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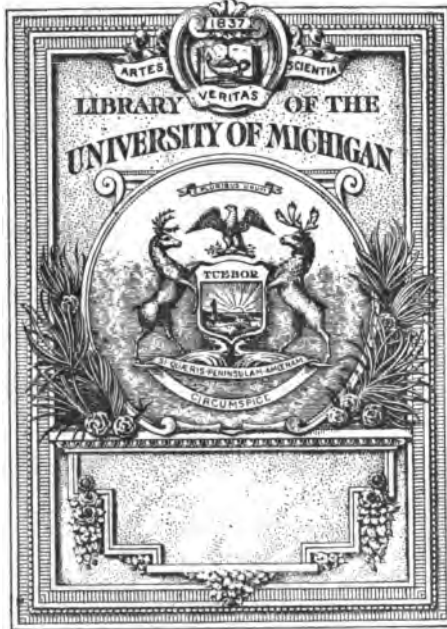
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THE SUPERNATURAL  
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The  
Supernatural in Christianity

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO STATEMENTS

IN THE RECENT

GIFFORD LECTURES,

BY  
PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D.  
PROFESSOR J. ORR, D.D.

AND

PROFESSOR MARCUS DODS, D.D.

WITH PREFATORY STATEMENT BY

PROFESSOR A. H. CHARTERIS, D.D.

SECOND EDITION

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE



DR. PFLEIDERER's double Course of twenty Lectures, "Philosophy and Development of Religion," ended on the 27th February. The three Lectures which follow were delivered on 5th, 8th, and 13th of March. Professor Charteris, who was prevented, as he explains, from taking part in the Course as a Lecturer, was kind enough to take the chair at the first Lecture; and his opening remarks constitute the Prefatory Statement.



## PREFATORY STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>

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INASMUCH as the kindly despotism of my medical advisers has absolutely forbidden me to deliver one of the Lectures of this Course, I ask permission of the audience—I have already received that of the Lecturer—to say a few words before calling on Principal Rainy to begin his Lecture.

Though this Course is occasioned by the recent Gifford Lectures of Professor Pfeiderer, there is neither intention nor need of beginning a personal conflict between present Lecturers and him. The mere fact that as yet many only know Dr. Pfeiderer's views from newspaper summaries, prevents a thorough discussion of them. That may come by and by in detail. Enough is known to make theologians aware of the general purpose and tendency of those views, as every biblical student has long been familiar with them in his published books. He is well known to be a follower of Ferdinand Christian Baur, making a gallant attempt to revive in Germany his great master's theories against the now predominant theology of Ritschl. There will, I am quite sure, be no attempt on the part of any Lecturer to belittle or

<sup>1</sup> Being the remarks made by me as Chairman on the occasion of Dr. Rainy's Lecture.—A. H. C.

disparage the conscientious convictions of Dr. Pfeiderer, or the remarkable literary ability with which he presents those convictions. In the sparkle of his style he resembles and rivals Renan, while in appreciation of the spiritual longings of men he leaves the brilliant, but superficial, Frenchman far behind. Nay, I will go further, and say for myself that he has demanded of the Christian Church in our day some functions and duties which we, who believe in the Redeemer's Incarnation and Resurrection, may well set ourselves with new purpose to fulfil and discharge.

But there seems to many of us to be a call to say, at the earliest possible moment, with all possible personal respect for the Lecturer, that we object to many things clearly stated in those Gifford Lectures. Perhaps I may be allowed to speak for myself, and say that I object to the Lecturer's presupposition that the Incarnation is to be disbelieved because it is not according to his conception of history, founded on our experience. Further, I object to his assumption that all the more marvellous incidents in the Gospel history of Jesus Christ are of later invention than the others. I object to his extraordinary assertion that St. Paul believed in a merely spiritual Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I object to his almost as extraordinary assertion in regard to Baur's view of the Fourth Gospel, that "all further investigations have always only contributed anew to confirm it in the main" (Lecture II.). I believe it is not difficult to show that Baur's account

of the origin and date of the Fourth Gospel has been proved to be historically inaccurate and critically and philosophically impossible; that the Gospel is explicitly quoted and undeniably founded upon forty or fifty years before Baur allowed that it was written; and that not one of Baur's followers, not even Dr. Pfeiderer himself, ventures to maintain Baur's date. Objection may well be taken to the Lecturer's attempt to borrow all the ethics of the Christian revelation, and to appropriate all its highest hopes, and to make them parts of a speculative system which I know not whether to call Deism or Pantheism, which seems to deny any revelation except what may be found in gathering the lessons of history and science, and yet speaks of God as "the loving Father whose nature it is to communicate Himself to His children" (Lecture XIII). We cannot recognise the faith in which our fathers fell asleep in this system which, as I understand it, leaves no place for expectant prayer, and no hope of a resurrection, and makes no admission that life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel.

Therefore I, for one, am glad that some men have come forward to protest, in name of the Christian Church in Scotland, against this attack upon their faith. I know that some, whose opinions I value, shake their heads and say that there is danger of these Lectures begun to-night adding to the Gifford Lecturer's prestige, and, as they say, fanning the flame; but there is a danger, on the other hand, of men's faith being weakened if no one amongst us dares to take up the

gage of battle which has been publicly thrown down. And as to prestige, it is not easy to add to what the Gifford Lecturer has received as the invited guest of the University. It is needful that some trained theologians should assure the Christian public that they have long been familiar with the system which the eloquent Berlin professor represents, and that they believe it has lost its power in its native country, as it will lose its power in Scotland when it is understood. I should think that every member of the Senatus which appointed him was surprised when he interpreted his commission as giving him a right to attack the Bible, for that appointment has lent importance—I trust only a temporary importance—to those views in the eyes of unlearned and generous youth. I hope steps may be taken by the Senatus to prevent any future Lecturer on Natural Theology—which is the apparent subject that Lord Gifford's rather puzzled bequest points to—from making an attack on the records of the Christian faith; and I hope and expect that these Lectures here will meanwhile somewhat counteract the attack which has been made. I venture, in your name, to express by anticipation my gratitude to the Lecturers for accepting the invitation to interrupt their ordinary work so far as to come here and take part in this special Course.

A. H. CHARTERIS, D.D.

*P. Gardner*  
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I

## THE ISSUES AT STAKE

By PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D.

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## THE ISSUES AT STAKE



I AM not here to prefer a complaint against Dr. Pfeiderer. Those who heard his Lectures have probably received the same impression which readers have gathered from his published works, viz., that he is a sincere and serious thinker, and is entitled to be met respectfully by those who differ from him most widely. But I wish to point out the singular position in which we find ourselves, if the constitution of the Gifford Lecture is correctly interpreted by some of the recent Lecturers. It was understood that the foundation deed authorised the discussion of Theism on grounds of Natural Reason, excluding arguments from, or urged in favour of, Supernatural Revelation. But, according to the view now proceeded on, a Gifford Lecturer may apply himself to argue down the supernatural aspects or elements of Christianity, on the ground that he holds Christianity to be a non-miraculous product of human reason; while no Lecturer shall have leave to argue for the things believed among us, because that would be to assert

supernatural revelation, which is excluded by the deed. The interpretation of the deed is no business of mine, and recent Lecturers may possibly be right in their construction of it. But if so, I venture to express my doubt whether Lord Gifford intended to produce this state of things; and still more, my doubt whether the Universities, in accepting the administration of the Lecture, anticipated that the deed would prove susceptible of this interpretation. At all events, it is time to point out that, as far as we know at present, we have a conspicuous and highly-paid system of Lectures at all our Universities, under which it is open to attack the faith of the Christian Church deliberately, energetically, and in detail, while so far as this Lecture is concerned the defence of that faith is gagged. And by the faith of the Christian Church in this connection I mean the main articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Now this at all events justifies, if justification is needed, a statement on the other side. And at the same time, as far as I am concerned, it limits the field which I feel called upon to traverse. In many Lectures Dr. Pfeiderer surveyed the course of the history of religion, and discussed the general principles which it is reasonable to apply to each of its successive stages. He said much that was learned, suggestive, and impressive—much that most of us will agree with, and not a little also from which many of us dissent. But that would not have led us to start Lectures to controvert him. It is when he comes into collision

with the Christianity of the Gospels and the Epistles that I, at least, find myself concerned to make a counter-statement. As I have said, he may be within his right in making the attack: I am certainly within mine in asking leave to meet it.

This brings us to the matter in hand. The business of an Introductory Lecture is to survey the field. And the first thing I take note of is the general attitude towards Christianity taken by Dr. Pfeiderer. There is no need, and one can have no wish, to misrepresent it.

Dr. Pfeiderer believes the world and man to be so constituted that germs of religious truth have always existed. Religious impressions grow into the minds of men, and they are gradually purified in the furnace of history. Then, from advanced stages like ours, a reasonable criticism can distinguish the elements that have been thrown together. It can separate what has been permanent and valid from what has been temporary and fanciful. It can recognise in the former something that abides the trial of reason, and should be looked on, therefore, as sanctioned by the Supreme Reason. He therefore strongly asserts what is called Natural Religion,—only, with him, it is not a fixed quantity, as it used sometimes to be represented; rather, it grows into being by a gradual discernment of principles, and clears itself by gradual disentanglement from impurities. In this process, which stretches through the whole history of the world, the influence of great religious personalities—men of exceptional force and

#### 4      *The Supernatural in Christianity*

depth and warmth—counts, of course, for a great deal. Generally, Dr. Pfeiderer's thinking on all this reproduces, with modifications, the ideas of Lessing's famous tract upon the *Education of the Human Race*.

Now, Dr. Pfeiderer has accepted the view that Christian religion must resign the claim to stand upon special revelation, or to be attended with miraculous sanctions. It remains, therefore, that it must be explained from the same principles, the same sources, as other religions. But yet, on this ground, he wants to make the most of Christianity. Accordingly, if he bases himself on philosophy, it is still a spiritualistic philosophy, not a mechanical materialism. And, from the point of view which it supplies, Dr. Pfeiderer claims to be the friend and advocate of Christianity, only—an enlightened friend. He wants to show us the Christianity we can still have on these terms; he wants to show us it may still be valuable; and he means this quite sincerely.

His point of view is given. But, from his point of view, he pleads for his right to stand in the Christian succession, to enjoy the Christian inheritance, and to breathe the Christian air. He emphasises the greatness of Christianity, at all events, as a fact or order of facts in the religious history of man. For some Christian thoughts and principles—especially the trust in the divine Fatherhood and the duty and privilege of merging our private will in the moral ends of the universe, which express God's supreme purpose—he asserts permanent worth: they are ever to be guarded

as part of the moral and religious heritage of man. And the outlines of the wonderful life of Christ, in which these principles were first suitably singled out and emphasised, are dear to him because invaluable to the race. In short, when Christianity is sifted by criticism, on the footing that it is the most perfect form which the religion of human reason has yet assumed, he believes it to retain all its elements of strength and goodness; and for Christianity so sifted he is an ardent and eloquent advocate.

And, indeed, more than this may be said. Nothing strikes one more than the illustrations every day met with of the singular strength of the Gospels, and of the image of Christ there set before us. Men start with theories that lead to negative conclusions. But if they are at the same time at all desirous to do justice to Christianity and to Christ, the object that rises before them begins to overpower them.

