some prominent character, some one individual who has been to its adherents the embodiment of the object at which they have aimed. Individuals of this description have so often and so mournfully abused their influence to selfish purposes, they have been so ready to take advantage of the idolatrous attachment of their fellow-men, that it has failed to be seen how deeply this mode of influence is founded in the nature of man. Thus the maxim has gone forth—"principles, not men," a sound maxim but only in a qualified sense. The truth is, principles at best are but imperfectly set forth in a verbal form. Language is an artificial sign and an inadequate one. It may meet and satisfy the understanding and answer important purposes, but it reaches the great springs of human action only indirectly and by aid of association. The conduct, the life of a human being is the true, natural, divine symbol whereby great truths are made to kindle our strongest affections. So that in the very nature of things, men, living men

are required to express in their lives to other men, the great purposes with reference to which they are to be moved.

I make these remarks to show that the stamp of divinity is as visible upon the mode in which Christianity has been communicated to man as upon its substance. The great truths, the paternal providence of God and another life, have been acknowledged to be great and important, worthy of God to teach. But the manner in which they have been revealed has not been recognized, as equally worthy of the Deity. "Why," it has often been asked, "why were not these truths written out upon the firmament, so that all men might read without the possibility of mistake; or proclaimed, as by an archangel's trump, so that the whole world might hear?" Alas! there is much written from of old in unfading characters all over the sky, the earth, and the sea. There are myriads of voices sounding on from eternity to eternity through all the heights and depths of the universe,—but where is the seeing eye, the hearing ear? Such methods of revelation as I now refer to, are mere human propositions. The mode actually adopted in the Christian dispensation harmonizes perfectly with the deepest principles of human nature, and displays the same wisdom by which that nature was fashioned. Man has been addressed through man. One has been raised up to communicate the life of truth through his own life, to point men not into space but into their own souls, there to read the will, and behold the countenance, and feel the spirit of God. In his spiritual features beams the glory of God. The cha-

racter of Christ is the rock of Christian faith, the high tower which cannot be hid by the thickest clouds which steam up from the ignorance and corruption of earth, and which assures us that the city of God is there, the dwelling-place of unchanging truth.

As it was from the character of its Founder that Christianity received its first impulse, so by the same force has it been sustained under the crushing weight of the corruptions by which its brightness has been darkened and its beauty deformed, and from the enormity of these corruptions we may form some idea of the force by which they have been resisted. This has been its shield amidst the deep wounds which it has received in the house of its friends. The common impression is, that it owes the influence it has retained, amidst the errors of its adherents, to its great moral principles. True. But, to repeat what I have said, these principles, in an abstract, verbal form, separated from the life of him by whom they were promulgated, lose nearly all their peculiar power. A moral system of almost equal excellence might be gathered from the records of ancient wisdom. Gibbon has remarked in one of his notes that he finds the great social law of Christian love stated in the plainest terms by a writer who flourished ages before Christ. Take from Christianity the original exposition of truth which it presents in its Founder, suppose it to have been first taught by one whose life gave no significance to his words, and it is evident at once how much it must lose. On the contrary, we might erase from the Christian records every general precept, yet so long as the acts and sufferings of Jesus were remembered,

they would retain an all-commanding influence. The superiority of actions to words has passed into a proverb. But where is it so strikingly shown as in the religion of Jesus Christ? His precepts recommend themselves to our reason; but the application we allow them is narrow or comprehensive according as we appreciate him. We understand them no farther than we understand him. When men, outraged by its corruptions, have been disposed to abjure Christianity altogether, the pure and generous character of its author, dimly discerned indeed, but yet seen in something of its truth, has commanded their respect and prevented them from rejecting a religion promulgated by lips so pure and eloquent. The greatest sceptics have confessed that the character of Christ is too great and too natural not to be a reality.