Schleiermacher refused to admit the supernatural; and yet the Christ of his system is really supernatural to all intents and purposes, and brings an element of the supernatural with Him wherever he comes. And Pfleiderer (who will not think I do him injustice when I say that nobody would put him in the same rank with Schleiermacher), after laying down his thesis that Christ is not, and could not be, more than a remarkable religious genius, marking a most memorable stage in the history of human thought and action,—from which one must conclude that not the man but the principles which He illustrated and

signalised make the essential and permanent worth of Christianity,—when he goes on to his theology, is found calmly laying down careful statements of the offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King—and of His redemption, satisfaction, substitution, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Of course, all these are carefully explained and qualified so as to retain only a certain vague impressiveness. But why on his principles, are they there at all? Because Christ is so strong. He must be allowed to fill the religion which He founded.

But Christianity claims to be a supernatural religion, and it has always claimed it,—not in some sense in which every religion is supernatural, but in a sense peculiar to itself. It has always claimed it. There is not an hour of its history for which the contrary could be established. Farther, it works and it always has worked as a supernatural religion; in that faith it has fought its battles, endured its trials, and brought forth its fruits. Here men have felt, God has spoken, and has come and has made Himself, finally, ours. With this denied, some men and some circles of men—especially for the first generation or two—may carry on the tradition of much Christian goodness or Christian fragrance; but in general, and on the large scale, such religion fades along the lines of religious dilettantism into a final religious nullity. On Dr. Pfleiderer's principles, great parts of Christianity drop away; and those that are left are transformed.

Great parts drop away. The Incarnation is dis-

<sup>1</sup> *Grundriss*, sec. 117 f.

carded. What witnesses to us the personality of God as no argument and no metaphysic ever can; what expresses conclusively the reach of God's thinking of us and caring for us; what stands as the unanswerable assurance that God so loves the world, that behind all the mystery of being is a heart seeking us and rejoicing to do us good,—is to be dropped. What appeals to us as the condescension and grace of the Son of God, vanishes. Redemption, too, passes away. Jesus Christ is a redeemer in the same sense as every one is a redeemer who exhibits in his own life principles which, if adopted, might tend to retrieve other lives. Christ, as a divine Friend, the object of a present trust, who has Himself overcome death, and lives to make us victorious, is gone. For He is dead; and He never rose again; the Syrian stars look down upon His grave. All faiths that depend upon an authoritative declaration of God's mind through Christ, all divine promises made sure in Him, all power in Christ to comfort, to succour, and to save, have to be resigned. To show how much is lost would be to recite half the pages of the New Testament.

When all this is given up, then we turn to go our way, making what we can of inferences about God from the system of His world, which, to various persons, have seemed acceptable. They have their value. In particular, a wise and good man called Jesus, who lived long ago, is said to have had wonderful thoughts on this subject. Of these we shall do well to take advantage. His thoughts cannot be

absolutely trusted, indeed; for, according to all accounts, He had some ideas about the importance or significance of His own personality, which appear to have been exaggerated and groundless.

But also the elements of Christianity which in a certain sense are left, are transformed. For some are left. There is, in general, the example of Christ; there are some great thoughts,—the Christian conception of the Fatherhood of God, of the true ideal of human duty. Yes; but not as faiths set forth for our comfort and guidance, emphasised for us to trust by one divinely charged with our welfare. They remain, but disassociated from the light and the heat derived from God's gift of His Son, and from the grace of the Son's incarnation and His death.

Now this brings us to the point. Christianity has always claimed to be the divine supernatural religion, in virtue of the unique Person and mission of its Founder. But those whom Dr. Pfeiderer represents rely on a philosophy of the world and of man. That philosophy is to determine the right view of Christianity, the wise and worthy way of looking at it. Accordingly, the Lecturer surveyed the progress of the schools of thought. In particular, he adverted to the way of thinking that was reckoned authentic in last century, which goes now among Germans by the name of the Vulgar Rationalism. That rationalism accepted and inculcated certain ideas, superficial enough, about God, virtue, and immortality. These they regarded as having been from the beginning, and these they



considered must be to the end, the rational basis of human religion. Those ideas, therefore, afforded a standard by which all religions of all ages should be tried; and everything in Christianity that went beyond this was dismissed, or was explained away. This rationalism, in short, gloried in a poor scheme of thought, and despised whatever did not correspond with it. By and by dissatisfaction with this declared itself, beginning with Kant, who was a rationalist in religion, but also a severe and resolute thinker. New systems of thought supervened, which far more fully recognised and strove to theorise the wonder and the glory of the world, and the destiny of man as a being capable of duty and of religious aspiration. Those systems did much more justice to Christianity than the older rationalism had done. It began to be felt and owned that Christianity embodied profound thoughts about the relations of God and man, and about the right ideal of human life. Those were thoughts which Christianity had emphasised in a way peculiar to itself; yet they were thoughts which reason, on due consideration, must approve, and which the world could not dispense with. Any worthy system of moral and religious truth must take them up into itself as permanent good, and must credit Christianity as the religion which had secured a due place for them in the minds of men.

But these systems, at least as Dr. Pfeiderer and his friends expound them, found no place for the supernatural, nor for any view of Christ that made Him

really unique and exceptional. Christianity was to count for far more with the representatives of philosophy than it did in last century. But it should do so on condition that it took its place as only a happy birth, in a favouring hour, of the labouring reason of man,—upon the same basis and amenable to the same criteria as the fruits of human reason generally.

Philosophy, then, had set itself so far to do justice to Christianity, but found no means to admit for it the character which itself claimed. That is a fact which may be very unfortunate for Christianity; or possibly it may turn out a little unfortunate for philosophy itself. But when we are called upon to accept this as the criterion by which we shall be assured what in Christianity we are still to own, and what we may dismiss as not central or essential, one can hardly help remembering that there are philosophies and philosophies; and also that the time in which this philosophy shall be supposed to have established its infallibility is somewhat short,—being really, at most, the time from Kant to Hegel. For Dr. Pfeleiderer's philosophy is revised Hegelianism. And in this department Hegelianism turns on one great thought, viz., that all history—and for one thing in particular the history of human religions (wilful and fortuitous as it may seem)—is after all a reasoned process, by which the Eternal Spirit is ripening—through all apparent confusions—the gradual disclosure of His own thought,—the thought which is the inner and immanent reason of the world. That is Hegelianism, for our present

purpose. And, having used the phrase "revised Hegelianism," I may say that the revision stands mainly in this. Hegel's God, or Eternal Spirit, was conceived to reach His own thought, or certainly was conceived to unfold it, only through the formal dialectic process of the intellect; that abstract order of steps is conceived to guide and control the history which is the history of the world, and is also all we have for the history of God. But the revised conception admits other principles to deepen and enrich the thought of God and His working as disclosed in history. And whereas Hegel's thinking was accused of being merely pantheistic, Pfleiderer follows a line of thought that seems to imply a divine Personality, working consciously for ends at which His providence aims. Whether this is or is not consistent with some of his own positions, it is welcome, at all events, as worthy in itself, and notably in harmony with Christianity. For the rest, Pfleiderer, who was a student of Baur's, stands very much in his view of religion and of Christianity where Baur stood when he died, more than thirty years ago.

There is a great deal in this Hegelianism that is very remarkable and very suggestive. No doubt it marked a signal step in the history of thought. As it reckoned with the history of the race,—including its religions,—Hegelianism was on a track which was surely fruitful, in recognising God at the heart of the universe, or pervading its processes, as a principle of progress. So Hegelianism set its face towards the

idea of development, which since then has become so dominant in the thought of the age. In connection with that principle of development, we all have, or ought to have, learned and gained much. For the present it is accepted, by all but all, as the key-principle which is to explain everything. And indeed there seems to be hardly any other way to test a valuable new principle than to try it in every lock without exception. By and by its limits will be found; and after a while it will be antiquated, and newer methods will intoxicate the world. Meanwhile it represents a real gain to human thinking. *Evolution*

Philosophy says, then: Let us assume an order of the world (with God at the heart of it), which order is to proceed by steps of process that are in some high sense necessary—dictated by the nature of the case or by the nature of God—necessary, even if human wills play their part in them. Let us assume this, and see how the world can then explain itself. Let us refuse to have the ideal process perplexed by the hypothesis of any divine interpositions or interferences,—aside from the law of the process. These interferences have been often suggested by superstition, and they are easily believed by superstition; let us waive them aside; and, I repeat, let us see how the order of the world will explain itself.

Then, of course, as other religions and their founders appear under the general rubric of the religious capacities of man, so Jesus Christ can be no more than one of those personalities. He may

be the most remarkable. Some one must be. But He is essentially one of those who have attained; within the human laws of intellectual and moral life, to wonderful insight, and to a style of life which their fellows felt to be impressively true and good. Hence in Him, as in the case of some of them,—but in His case more perhaps than in any other,—some religious truths and aspirations, that always were and will be true and valid,—germs of which were always in the nature of man and in the nature of the case,—shone out vividly to Him and shone out vividly through Him. The world is conscious of them now in a way which it will never cease to trace up to Him.

This man left remarkable effects, as good men do; and wonderful things were asserted of Him. But our theory (so this philosophy speaks) will account for as much of this as one is bound to recognise. It will account for the grand thoughts,—some, at any rate—about God and life. And then, as to every apparent evidence of more, there must be some mistake about it. More is inadmissible. To admit more is to burst up from the bottom, as Pfeiderer somewhere says, the foundations of our thinking; for we are thinking out a divine method which works out an eternal process, just because the process is worthy to be worked out, and therefore is owned to be unworthy if it requires to be disturbed. Any apparent evidence, therefore, pointing in this direction, must be explained away. In thus separating elements which in Christianity

have been combined,—maintaining some and dropping others,—we may be assured that we are only distinguishing the kernel from the husk.

I am far from denying that in historical Christianity it is well to distinguish the vital from the accidental, the more essential from the less. But I cannot but ask whether this philosophy, which cannot make room for the supernatural in Christianity, supplies, after all, a reliable criterion. We all know it is a temptation which lies in the nature of philosophies, to trust to single principles, and to refuse to contemplate exceptions. Here is this manifold and mysterious world of ours, with Christianity seated in the heart of its noblest history. Revised Hegelianism says: "I will open the door and admit what can pass as an elevated form of natural religion, but what claims to be gospel revelation or to involve special interposition—no. Shut the door." Well, but what a long procession of philosophies have passed down the stream of time! They have had meritorious lives, but they are ghosts now. They had their share of truth, but they failed to solve the mystery of the world. Has revised Hegelianism solved its own problems? Is it not also upon the march like the rest? Will no day come when those departed forms of thought—even the vulgar rationalism itself—shall hail its advent among them, saying, "Art thou also become one of us—art thou become weak as we?" Revised Hegelianism has no right to dictate. The business of a philosophy is to recognise what can establish a right to be recognised.

If its principles disable it in any case from doing so, they must be widened.

In the scheme of the Lecturer it is plain that much turns on the alleged incongruity of supernatural Christianity. A system of the world which is to proceed mainly by development and growth, ought not to be interfered with by an Incarnation, and by a revealing process leading up to an Incarnation. That, Dr. Pfeiderer says, is to undo the scheme of thought from the bottom. We are here, then, in presence of the question, whether a worthy conception of the world can embrace the biblical conception of the Incarnation, precluded and prepared by the Jewish history which leads up to it. It is a question on which perhaps our best thoughts, on either side, are not conclusive. But I see no reason why they should not be given. It depends on the ends which God may reasonably be conceived to provide for. And as Dr. Pfeiderer does not question the personal character of God as one who contemplates ends, and by due means accomplishes them, we are not embarrassed by any necessity of debate upon that point.

We assume, then, that man's nature, having a religious capacity, was destined to development, under the discipline of life and experience. That was, we know, to be in practice perplexed and marred by the spiritual state of men; but if not always progressive, it was at least to admit of progress. The persuasions of men about God were to be gathered, if we look to

the prevailing aspects of human religions, not from perpetual interferences and oracles, but from the unfolding of the nature of man in the midst of the process of the world,—both the evolution of man, and the process of the world proceeding on principles which imply a stable order. Under these conditions, as a matter of fact, the history of the mass of the race went on, whatever ground we take about primitive revelations. Under these conditions, so far, human religion has had its history. Human religion proved, indeed, extremely prone to expect and believe all kinds of supernatural agencies. But, in the more remarkable examples of it, the tendency, as time went on, was to grow into a more adequate sense of the laws of nature and of the laws of mind. Men felt more and more the pressure of the stable order. They learned so far that God was not such an one as themselves, and that the awful majesty of His will was not liable to be warped, on all occasions, to the wantonness of theirs. In the same proportion also they learned to feel as though God—at least the highest God—was more remote, or more hidden, than in earlier days had been supposed,—far above, out of sight. And one knows the fluctuations of opinion and belief which have ensued.

All that being supposed, I ask, first, Is it beyond belief that it might be in the design of God to make a worthy manifestation of Himself, which should be personal,—that is to say, should vividly bring out God in the unity and concentration which belongs to per-



sonality — personality with intellectual and moral features, with personal mind and will. That might not be well, for it might lead to inevitable misconstruction, unless accompanied and prepared by the great impression of the order of the world. And yet this last also might surely be defective if it stood alone. For in it God is manifested, as it were, on impersonal lines; and even if reason and conscience augur a personality behind the veil, it is vaguely, and with an unsatisfied sense of distance and dimness and doubt. Certainly, also, this is what the human heart has always craved for, when mythic fancies gave way before the advance of thought or under the strain of suffering, and when man felt himself face to face with the inexorable movement of the mighty world. "O that I could find Thee." If God is in some high and intense sense personal,—in possession of His own thought and character and will,—is there no need that somehow at some stage His revelation should take personal character? And if so, let us not deceive ourselves. Personality expresses itself not by eternal processes, but by individual words and deeds. If there be personality in God at all, it means that He who is behind me and beneath me and above me, who besets me everywhere, who is in all nature,—the source of forces, the measure of laws, the orderer of events,—*can* also, *can*, as person with person, stand face to face with me on the platform of His own world, to speak, and to be answered. But can He do it *worthily*? Can He do it, so as to complete, without fatally perplex-

ing, the manifestation of Himself? I point for answer to Jesus Christ. Through Jewish religion, which developed in singular combination the consciousness of God's majesty with that of His watchfulness over men, we reach Jesus Christ. Whatever view you take of the theology of His Person, no doubt His own religion gave Him out as the singular manifestation and expression of God. And, no doubt of it, it is this that has decisively carried home to human minds the impression of the Divine personality, associated with worthy impressions of His mind and will. This, in fact, has done it. Has it done wrong to the manifestation of God, given through the great universe in which He is immanent, working evermore? Do we not rather feel that this form of lowly and gracious manhood enables us to harmonise both sides of the manifestation, each enriching each. True, many a Christian has halted in one-sided thoughts of God,—all our thoughts of God come short. Nevertheless, the manifestation itself is worthy in its completeness. It would be incomplete without the presence which confronts each of us in the pages of the gospel. For in some world—here or hereafter—I, the personal man, rightfully desire to find the personal God. In some world; but why not in this world?

I say again, secondly, is it beyond belief that it may be in the design of God to bestow upon men in connection with religion—and most fitly in connection with the special manifestation just described—that form of evidence and assurance which arises when

tokens of God's special working in the outward history are associated with the inward evidence appealing to reason and conscience? This is the question of Christian miracles. I suppose I need not explain that I am not concerned with any question about vagrant marvels scattered fortuitously up and down the world. I deal with those which associate themselves with the revelation in Christ. Here I deal with matter on which modern prejudice is strong, I will grant, not unnaturally strong. I may be allowed, therefore, a few minutes to explain myself upon it. I am not going to thresh out the dry straw about laws of nature and that sort of thing, which, happily for the present, I feel that I can let alone.

In asserting the supernatural in Christianity in any form, and especially in this form, I do it with a very lively sense indeed of the difficulty, the temptation or excuse for doubt and suspense, which arises to many minds from the consideration of the masses of superstition related to the asserted supernatural, which have filled the history of the world. Men have been notoriously prone to assert rashly and to believe greedily in this department; in fact, there seems to be almost nothing some people will not believe. There has been such a complete proof of the disastrous and misleading influence exerted by all this, that a certain sceptical caution in relation to it is certainly, beyond all question, an element in sane thinking. There are whole categories of the marvellous, which we every day of our lives dismiss

without a thought; we are not going to waste time in examining them, because we perceive at a glance what tribe they are of. They bear on their face the stamp of outlaws of reason. I still think that even this mass of now incredible assertion — some of it non-Christian and much of it Christian—raises the question, whether behind all the folly and poor thoughts of God and His ways thus manifested, there is not here the working of a craving which might have legitimate expression, and might find a divine response? But, at all events, as I have no hesitation at all in maintaining that the supernatural view of Christ, instead of being something to be shut out as incredible, is a congruous and necessary element of the spiritual life of men, so also I maintain the fitness of the miraculous in the manifestation of God through Christ. And my present point is that, *a priori*, it should not be judged unsuitable to God.

I admit with Pfeiderer, and I may add with Dr. Martineau, that the most appropriate, the most spiritual evidence—that, therefore, which may be regarded as most fundamental, constant, and vital—is the intrinsic reasonableness and divineness of the truth believed and embraced. Therefore spiritual Christianity has always laid great stress on the witness of the Spirit, as that in which a man may supremely and finally rest. There is such a thing as a perception, that in truths and facts God and I meet. And in this line Dr. Martineau has eloquently taught us, that the divine voice in the conscience of each man is the true

revelation, and for each man the only one,—because, whatever gifted persons may have seen or experienced more than I, their report is no evidence to me, till countersigned by the oracle within myself. Well, whether that be true or not, the peculiar place and worth of this inner evidence is granted. And I have great sympathy with those who, under certain difficulties, say, “Well, let me, at all events, take the undeniable facts about Christ and His teaching; let me take them at their worth as facts, and make what I can of them, and, at all events, do no *less* than justice to them as they stand.” I believe that often along that line a mode of feeling and of thought establishes itself, in which the peculiar and supernatural significance of Christ is really felt; and His appearance in the world assumes its own decisive place. I only claim that such a mood should not be hindered from expanding farther. But then I am dealing with a theory which does not bar expansion, which finds it necessary to argue down both the essential elements and the proper tokens of Christ’s peculiarity. I say, then, that the inner evidence I have spoken of is by no means always so clear and conclusive in practice. It is not true that every man is a prophet, who in these matters can confidently say, “Thus saith the Lord.”

The man, although he knows that such evidence is desirable, and perhaps believes it to be attainable, yet finds it hard to be sure of the accents of the divine will. He may be dubious as to the range of truth he ought to receive; he may find it difficult to separate

that to which the authentic evidence applies from that which is mixed up with it in his own way of thinking. He may find his own confusions intensified by the confusions in other minds. For men's minds are confused,—obtuse and dull,—bewildered by the various voices that make themselves heard within us. This cannot be questioned. The existence and personal character of God, providence, prayer, immortality, are all of them debatable and debated. Many, also, who have no wish to debate these articles, are yet unfixed and changeable in their thoughts about them. The question returns: How do I know that I am not misled by feelings and by wishes, that I am not mistaking the interpretation of nature and conscience? Moreover, the soul is dull, and cannot well trust its own estimate of the worth of what it does believe. That may be true, it may be good; but is it able to bear the weight if I throw my life upon it, and make it my guiding principle, the light of all my seeing? It is here that the concurrence of the outward and the inward has a peculiar effect of assurance. It is a token that God is inviting to trust, is calling for faith. The divine within me and the non-divine are inextricably mixed, perhaps; but the finger of God without is wholly independent of me. God will not give me such tokens on all occasions, nor on many. But He may have given them to the world in connection with the mission of His Son. Further, in any such personal manifestation of God as I spoke of, the point in hand is not only the validity of unchanging

truths, but the significance of this present interposition,—the worth of this person, Jesus Christ. Now, His worth lies indeed in His fulness of grace and truth,—it lies first in what He is. But there may be much human uncertainty and insensibility, which receives its needed succour in the mighty works which showed that God was with Him.

In this view it is very often overlooked that a purpose of great value is secured by the mighty works of the Gospels, quite antecedently to all discussion of the evidence in detail; and, indeed, the discussion of that evidence in detail, however fitting, has a great deal less to do with Christian faith than readers of books on the subject might be led to suppose. At least I judge so by my own case. As I have said that the central evidence is that which opens in the truth itself, so I hold that the life, works, and teaching of Christ—the total Personality taken, if you will, apart from miracles—establish the unique and exceptional character of the Man. I find the supernatural there. As they grow upon the mind, they establish for Christ a place not with other men, but far different. As Charles Lamb said: “If Shakespeare came into the room just now, we would all rise up; but if HE came in, we would all kneel down.” Never man spake like this Man. Truly this is the Son of God. Yes; but my own conclusions in such matters are so hard to trust. Am I perhaps deceiving myself in some fond idolatry—was this, after all, not a man as other men, but one whose coming made the great

epoch of the world, one whom God calls me to trust and follow? Could He be deceived Himself about His own powers and mission and claims? If the decisive manifestation of God was here, were there no tokens of it? Now I find that, as He stood in the line of a great preparation going before, so from the outset He claimed that works which man cannot do betokened His exceptional relation to God. The sick were healed, the dead were raised, the sea was stilled. This is what I need. It is a congruous part of that whole, of which our Lord's personal worth is the greater part, but of which this part too is the fitting complement. It comes home to me as a consistent and credible whole.

I have one more point in this line, which needs the least illustration just because it is the most obvious and important. If great sin and need were to mark the history of the human race, shall it be judged unsuitable on the part of God to make manifestation and expression of Himself, in such a sort that here we should find divine remedy proportioned to our need,—personal friendship for the lost, redemption, love that saves? On the other view, it is true, indeed, that great personalities are rising and falling in the history of our race,—religious personalities among the rest,—who diversify our experience for better or worse. But on that view there is no interruption of the silence of God. He is present,—on reflection, He may be presumed to be present,—but there is no movement, save the even thrill of His great existence for ever on the spiritual



natures in contact with it: no incarnation, no atonement, no great promises, no covenant ordered in all things and sure. Not on these terms did Christianity conceive its message. Not under these conditions did the great sayings fill with their immortal meaning: "Hereby perceive we the love of God." "We have believed the love that God hath to us. God is love."