When we turn from the past to the present and the future, and inquire by what means the improvement of mankind individually and collectively is to be most effectually promoted, we find in the character of Christ untold resources of wealth and power. "Political reform, pressingly enough wanted, can indeed root out the weeds; but it leaves the ground *empty*, ready either for noble fruits or new worse tares! And how else is a moral reform to be looked for but in this way, that more and more good men are, by a bountiful Providence, sent hither to disseminate goodness; literally to sow it, as in seeds shaken abroad by the living tree? For such in all ages and places is the nature of a good man; he is ever a mystic, creative centre of goodness; his influence, if we consider it, is not to be measured; for his works do not die, but being of eternity, are eternal; and in

new transformation and ever wider diffusion, ~~and~~ *deduce*, living and life-giving." Then let him whose character is acknowledged to be the best and purest ever exhibited on earth—let him live in the faith and imagination of men. To ascertain our destiny—to know the hidden aim of our being, we need not gaze into the sky, or pry fruitlessly into futurity. The end of life is revealed in Jesus Christ. He is the model whereby all men may fashion themselves. When he appears, not personally but morally, not to the outward eye but to the inward sense, we shall become like him, for we shall see him as he is.

When the character of Christ is felt, then exists that principle of action denominated in the Scriptures *faith*,—the faith that saves the soul. Then will the destiny of man be realized. He who contemplates Jesus Christ, as he is presented in the brief and simple sketches of his life, as a pattern of disinterestedness, self-command, and piety, before whose imagination and affections that wonderful being stands distinctly revealed, such a one must feel the force of the character of Christ. He beholds a being, the greatest that ever trod this earth, not merely for the extraordinary powers he possessed, but for the uniform humility, the touching self-forgetfulness, with which he bore his great gifts; one who disregarded all the seductions of ambition and power, in whom the honours of multitudes never excited one throb of vain glory, whose tenderness, overflowing all artificial distinctions, poured a tide of mercy into the hearts of the degraded and miserable; one who suffered fatigue, and hunger, and thirst, and contumely, and violence; that he might comfort, correct, and bless our race;

out of whose heart, in the very agonies of death, broke words of affection for his mother, and prayers for those who tortured him. Such was the Man of Nazareth. But how vain are words to describe his original excellence! Could we only bring up before our minds the spotless and venerable idea of him; could our cold and sluggish imaginations only picture him in his youth, in the serenity of that blessed countenance, in that attitude of unspeakable love, yearning to gather the whole family of the suffering and afflicted, even as a bird gathereth her young under her wings;—could the eye of the soul be so cleansed as to see him as he was, then we should not need to be told of the power of his character. In the reverence, gratitude, and love which would overflow our minds, gushing up from a thousand hidden springs; we should have a present proof of his moral force, of his power to sweep away from the heart all the false idols and temples we erect there, and to cover it with the unfading verdure and the immortal fruits of true and evergrowing goodness. If we have ever been in any degree impressed with the wisdom and excellence of Jesus, by the emotions we have sometimes felt, let us pause and consider what a transformation must be wrought in him, who discerns this illustrious being not partially and by glimpses transient and far between, but who cherishes his pure idea in the innermost recesses of his mind, amidst his best sensibilities; studying all the beautiful details of his life with an ever-present conviction of reality, learning to conform all his ideas of greatness to him as an unerring standard! Must not a mind, thus occupied, be strong

in the goodness which it loves? And if strong in goodness, then saved, yes, saved—O, how truly saved! being delivered from all corrupting passions, from all those false prepossessions, to which those who live in the world without a pure object to look at and to love, are ever so exposed,—being redeemed from all iniquity, and inspired with an affection for all that is holy in imagination, upright and benevolent in act.