On lines of thought like these a great deal could be said. They have been adduced, not at present as evidence, but as pleas for keeping the mind open to evidence in favour of biblical Christianity. If the mind be kept open, the evidence will pour in by many avenues. The central conviction is one, but it will thrill into our being along many a line of evidence and many a chain of impressions.

The doctrine of development, then, as we see, is the engine by which Christianity is to be reduced to the same principle with earlier forms of religion. But there is no need for us to take an attitude of suspicion towards the doctrine of development, though we contest a particular application of it. Nothing is more remarkable in Christianity than the way in which it articulates itself into the process of the developing world, takes up that process into itself, and submits itself to the principle of growth and progress. We have learned much of this; we are willing to learn more; but not so as to forget that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

Now, as development is the engine by which Christianity in principle is levelled down, so the doctrine of the

Divine Immanence is that by means of which it is afterwards to be levelled up again. For while Dr. Pfeiderer wants to disenchant Christianity of the miraculous and of the true supernatural, he wants at the same time to glorify the Christianity he retains. Christianity is still to figure as something eminent, extraordinary, beneficent. It is to be only a birth of human reason, but then reason has resources which enable it to rise as high as there is any need for. Indeed, as the next Lecturer will show, Dr. Pfeiderer claims for his Christianity gifts and attainments that are not consistent with his philosophy. Now the doctrine of Divine Immanence is the means by which he conveys the impression that this feat is possible. Christianity must be conceived to take origin and to abide within the order of the world, but then immanence belongs to the order of the world. So here, it is implied, we have divine influence, which may impel men to any height of mental or moral attainment that can reasonably be claimed. On this principle all that the world has seen of great and good can be accounted for, and yet can be kept within the limits of philosophical theory. Immanence can replace, for instance, the Incarnation, and leave us with no loss of anything substantial.

But we have already seen how much is lost. And I am persuaded that the impression that any important help is to be found in this quarter depends upon confused thinking.

The doctrine of the Divine Immanence means that we ought not to think of God as setting up a universe,

endowing it with certain forces under certain laws, and then standing by, as it were, to see it work as of itself. Some such view it is usual to ascribe to the rationalists of last century, and also to some schools of Christian theology. At all events, immanence is the opposite of all that. The doctrine contemplates God as most inwardly present to His creatures, working all in all. This doctrine has been strongly pressed by philosophers during this century, including those in whose genealogy Dr. Pfeiderer stands, and they have done so sometimes in the form of Pantheism, identifying the life of God with the life of the universe. But this is not to be imputed to Dr. Pfeiderer, who welcomes the thought of God as personal—as having moral and intellectual features, and conscious designs towards which the universe tends—eternally, as Dr. Pfeiderer thinks, without beginning or end. Whether or no this doctrine of Divine Immanence can be finally settled on philosophical grounds, I willingly accept it on Scripture grounds, in so far as it teaches that “in Him we live and move and have our being.” All that I feel concerned about is that this should not be held to be all that is to be said about God, or about His relation to His universe.

But supposing God confessed to be immanent, the question still remains: What range of meaning belongs to the phrase, and what range of action is allowed to God under it? Here, then, let it be remembered what this notion is set against, according to the philosophy of which it is a part. On the one hand, it

is set against the notion of a world that goes on by itself, with God, as it were, on the outside, looking at it. But, on the other hand, it is set against the notion of everything miraculous. That is, it is set against the notion of any action of God in the world that is not at the same time the action of the creatures, and of the creatures according to their own nature, under their own laws, and subject to all the conditions in which they are placed at the time. God must confine Himself strictly to that; for if He goes beyond it, however secretly or gently, He is out into the region of the miraculous, which is prohibited. In short, His presence is only, after all, the philosophical explanation of the forces of nature, including of course the forces and capacities of human souls. Those are the facts of which we have cognisance. Certain views of the structure of the world lead thinkers to postulate God as the common ground of the existence of these facts with their forces and laws. Their life is conceived to refer itself back to His life. But, then, He is not supposed in any case to add anything immediately, exceptionally, or of Himself; for that would be supernatural interposition, and the thought of it would burst up the true system from the bottom. The forces and capacities of all creatures are conceived to be invested with a new dignity and interest, when they are viewed in their relation to the divine sustaining and vitalising power. But then they are not therefore to be supposed to receive a new inspiration, or to be carried beyond

themselves. For what the divine immanence does is to sustain them as they are, as in themselves they were meant to be.

The immanence of God, assumed and granted, does nothing to shed new light on the world of nature or man, nor are the difficulties which have always beset natural theology in the least alleviated by it. For example, in this presence of His, God upholds all forces and tendencies, alike the conservative and the destructive. He is immanent in the serpent and the tiger, as much as in the dove and in the lamb. And, in regard to man, He maintains our powers when we are using them well, and when we are using them ill,—both alike as far as the doctrine of immanence is concerned,—not less truly immanent in us in the time of our errors and our sins, than at any other time.

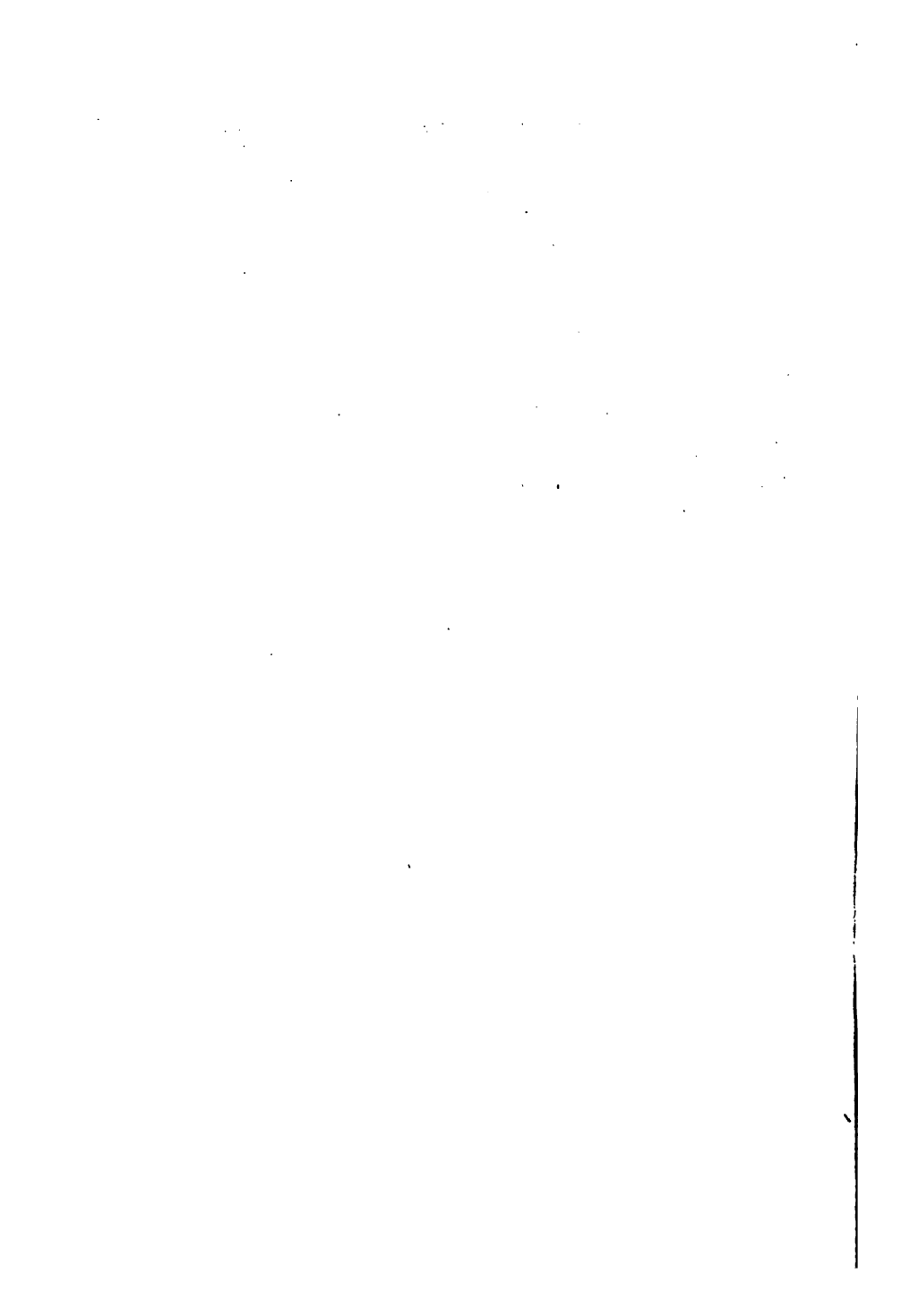
It is true, indeed, that however we err, or however we sin, man is so made—man's life is so conditioned—that the great constants of truth and duty come into view, and they claim to be regarded and embraced. It is a sound conclusion that those great elements, which thus maintain their ground amid the fluctuations and infirmities of our minds and wills, have a divine authority and reveal the divine character. That conclusion is sound, whether the doctrine of immanence, or any other doctrine consistent with faith in God, is embraced. But the divine immanence guarantees nothing beyond the known lines and limits of creature natures. In particular, it cannot ever guarantee us in any particular case against mixed experiences of

true and false, right and wrong. After we have adopted the doctrine of Divine Immanence as before, the question as to what is possible to human nature has to be settled from our own consciousness and from the experience of the race.

All this applies to the case of Christ. The doctrine of Immanence supplies no fountain of revelation, and offers no guarantee against mixtures or errors. Immanence could not produce sinlessness; for that would be the proper supernatural. Immanence leaves the creature within his limits. Never could it justify a man in saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." To carry the creature beyond itself, to clothe it with authority, to guarantee it against error or sin, may be very possible to God,—I believe it. But it is a belief that contemplates the miraculous, and does not limit God to development.

I shall be sorry if I am thought to cherish a grudging spirit towards any who, unable in their present mental atmosphere to receive the miraculous and the supernatural as these appear in Christianity, still strive to hold on, and do hold on, to the impression derived from Christ as at least an incomparable Personality and an incomparable Teacher. The truth is, I regard the position of many such persons with a very peculiar feeling of respect. I believe that not unfrequently their position represents moral qualities not easily overrated. And while I must think it symptomatic also of something that is defective and one-sided, I am far from counting

myself qualified to be their censor. But I must express my belief that in the long-run, and for the mass of men, the position is untenable. Christianity does not hold men first by its ethical depth. It holds men because God is in it; because it is felt that once God in Christ has taken His self-revealing place in the midst of the world, calling men to judgment and to mercy. In Christ He has done it: "whereof He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead."





II

CAN PROFESSOR PFLEIDERER'S VIEW  
JUSTIFY ITSELF?

By PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.



## II

### CAN PROFESSOR PFLEIDERER'S VIEW JUSTIFY ITSELF ?



THE task entrusted to me this evening is that of surveying, and endeavouring to estimate on its merits, the theory of religion presented to us by Professor Pfleiderer with much persuasiveness, and in the name of the highest theological science, in his recent Gifford Lectures, and propounded by him as a substitute for, or rather, as he would phrase it, the truth and kernel of, supernatural Christianity. I need not say that in any criticism I feel called upon to make on this theory, nothing is intended personal or disrespectful to the distinguished Lecturer himself. Professor Pfleiderer's great abilities, and his remarkable breadth of historical knowledge and philosophical culture, are ungrudgingly admitted, and perhaps those of us who have most to do with these things would be the first to acknowledge, in its own place, our indebtedness to him in many respects. All the same, it is impossible not to recognise that these Lectures, delivered by a thinker deservedly of such high repute, and under the ægis of one of our great Scottish Universities, striking

as they do directly at the foundations of historical Christianity, and tearing up by the roots with unsparing hand much that we have been accustomed, at least, to regard as most vital to our faith, constitute a challenge to the Christian Church which it cannot ignore. I do not think the Church will shrink from taking up the gauntlet thus thrown down to it; at least, I am sure it need not. The challenge in itself is not a new one. It has been heard before, and supernatural Christianity survives. To those acquainted with Professor Pfeiderer's works, the views enunciated in the Gifford Lectures came in no sense as a surprise. They have been before the world any time for the last dozen years; and they have been discussed in Germany any time for the last forty or fifty years. What is more important, they have not found acceptance there, or at least have not been able to hold the field. Indeed, the most remarkable thing to my mind in connection with these Lectures is, that it is precisely at the time when, as Professor Pfeiderer frankly acknowledges in a recent published utterance,<sup>1</sup> the tide has receded from the school he represents in Germany, and a reaction has set in in the direction of belief in a positive historical revelation in Christ—for this is the meaning of the dominant Ritschlian movement in that country—he should be found enunciating these views in Scotland as a new gospel, and should be hailed by many as the prophet of a new age! I do not, however, wish to

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Grundriss*, 1893.

make too much of this. Professor Pfeiderer's theories, old or new, are entitled to be tried on their own merits. He has stated his views to us ably, reverently, undisguisedly; has put them before us in logically-reasoned form; and he is entitled to his answer. I have no desire to play with details on the surface of the system. What I would wish to do is to get as soon as possible to the heart of things, and deal with this theory in its fundamental presuppositions. I would take this new philosophy of Christianity, not on its weakest and worst side, if there is anything about it which can be so characterised, but on its highest and best side, and would ask whether the root out of which it is supposed to grow is capable of sustaining it; whether this rejection of the supernatural has a justification in the postulates and principles of Professor Pfeiderer's own system; and whether the religious convictions and moral idealism he retains do not require us to admit more than he allows.

Let us look, then, at this theory of Professor Pfeiderer's—try to get to the essence of it. We have seen from the Lectures he has given us how everything of a supernatural or miraculous nature in the narratives of the Gospels goes overboard; how the divine facts in the history of our Redeemer, on the confession of which every great historical Church in Christendom up to the present hour, including Professor Pfeiderer's own, is founded, are relegated to the realms of myth and fiction—are interpreted as the fruit of "ideal

figurative invention." The question which starts up in every mind in the light of this treatment is: When these foundations are knocked away, as Professor Pfeiderer helps so vigorously in knocking them, will the Christian Church, or will Christianity itself in any form, survive, save as a pleasing (or, as some may choose to think it, a baleful) dream and illusion of the past? Giving up supernatural Christianity, are we, with so many in our age, to take the plunge into Agnosticism or Nihilism or Pessimism? This is far from being Professor Pfeiderer's opinion. He is never weary of assuring us that, if his theories are accepted, religion, so far from being destroyed, will be placed upon a firmer basis than ever. It is only the accidents, the excrescences, the drapery and embellishments of religious ideas that disappear: the essence, the kernel, the rational, imperishable truth of the matter remains,—and what could any reasonable mind wish more? A wonder-working word, as we shall see, is this "kernel" in Professor Pfeiderer's system; a veritable enchanter's wand by which the most magical transformations are accomplished! By its aid nothing vital is to perish. The Church is to go on; Christianity is to go on, though in a purified form; faith in God and in the moral goal of history is to go on; labour for the Kingdom of God is to go on. Now, what I want to know is, whether this is a rational or tenable expectation? I want to know whether, in giving up these supernatural aspects of Christianity, under pretence of keeping everything, we are not really

parting with all? I believe for myself that we are, and I think that nine-tenths of those who agree with Professor Pfliegerer in his rejection of the principle of the supernatural, and who are gleeful over his supposed demolition of the historical groundworks of Christianity, are probably of the same opinion. We cannot forget that this kind of language has been heard before. There was a time when Strauss also wrote: "But we have no fear that we should lose Christ by being obliged to give up a considerable part of what has hitherto been called the Christian Creed! He will remain to all of us the more surely, the less anxiously we cling to doctrines and opinions that might tempt our reason to forsake Him. But if Christ remains to us, and if He remains to us as the highest we know, and are capable of imagining, within the sphere of religion, as the Person without whose presence in the mind no perfect piety is possible, we may fairly say that in Him do we still possess the sum and substance of the Christian faith."<sup>1</sup> But at a later period, in his *Old Faith and the New*, Strauss faced the question, "Are we still Christians?" with a bolder look, and gave it an uncompromising answer, "No." We want to know whether it may not be the same here.

The difficulty, I imagine, which most people will feel in dealing with Professor Pfliegerer is, that there is so much in his religious philosophy which is in itself good and true,—which has a Christian appearance, or at least a Christian sound,—and to which the

<sup>1</sup> *Colloquies* (Eng. Trans.), p. 67.

Christian believer can cordially assent. The denial of the miraculous in Christianity by a bold naturalism we can readily understand, but here is something of a subtler order which does not fit in with any of our accepted categories. Huxley we know, and Spencer we know; but here is a thinker, not less pronounced in his anti-supernaturalism than they, who clothes his ideas in Christian garb, who uses continually the Christian dialect, who professes to be giving us the very essence and truth of the Christian religion,—what are we to make of him? Professor Pfeleiderer himself would not admit that his theory is fairly described as a denial of the supernatural. His system, he will tell you, is saturated with the idea of the supernatural. He believes in a supernatural basis of the world—God; in a supernatural government of the world, or, what is held to be the same thing, a divine teleological system of the world; in a divine purpose and goal in history; in the peculiar place of Israel in the religious development; in Jesus as the bearer of the principle of the absolute religion; in the victory of good over evil, and the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>1</sup> Still less would Professor Pfeleiderer admit that he is fairly described as denying revelation. It is the last thing in the world, he will tell you, he would think of doing. All religion rests on revelation. The foundation of his whole religious philosophy is the idea of God as self-revealing. The religious history of mankind is the history of revela-

<sup>1</sup> Lectures V., VI., IX., X. (First Course); II. (Second Course), etc.



tion.<sup>1</sup> Yet underneath all this, as we are compelled to confess when we get to the bottom of his meaning,—the limits of my Lecture will not allow me to put too fine a point on it,—there lies nothing but the most naked rationalism. The world may rest on a supernatural basis, but it is a supernatural which expresses itself only in the natural, never beyond it. Miracle, in the strict sense, he tells us again and again, is impossible; nothing ever happens, or can happen, outside the eternally established natural order; of any transcendence, or overstepping of the limits of that order, whether in nature or in the human mind, it is not permitted to the enlightened theologian to speak.<sup>2</sup> With this accords the idea of revelation. That which, on the divine side, is viewed as revelation, is, on the human side, simply the natural development of man's spirit—the working out of the original potentialities and capacities of his nature in contact with the world and with history.<sup>3</sup> Everything is there, like a coiled-up spring, in man's constitution from the beginning, waiting only the touch of external events to cause it to unfold itself. This I take to be the peculiarity of Professor Pfeiderer's system—its combination of Christian elements and a high moral and religious idealism with an essentially naturalistic or rationalistic view of the world; and it is the legitimacy of this combination I am to test. The

<sup>1</sup> Lectures V., VI. (First Course), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture I. (Second Course).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Philosophy of Religion* (Eng. Trans.), iv. pp. 70, 72, 75, 78.

difficulty is not in dealing with either of these conceptions separately. We can perfectly understand a man who maintains his faith in God, in His love, in a providential government of the world, in progressive revelation, and in an ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God, in connection with a general supernatural view of the world; and we can understand the agnostic or the avowed naturalist who rejects the supernatural altogether, and with it sweeps aside this whole load of theological conceptions which Professor Pfeiderer would carry with him. The peculiarity in Professor Pfeiderer's philosophy is its attempt at the combination of these two commonly opposed sides. I do not doubt that Professor Pfeiderer has made a synthesis of these two sides which satisfies his own spirit; the question is, whether it is one which will hold good for the mass of men, or can permanently justify itself at the bar of reason; whether a religious optimism can maintain itself on this footing; or whether we are not brought back to the alternative of either going over wholly to the side of Christianity, with its supernatural basis, or else of accepting a view of the world from which the supernatural is entirely excluded, and surrendering the hopes and idealisms which spring from faith in God and revelation? It is this peculiarity in Professor Pfeiderer's system which is, as I regard it, at once its strength and its weakness. It is its strength, for it falls in with a prepossession of the times, fostered by many causes, adverse to the recognition of the supernatural, and creating a desire for just

such a combination as is here attempted. Even from the evangelical side I can conceive that many, finding so much that seems to them morally elevated and genuinely Christian in Professor Pfeiderer's teaching, hearing him speak, as they constantly do, of the love of God and revelation and salvation and the communication of the Holy Spirit, may think, "Well, if this is not supernatural Christianity, it is at any rate a very good substitute for it, and we can get on very well without the other." But it is also its weakness; for this middle position of Professor Pfeiderer's cannot long satisfy either the Christian believer or the sceptic. The former will ask, with perfect justice, whether these high religious convictions of Professor Pfeiderer's would ever have been his, or can be sustained, apart from the faith in supernatural revelation from which they have sprung; and the sceptic will ask whether, renouncing such revelation, he has any right to retain the fruit which grew upon its tree? This is a question we must now inquire into further.

It is the anti-supernaturalism of Professor Pfeiderer's system which is its chief attraction in many eyes, and with it, accordingly, I must begin. Nothing, we are told, can be allowed to have a place in the system of the world outside the natural order. Not only is it so, says Professor Pfeiderer, but it must be so. It is impossible to think rationally or worthily of God otherwise. A miracle is excluded on metaphysical and on moral grounds; and it is further, we are told,

excluded on scientific grounds.<sup>1</sup> This, *e.g.*, is Professor Pfeiderer's objection, or one of his objections, to Augustine. The Christian salvation stood with him in mere opposition to nature, and could only come to it from without through a miracle.<sup>2</sup> I cannot help remarking in passing that Professor Pfeiderer is not always quite fair to his supernaturalistic opponents in his statements of their views. He exalts distinctions into contrasts, and throws them into an abrupt and forbidding form which those whom he criticises would not accept. No Christian (and least of all Augustine) holds that because salvation comes to humanity from a source above nature, therefore it is "in mere opposition" to nature. Rather is it held to be in deepest congruity with nature,—that which redeems, restores, sanctifies, and perfects it. The same exaggeration is seen in Professor Pfeiderer's treatment of the idea of revelation, and indeed of the supernatural generally. A view which refuses to recognise the all-sufficiency of nature is invariably represented as in harsh opposition to nature, and as taking no account of psychological or other natural conditions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 88, 89.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture IX. (Second Course).