If a great and good man were now to appear, such as this age, and many preceding ages, had not produced nor approached, a great public benefactor, an example of every private virtue, and it were our privilege to be associated with him daily, intimately, by the respect and love he would inspire, would not every generous and virtuous sentiment be called into action? Would not our cheeks be crimsoned with shame at the bare thought of doing anything abhorrent to the nature of our revered friend? Could anything act upon us so powerfully as such a fellowship with living virtue? Of precisely this nature is the force of the character of Christ, and this is the way in which he who believes in Christ attains to that blessedness, which the Scriptures describe as the presence of God, heaven, salvation. To live in a Christian land, among Christian institutions; to profess the Christian faith in one or another form,—this is not faith in Christ, although thousands hug the delusion. It is to have the sacred image of his excellence set up at the very fountain-head of one's spiritual being,—this is faith, living, Christian, saving faith. He who cherishes it will—ay, he must—be saved. The decree is writ in the very constitution of the soul.

The world has suffered from nothing so much as from false ideas of greatness. The passion for military glory has been the fruitful cause of slavery, bloodshed, and crime. How little has the experience of its fatal results hitherto done to teach men wisdom! How is this deadly charm ever to be broken, save by the formation of a nobler idea, the creation of a better taste, the erection of the true standard? In Jesus Christ, the real greatness of our nature—the glory of a pacific, all-enduring temper—is revealed. Let him then be lifted up before all eyes, and all hearts will be touched, and the sword, and the spear, and the banner, bathed in blood, will be buried at the foot of his cross, and it will be felt that all other courage is fear, all other glory shame, in comparison with that spirit which subdues by mercy and reigns by suffering.

Once more. There is a wide and mournful need of confidence in the omnipotence of moral truth. This it is that the wise in all ages have most seriously wanted. They have had, as it has been said of a certain political party, “more of the wisdom of experience than the wisdom of hope,” and they have “looked for their future—only in the direction of the past.” Look at the wise, and the educated, and the thinking at the present day. How faint and sickly are their hopes of the moral improvement of our race! Things are deemed impossible, for the instant accomplishment of which only that simple energy of will is required, which a sure faith in the vitality of moral truth would immediately create. In these circumstances how unspeakably precious, (could it only be

brought home to the heart!) the memory of one in whom no trait is more conspicuous than a calm and unflinching confidence in truth, and this too in a condition of things apparently the darkest and most hopeless! Without a single decisive token of success, he uniformly looked upon the great revolution he commenced, as already consummated. In no respect is his example more original and inspiring. In nothing does he stand so pre-eminently alone, far above all other teachers, as in his perfect faith in human nature. He scattered fearlessly abroad the seeds of truth, and trusted in God that they would germinate and grow. Whereas all other teachers have divided their doctrines into *esoteric* and *exoteric*—philosophy for the initiated, and fables for the vulgar. And at the present day, how frequently is it said in regard to any new and more rational view of religion—"it is all very true. I understand and believe it. But it will not do to disseminate such views. The generality of men cannot appreciate them." I say nothing of the modesty of this sentiment. It reveals the very worst kind of infidelity, and our sabbaths, our churches, and all our multitudinous institutions of religion are but a dead and delusive show, so long as man believes not in man. Jesus Christ went down directly among the most ignorant and degraded, and well did he describe it as the most decisive attestation to his divine authority, that he delivered the glad messages of truth "to the poor."

But I have done. To bring the Man of Nazareth, the elder brother of our race, the chosen Son of God,

the revealer of God and man, more within the reach of human sympathies ; to show that such, in the unspeakable grace of God, are the records of his life, that the remotest generation may cherish, not merely a traditional, but a personal faith in him ; that in the very form and structure of the Gospels there are the means by which every man may be brought into personal intimacy with him, beholding him, as it were, face to face, is the ultimate aim of the present work, and gives it whatever value it may be found to possess. How imperfect it is, how all-inadequately I have touched upon the great subject, I feel deeply. Still it has been a delightful employment. If it fail to awaken interest in other minds, I do not say I shall not be disappointed. But I shall be ungrateful to the Giver of all good if I ever cease to acknowledge with fervent thankfulness the confirmation it has afforded to my own faith.

THE END.

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