<sup>3</sup> Thus the alternative is represented as lying between a view of revelation which resolves it into a purely psychological product (with God certainly as the ultimate creative ground) and "an entirely divine operation, not indebted to the assistance, nor subject to the conditions of the human mind."—*Philosophy of Religion*, iv. p. 66. So miracles are "isolated exceptions of a lawless divine freedom," and are held to involve a view of God as "in general unliving, inactive, and not free,"—an activity which "shows itself alive by way of exception merely."—*Ibid.* p. 88, etc.

It is this anti-supernaturalism which is the key of the position in Professor Pfeiderer's, as in all similar systems. It marks the contrast between two conceptions of the world and of Christianity fundamentally distinct, and incapable of being reconciled. Here, then, the issue must specially be faced.

There must be nothing, we are told, outside of the natural order. But why must? I can conceive of some views of the nature of God and His relations to the world which would necessitate this conclusion. A Spinozistic view of God, *e.g.*, in which everything proceeds necessarily from the Divine Substance; a Hegelian view of God, in which nature and spirit are again but the logical unfolding of the Immanent Reason of the universe; a Deistical view of God, such as that described by Professor Pfeiderer in words quoted from Goethe—"What were a God which only gave the world a push from without, or let it spin round His finger?"<sup>1</sup> Such views of God of necessity exclude miracle; but none of these is Professor Pfeiderer's view of God, though he puts himself in the rational succession to Spinoza and Hegel, and serves himself heir to their denials of miracle, drawn from such different premises. Professor Pfeiderer is a theist. The God he believes in is a God of love and power and wisdom—a personal God, not to be identified with the natural order, but distinguishing Himself as a knowing, willing person from the totality of His manifestations in the universe.<sup>2</sup> With such a concep-

<sup>1</sup> Lecture IX. (First Course).

<sup>2</sup> Lecture V. (First Course).

tion of God as that, however it may be on the view of a Spinoza or Hegel or Spencer, the denial of the possibility of miracle on metaphysical grounds is plainly incompetent. Not less illegitimate is the assertion of the *à priori* scientific impossibility of miracle. Professor Huxley and J. S. Mill are probably as good authorities on science as Professor Pfeiderer, and both of them tell us that there is no scientific impossibility in miracle—it is purely and solely a question of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the denial tenable on Professor Pfeiderer's own theory. God, as I understand it, on Professor Pfeiderer's view, is Himself the ultimate law of all connection of phenomena in the universe, and the immanent and efficient cause of its changes. No laws of nature, no secondary causes, interpose themselves between the universe and Him. He is Himself the ever-flowing fountain of all life and power; His presence, love, and will are through and over all.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, but from this very doctrine of the immanence of God a new objection arises. Miracle may be possible to God, but is it worthy of Him? Is it not a far higher conception of God to think of Him as immanent in His universe, working along the lines of an eternally-ordained order, and never needing, as He can never desire, to depart from it? Is it not a reflection either on the wisdom or on the power of

<sup>1</sup> Huxley's *Controverted Questions*, pp. 258, 259; Mill's *Logic*, Bk. iii. chap. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture V. (First Course).

God, a reflection on the perfection of the order He has established, to suppose that all the ends He had in view in His creation cannot be accomplished through it—that it needs to be tampered and interfered with to bring out yet higher and exceptional ends? Is it not enough, to quote Goethe again, to say, “I look for a God who moves the world from within, who fosters nature in Himself, Himself in nature; so that naught that in Him lives and moves and has its being ever misses the force of His Spirit;” and is it not a kind of sacrilege, a desecration of this conception, to imagine that God ever needs to depart from this sublime path which His own infinite wisdom has eternally marked out for its manifestation? I desire to state this objection as strongly as I can, for it is here that the argument against miracle is at its best. I wish, at the same time, I could be clearer than I am as to what place after all Professor Pfeiderer leaves in his scheme for something that to the uninitiated mind looks very like “miracle.” He often enough uses language which, strictly interpreted, would imply the appearance of something absolutely new, springing creatively from the immanent divine source, though prepared for by previous stages of development. Such a new beginning, for example, was the appearance of life upon the earth, which, he appears to contend, in opposition to those who would extend the Darwinian theory of development to include this phenomenon, cannot be explained out of pre-

existing physical causes.<sup>1</sup> But this is what in ordinary parlance would be called a miracle; indeed, in this sense, every higher stage of nature (vital, sentient, rational) is a miracle to the stages below it. Language of the same kind is frequently used in speaking of "revelation,"—giving his expressions often a quite supernaturalistic look,—though this is taken back again by saying that every so-called revelation, if we could only see into its depths, would be found to be perfectly psychologically mediated, *i.e.* to be only a stage or phase of the natural development of the spirit.<sup>2</sup> To take but one more instance, readers of Professor Pfeleiderer must often feel edified by the earnest, almost warmly evangelical, references to the "Holy Spirit" which abound in his writings,—to His teaching, guiding, sanctifying influence,—but the glow is rather chilled when we find this "Holy Spirit" elsewhere rationalistically explained as simply "the arrival of the divine reason (which is our own reason) at supremacy in our hearts."<sup>3</sup> I take it, then, that anything which looks like the admission of the miraculous in Professor Pfeleiderer's system is to be interpreted in harmony with a curious phrase of his own in one of his works, when speaking of the transactions of Pentecost,—"miraculous, no doubt,

<sup>1</sup> Lecture IX. (First Course).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, iv. pp. 70-78; *Grundriss*, p. 20. It must be observed that on all subjects touching the border-line of the natural and supernatural, Professor Pfeleiderer's language is exceedingly loose and vague.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. pp. 304-5.



but not an absolutely supernatural miracle ;”<sup>1</sup> and that his real view is, as I indicated, one of unbroken natural causation, a causal order outside of which no operation of Deity ever takes place. It is a fair demand, then, when we are asked why this purely immanent action of God in nature and in the activities of the human spirit does not satisfy us, why we contend for something more as both worthy of God and necessary for the fulfilment of His purposes? I shall try to give some reasons, arguing the matter less on abstract grounds than on the basis of ideas and principles furnished by Professor Pfeiderer’s own system.

And the first reason I would give why a purely immanent action of God within the limits of the natural order is not regarded by us as intellectually, morally, or religiously satisfying, is this,—that the end of the natural order itself is something higher than a mere natural order, namely, a realm of free, personal spirits, in which the law is not that of impersonally mediated manifestations, but the direct personal intercourse of love. Professor Pfeiderer is the last who can reject this premiss of my argument, for the idea is one on which he himself is continually insisting. Nature is a means to humanity. The end of the natural development is the spiritual being man; the end of the historical development, that for which both nature and history are constituted, is the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> But see what this means. We are

<sup>1</sup> *Urchristenthum*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Lectures V., VI. (First Course).

ourselves parts of nature, yet in a very true sense we are above nature—higher than nature. We have the attribute of personality which nature has not, and through this attribute can enter into relations with each other which are impossible to nature; we have modes of revelation to one another of which nature knows nothing. We can form societies, spheres of reciprocal love and communion; can hold personal converse with each other; can act and react on each other by the continual interchange of thought and sentiment. We communicate with each other, not merely by dumb show, or through some system of automatic arrangements which go on unvaryingly from day to day, but behind which we ourselves are never visible,—which would be no satisfaction to the life of personality (imagine it in the arrangements of a household, or of a father with his children),—but by direct articulate speech, through personal word and look and deed, through all those subtle media by which the contents of one soul are poured into another. This is because, on the basis of nature, there has been reared a kingdom of personality. Is it, then, to be held that this direct personal form of communion is possible to every class of finite spirits, but is only not possible to, or cannot take place with, the Spirit of spirits,—who, be it remembered, in Professor Pfeleiderer's view, as in our own, is a Personality, full of love, fatherhood, and the desire of self-communication? I do not ask what is possible with other conceptions of God, but can we hold *this* conception, and yet consist-

ently deny the possibility, need, and suitableness of supernatural revelation? The strangest thing of all is, that Professor Pfeleiderer himself affirms the actuality of communion between the human and divine spirits in as strong a form as can be desired. I quote only one passage: "Why should it be less possible," he says, "for God to enter into a loving fellowship with us, than for men to do so with each other? I should be inclined to think that He is even more capable of doing so. For as no man can altogether read the soul of another, so no man can altogether live in the soul of another; hence all our human love is and remains imperfect. But if we are shut off from one another by the limits of individuality, in relation to God it is not so: to Him our hearts are as open as each man's heart is to himself; He sees through and through them, and He desires to live in them, and to fill them with His own sacred energy and blessedness."<sup>1</sup> Verily, why not? But will any one say that when you have thus affirmed a perfect loving fellowship of God with the soul, analogous to that into which human beings enter with each other, the line is not already crossed between the natural and the supernatural? or will any one say why, if the gates of intercourse are thus open between the soul and God, He should not enter into them, and give to man a better light and aid than he can find in his own dim gropings after Him? Why *must* God speak with man only through these dumb symbols of nature, or

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. iii. p. 305.

through the inarticulate longings and aspirations of his spirit, to which no personal response is ever given, and not through a "a more sure word" such as Plato of old longed for, and these ancient Hebrew prophets believed themselves to possess, and we Christians are assured that we have in a yet diviner form in Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh? There is nothing here which is not worthy of God, needed by man, consonant with the nature of things, and in accordance with the laws of the human spirit. Once grant, what lies in Professor Pfeiderer's own philosophy, that spirit is higher than nature, consciousness than unconsciousness, personality than impersonality, and that the goal of all God's workings and leadings alike in nature and history is the realisation in humanity of a kingdom of love,<sup>1</sup>—the production of a kingdom of free, personal spirits, bound together by love, and finding their highest good in fellowship with Himself,—and some direct, immediate, articulate word of God to man is the most natural and probable thing imaginable.

I have given one answer to the question why we cannot rest satisfied with a view of God which confines His activity purely within the bounds of the natural order. I shall now give another. It is this: If the goal of the divine purposes in nature and history be the bringing in of that Kingdom of God on earth of which Professor Pfeiderer speaks,<sup>2</sup> there is needed for the attainment of this goal a better know-

<sup>1</sup> Lecture VI. (First Course).

<sup>2</sup> Lectures VI. and IX. (First Course).

ledge of God than is possible on the hypothesis of immanent development. Professor Pfeiderer thinks it quite easy — nay natural and inevitable — that, given time and circumstances, the spirit of man should unfold from its depths just such a knowledge and certainty of God as we now have in the Christian gospel. He will analyse the process, trace the steps of the ascent, and put the whole result before you — on paper. Yes, on paper; but does the actual history of mankind justify him in this view? Grant that the Christian idea of God, once we have got it, can be shown to be in deepest accord with reason, and to furnish the true key to the purpose of God in history,—though this to many will be a very huge assumption,—has human reason found it so easy in practice to make a synthesis of these elements for itself, and to construct a conception of God adequate to the religious necessity? I do not think the history of philosophy or of religion will bear us out in saying that it has. Will any one read the history of the higher speculative systems, either ancient or modern, and say that their trend has been naturally and necessarily in the direction of that conception of a living, loving, personal God, which Professor Pfeiderer, with the Christianity from which he has borrowed it, affirms to be the only true one? Is the tendency of our philosophies of the Absolute not quite in the opposite direction—away from the idea of personality? Does the study of science any more than of philosophy necessarily beget in men's minds this profound

faith in God as the ground at once of the moral ideal and of the natural order? I fear we have only to look to the Agnosticism of many of our leading men of science to get too conclusive an answer. No, so far as history enables us to judge of the powers of reason, or of the soul's intuitions, to rise to a clear, assured, consistent, adequate conception of God,—of His character, will, love, and purpose in the world,—it is not a denial of, but an eloquent plea for, the necessity of a supernatural revelation. Nor is this to be wondered at. Each thinker had flashes, gleams, fitful apprehensions of this or the other side of the truth,—saw, guessed, imagined, something of the ways of Him whom Plato said it was hard to find, and when He was found, impossible to make known to all,—but not the efforts of any single mind, or of all together, could so combine these scattered rays of truth, so purify them from what was erroneous, or supply remaining defects, that the full and true theistic conception was the result. Still less could they bring the soul into living relation and communion with the Being thus dimly sketched by the intellect.

But there is another side of this subject from which perhaps it may be more profitably approached. This knowledge of God which is now in the world, and of which Professor Pfeiderer avails himself, has come to us in a very different way than through philosophical speculation. It is an heritage to us from the people of Israel, and above all from Jesus Christ. How, then, are we to explain this God-consciousness of

Israel,—this clearness, certainty, and power of their convictions of the being, government, and holy, loving purpose of the one living and true God,—the unshaken faith of psalmists and prophets in His righteousness and goodness, and their triumphant confidence in the future of His kingdom? We know how they themselves explained it, but let that pass for the moment. To Professor Pfeiderer it is but the highest example of what the spirit of man can attain to in the evolving of its innate religious endowment. But is this reasonable? Professor Pfeiderer is by no means of the opinion of another Gifford Lecturer, at present discoursing in a neighbouring city, who thinks that the Old Testament has been an unfortunate inheritance for Christianity. He does very considerable justice to the uniqueness and moral elevation and purity and far-sighted vision of the religion of Israel,<sup>1</sup> though that religion is even more unique and organically one in its development from patriarchal promise, through law and prophecy, to its ripened fruit in Jesus Christ, than he, with his naturalistic presuppositions, can allow. "In fact," he says, "if a religious revelation is to be found anywhere, it is certainly to be found in the spirit of the Hebrew prophets, who knew that God was the soul of the morally good. . . . Israel knew such a purpose of history, viz., the realisation of a kingdom of God, of a human fellowship and community, corresponding to the holy will of God, and thus did they become the path-finders and leaders of our race upon its toil-

<sup>1</sup> Lecture VI. (First Course); II. (Second Course).

some way to the moral ideal of humanity.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, but is their path-finding intellectually comprehensible, except through that factor of supernatural revelation to which they themselves unhesitatingly referred it? Try the matter by Professor Pfeleiderer’s own account of the origin of the idea of God. There are, it appears, two roots of the idea of God,—the rational impulse and the moral ideal.<sup>2</sup> Israel did not get its idea of God from rational and philosophical speculation,—that is clear. There remains the path of the moral ideal. But the mind in the forming of any of its ideals needs materials to work upon,—it does not act *in vacuo*,—and the materials at Israel’s disposal here were nature and history. Did Israel, then, get its idea of God from nature? To the inspired seers nature indeed was full of the presence of God,—a perpetual revelation of His wisdom, power, and goodness; but every one sees that they interpret nature through the idea of God which they bring to it, rather than reach God through the appearances of nature. When science comes to nature without this presupposition of God in its heart, it is often a far different account it has to give of it. There remains history, experience, the visible course of God’s providence. Did Israel get its idea of God from these? Now, history does indeed reveal God,—is an unfolding of His plan and purpose; but will any one say that in the course of events as they actually fall out around us,—in this strange

<sup>1</sup> Lecture VI. (First Course).

<sup>2</sup> Lecture IV. (First Course).



riddle of a life of ours, as we are so often compelled to regard it,—this plan of God is so clearly and unambiguously revealed that the most gifted mind could infallibly read in it God's purpose for the world, or raise out of it that unflinching confidence of His wisdom, righteousness, and all-compassionating mercy which we find in the Hebrew prophets? Given the Christian key to history, and we can perhaps spell out the meaning of God's purpose in parts of it; but how dark and confused, how enigmatical, tangled, and perplexed, how often a torturing problem to faith, does the larger portion of it still remain? Optimist and pessimist alike find grounds for their theories in history, according to the attitude of mind with which they approach it. It is here also less the action of history upon the mind which creates the faith, than the faith in God which determines how we shall read the history. And this is conspicuously evident in Israel. It is not when events are going well in their nation, but precisely in those periods of darkness and disaster, when God's providence is most adverse, and to the eye of sense His purposes are breaking down in utter failure,—it is then that the faith of these prophets seems to draw new vigour from misfortune, and plumes its wings for flight to yet unreach'd heights of confidence and hope! It is neither from nature nor from history, therefore, that Israel derives its idea of God. If it is the ideal that does it, it must be an ideal unlike every other we have known,—one, namely, which has power to lift itself up in

its own naked strength clean above and out of its environment, and sustain itself at this triumphant height of confidence, not only without anything objective to stay on, but in face of the most adverse appearances,—which works, as I have said, *in vacuo*. And this, I take it, is an inadmissible hypothesis. It was a far different account which Israel itself had to give of its faith and hope in God. They believed, this people of Israel, in a God who had revealed Himself to them, not in Professor Pfeiderer's sense, but in loving, saving deeds in their history, in which His presence, power, and grace had been unequivocally manifested; who had given them His sure word on which to hope; and who had opened to them by His Spirit visions and hopes of a future salvation, and a universal triumph of righteousness, which they knew He would not allow to fail. And why should we not accept this account as the truest and most reasonable,—as, indeed, it is the only one which will perfectly explain the facts? If the end of all God's guidance in nature and providence is, as Professor Pfeiderer says, the realisation of this Kingdom of God in humanity,<sup>1</sup> and if man is designed to be a co-worker with God in bringing in that kingdom, why should God not give to him that knowledge of Himself and of His will which is needful to enable him to enter intelligently into His purposes, and to co-operate with Him consciously and effectively; instead of using him only as an unconscious instrument of His plans, and

<sup>1</sup> Lectures VI., IX. (First Course).

leaving him to his blind gropings after a Divinity whom haply he may never find? It will at least hardly be disputed that a far higher class of results are conceivable as reached on a system in which man knows something of the ends he is pursuing, and freely devotes himself to the realisation of these ends (the hypothesis of supernatural revelation), than on another in which he has no such knowledge, but is left to the dim and uncertain light afforded by his natural reason and conscience.

There is yet another answer which might be given to this question, why we cannot be satisfied with a merely natural revelation of God, but it was touched on by the learned Principal in his opening Lecture, and I shall dismiss it with a few words here. It is that drawn from the fact of *sin*. Whatever knowledge of God we may suppose to be possible to man if his faculties were pure and entire, and his conscience an unsullied mirror reflecting the divine, it is surely obvious that the case is altered when it is recognised—as on any hypothesis it must be—that his mind is darkened and beclouded, and his will held in bondage, by sin. Did my limits permit, I might raise the question whether Professor Pfeiderer's account of the genesis and nature of sin does not evacuate that which we so name of its essential evil, and rob it of its awfulness and tragicalness under the government of God, by representing it as a part of man's original constitution and necessary stage in his development ;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecture VII. (First Course).

but at least he recognises the fact of universal sin and guilt, and does homage to the Christian idea of Redemption, by granting that salvation from sin in some sense is necessary. When, however, we come to inquire what this salvation from sin is, we find, in accordance with the genius of the whole system, that it is something which man has to accomplish entirely in and on himself.<sup>1</sup> The true Saviour is not Jesus,—though He remains as a motive,—but the ideal man within ourselves, our own reason or better self. The mystical conception of Redemption, as Professor Pfeiderer expresses it, is changed into the corresponding ethical conception of education.<sup>2</sup> The sinner is saved through faith in the ideal. The doctrine is simply that of Kant in his *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*, given to the world now fully a century ago,—salvation through return to the better self, the new man suffering vicariously for the sins of the old, etc.<sup>3</sup> It is very much as if a man were summoned to take himself by his own waistband, and lift himself up out of his sin and misery,—and this is called Redemption; nay, is supposed to be the “kernel” of that doctrine of salvation by grace which is founded on the absolute inability of the sinner to help himself, and on the need of a divine, supernatural interposition on his behalf. Now, I submit that all experience is with me when I say that the power of sin is not to be broken in this way in the heart and life of the sinner.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, iv. pp. 126-132.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture VIII. (First Course).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

In Professor Pfeiderer's system there is no place for forgiveness, in any proper sense of that word. There is no act of God in forgiving; no change in His thoughts or dispositions towards the sinner. The sinner was formerly alienated from the ideal of his being; he has now come back to his true self; the whole drama is internal to his own spirit. For a change like this, perhaps, no supernatural revelation is needed, beyond, at least, an illuminative one; but for such a salvation as I daresay most of us feel that we require,—a true forgiveness, a real regeneration, a sanctifying power brought to bear upon us from without ourselves,—there is needed very much more: an actual redemptive interposition of God in human history, provision for the obliteration of guilt, the work of a divine, living Spirit,—in short, a great moral dynamic such as the Christian gospel yields, but for which Professor Pfeiderer's system, however clamant might be the necessity, affords no room.

These last remarks are already the answer to another line of defence of Professor Pfeiderer's anti-supernaturalistic conception of Christianity which might plausibly be attempted, and may possibly have occurred to your own thoughts. "Granted," it may be said, "that there is a doubt as to how these ideas have arisen, need that trouble us? However originally obtained, whether by natural or supernatural means, these ideas of the Christian system are in the world now, and are not likely soon again to be parted with. The Christian idea of the fatherly love of God; the

moral idealism of Jesus; the thought of a Kingdom of God for which all are to labour; the ethical view of Redemption as a dying to the old self that we may live to the new,—are not these sufficient to constitute the basis of a very elevated form of religion for mankind, to which all questions of supernatural or non-supernatural origin are indifferent?" This brings us back to the point from which the present Lecture started. Purged of all supernatural elements, how long would this quasi-Christianity of Professor Pfeiderer be likely to maintain itself? I cannot say that I regard its prospects as very bright. Professor Pfeiderer thinks that he is able to establish these views of his on God and the ethical purpose of the world on philosophic grounds. But we have only to look at the variety of opinion in the philosophic systems around us,—at the Agnosticism, the Materialism, the Pessimism of the day, not to speak of the diversity of view even in the higher idealistic schools,—to see how far Professor Pfeiderer is from being likely to gain general acceptance for his metaphysical foundation; while, for the workaday mass of mankind, his philosophical reasons are as good as non-existent,—they produce no effect on their minds whatever. But were the foundations even stronger than they are, there are other glaring defects and weaknesses of the system which would still prove fatal to it. In its heart lies the great essential contradiction of a God who is conceived of as living, loving, personal, yet who never enters into real relations of revelation and fellow-

ship with His creatures ; who, having the power to make Himself known to them in direct, immediate ways, and to bless them with His friendship, help, and grace, never does so. This system, standing fixed within the limits of natural law, brings no aid to those whose need can only be met by supernatural remedy. It cannot be preached as a gospel to the sick in heart and sin-laden, for it has in it no power to pardon, renew, or save. It speaks of the Kingdom of God, but it has no means to realise it. The theory lies under the fatal defect that it will not work. It has no force to make it *go*.

All these difficulties in Professor Pfeiderer's system, I would now observe in closing, reach their acutest stage when we come to deal with Jesus Christ. That Professor Pfeiderer is filled with the sincerest reverence for Jesus, and the highest admiration for His character; that he exalts Him, ethically, spiritually, religiously, to the highest pinnacle of eminence compatible with his principles; nay, that he sometimes strains his principles almost to breaking point in the attempt to do Him yet greater honour,—this must be evident to every reader of his works. Professor Pfeiderer's face is not away from, but towards, the grace and truth that are in Jesus Christ. Yet, with all this exaltation of Jesus, it is not difficult to see that Jesus is for him, so far as historical reality is concerned, little else than a figure to hang his idealisations upon. He is a great religious genius, it is true, but still within the limits

of the merely natural. He has a young, fresh heart; is filled with a child-like love of God; has a wonderful charm and sweetness as a preacher of the Kingdom of God; is the nearest approach to the ideal which history can show.<sup>1</sup> But He is not the *perfect* ideal; He is not sinless. This would be to take a magical view of His character; would be to acknowledge Him as miraculous; and miracle is the one thing which cannot be admitted.<sup>2</sup> For the same reason, He did not work real miracles in His ministry; and when He died His history on earth was ended. There was no Resurrection. But there happened something which took the place of a Resurrection for the Christian Church. The stricken disciples, after the first blow, pluck up courage, and begin to think their Master is with them again. Then Peter has a vision,—sees a bright light, or something of the sort, and fancies it is Jesus; and, by a mysterious telepathy, his faith affects the Twelve, and they have visions; and the women have visions; and the five hundred brethren at once have visions; and, last of all, Paul has a vision. Out of these visions grew faith in the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Godhead, the Incarnation, the Atonement of Christ,—the whole scheme of Christian theology.<sup>3</sup> Paul is peculiarly the creator of this theology, and his scheme—though ingenuity can do wonderful things in extracting “kernels”

<sup>1</sup> Lecture III. (Second Course).

<sup>2</sup> Lecture I. (Second Course); cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, i. p. 339.

<sup>3</sup> Lecture IV. (Second Course); cf. his *Urchristenthum*, pp. 1-25.



from it<sup>1</sup>—is mainly a scheme in the air! But treat these illusions tenderly. Professor Pfeleiderer is very angry with the Ritschlians for laying violent hands on what he calls the “picture-language” of the Church,<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, the dogmas of the Miraculous Conception, Resurrection, and the like. Let all be carefully preserved. Let the Church be maintained, with its institutions, its sacraments, its festivals,—its Christmas, and Epiphany, and Easter, and Whitsuntide; let the old prayers be recited, the old hymns be sung, the old Scripture lessons be read, the old service be gone through. The philosopher knows its meaning, and it edifies the people. Ah, but there are others to reckon with! The sceptic comes along, who has long since parted with all this theological make-believe,—a Strauss or a Hartmann,—and he draws aside the veil, and points the finger at this which is going on, and says, “What mockery!” “In all ages,” says Hartmann, “there has been one common mark of the Christian religion—belief in Christ. . . . But the liberal Protestant cannot believe in Christ as either Luther, or Thomas Aquinas, or John, or Paul, or Peter, believed in Christ, and least of all as Jesus believed in Himself, for He believed Himself to be the Christ—the Messiah.”<sup>3</sup> And is the sceptic not right?

Must we then give up all in which we have hitherto believed? Most certainly not, if only we are willing

<sup>1</sup> Lecture V. (Second Course).

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Grundriss* (1893).

<sup>3</sup> *Selbstzersetzung des Christenthums*, pp. 54, 55.

to fulfil the simple condition of allowing Christian ideas and beliefs to grow upon their own root, and do not attempt to put this artificial, non-natural meaning upon them, and force them into a frame of anti-supernaturalism with which they can never agree. Go back to these Gospels again,—you will find a very different Jesus in them from Him whom Professor Pfeiderer has pictured. Professor Pfeiderer tells us that Jesus was no enthusiast, yet he acknowledges that He believed in His Messiahship, and in His own future return to judge the world.<sup>1</sup> Think of One who, without fanaticism, claimed to be the Judge of the world—the arbiter of the everlasting destinies of mankind, and ask by what standard you are to measure Him? Think of One who speaks habitually of Himself as “Son of Man” and “Son of God,” who founds the Kingdom of God, who gives the law for a new dispensation, who arrogates to Himself the power on earth to forgive sins, who dispenses the Holy Ghost, who ascribes an expiatory virtue to His death, who predicts His Resurrection and return in glory! This is no simple, trustful, religious genius, preaching a sweet gospel of the love of God to the multitudes of Galilee, but One vastly greater. I read these Gospels, and find in them the most wonderful impress of historical reality. But if the Christ of these Gospels was an historical Person, He made claims, He did works, He spoke from a consciousness of unity with God, He asserted an authority, He wielded prerogatives, which

<sup>1</sup> Lecture III. (Second Course).

you cannot fit into a merely human—least of all naturalistic—frame. To the life and death of such an One as Jesus Himself claimed to be, the Resurrection was a natural sequel,—indeed, is implied in His own announcements of a return after death. And it is faith in such a Divine Christ,—One who liveth and was dead, and, behold, is alive for evermore,—not faith in a mere moral ideal, which is the victory that overcomes the world.<sup>1</sup> I do not pursue this subject further, but leave the discussion of the historical evidence to one more competent to deal with it than I am.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John v. 4, 5 ; Rev. i. 18. I have not had opportunity to refer to the remarkable silence on the hope of immortality in the Lectures, but the fact is surely one full of significance. Can the Christian hope be dissociated from the promise—"Because I live, ye shall live also" (John xiv. 19) ?



III

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE  
GOSPELS

BY PROFESSOR MARCUS DODS, D.D.



### III

## THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE GOSPELS

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IN the first Lecture of this Course the ground was cleared of some of the difficulties most commonly alleged against the admission of the supernatural; its reasonableness and congruity were urged; and the genealogy and general character of Professor Pfeiderer's scheme were indicated. The second Lecture exposed the inconsistencies of that scheme, and of the philosophy which so largely enters into it. It is my humbler function to exhibit the unsatisfactory character of the Gospel criticism which is an essential part or necessary adjunct of this form of anti-supernaturalism. I am not called to estimate the value of miracle, to discuss its necessity, or to determine whether we can have a religion without it, and what kind of religion that must be; I am not even to bring forward what might be adduced as positive evidence in favour of the miracles which lie at the foundation of Christianity: I am merely to show the incompetence of that mode of disposing of the miraculous which is adopted by Professor Pfeiderer under the guise of criticism. But if I must call you down from those heights of philo-

sophy to which you have been carried, and invite you to accompany me on lower levels and in more pedestrian style, I have yet the advantage of being able to lay before you issues that are sharply defined and easily apprehended.

Let me once again remind you that the question in debate is the all-important one: What is Christ? What is the truth about Him; how is He to be accounted for; and what lies at the root of His influence? Is He a supernatural interpolation in the history of our race, or is He the natural product of antecedent persons and conditions? Did He begin to be when born in Judea, or did He come from a previous existence? Is He human, precisely as other men are human, or has He a unique relationship to the Father and to the Unseen? Is Christ merely the best of men, or is He the same who was with God and was God, and by whom God made the worlds?

To answer these questions, one naturally turns to the Gospels. These narratives profess to give us an account of what Jesus was and did and said in His life on earth. Cannot we, then, at once settle all debate by referring to these documents? No, says the theory in question, you cannot; because it is axiomatic that all miracle is impossible, and the Gospels are full of miracle. In the words of Professor Pfeleiderer: "To investigate a history means to trace up the connections of its causes and effects and to make it intelligible to the understanding. This presupposes that in what once happened there existed such a connection of



causes and effects as is analogous to our general experience and to what happens among men, and is therefore intelligible to our understanding." This postulate is an essential part of the philosophy expounded by Professor Pfeleiderer. It cannot admit the miraculous. One miracle explodes the whole system.

Now, unquestionably, any construction of Christianity which can dispense with miracle has a *prima facie* recommendation. Matthew Arnold stands by no means alone when he says: "There is nothing one would more desire for a person or a document one greatly values, than to make them independent of miracles." The smaller the claim, the larger will be the number who admit it. Possibly; possibly, also, even religion may be so cheapened as to make it worthless. A religion without miracle may turn out to be a religion without God. Take Christ, we are told, as the revealer of God, and let miracles go. But we may reasonably ask in reply, How has Christ revealed to us a God present with us, tender and helpful? How, but by and in those very miracles in which divine compassion and divine help were manifested? Is it not precisely the miracles of Christ even more than His teaching, and as much as His death, which have imprinted indelibly on the heart of Christendom the impression of God's love?

Neither is it quite as easy as it seems to dismiss miracle. For at once the question emerges, and a most troublesome question it has proved itself to be, What is to be done with the Gospels? Here are four

narratives, indisputably written by truthful writers ; and yet it is imperative to get rid of a large part of what they tell. How is it to be done ? Observe that, starting from the postulate that miracle is impossible, criticism is impossible. The form of examining the records may be gone through, but the conclusion is foregone. No school of sound criticism can arise on a basis of presuppositions so enormous. The problem of criticism so-called, becomes the problem of finding the most feasible mode of accounting for the presence of the supernatural in the Gospels. No matter what violence is done to the Gospels in the process, it is imperative to form a theory of their origin which shall account for the presence of the miraculous without requiring us to accept it.

It is to this point I am asked to speak. I have nothing to say directly of the underlying philosophy —I am relieved from the extremely difficult task of measuring the probable results of accepting or denying this philosophy ; but I have to call your attention to this: that the philosophy under consideration necessarily carries with it a certain explanation of the Gospels, and if this explanation is demonstrably erroneous, then plainly the philosophy itself must be reconsidered.

In testing the worth of Professor Pflleiderer's criticism of the Gospels, it will be convenient first of all to consider the theory by which he accounts for the presence of the miraculous, then to examine his account of the crowning miracle, the Resurrection

of Christ, and, if time allows, to adduce some considerations which corroborate the historicity of the narrative as it stands.

On learning Professor Pfeiderer's theory of the origin of the Gospels, the first feeling is one of disappointment. Has criticism, then, actually not moved for sixty years? This is precisely nothing more nor less than the theory of Strauss, given to the world so long ago, and which was thought to have been slain and buried a generation ago. May not conservative criticism be excused if it exclaim, "This is John whom I beheaded." In the battle of Inkermann, after every repulse of the Russians, mass after mass of grey-coated obedience and fearlessness was hurled against the British position, but with no new disposition of force, and no more adequate conception of the requirements of the attack. They did not know when they were defeated. So in these reiterated critical assaults without the slightest change of tactics, one sees stubbornness, gallantry, but also some bluntness of perception. "This is not war," we are tempted to say.

However, the fact is that the two most influential living critics in Germany at this hour, Holtzmann and Pfeiderer, merely reproduce the theory of Strauss, and certainly have added nothing of any consequence to his fascinatingly lucid and persuasive presentation of the case. This theory accounts for the large admixture of the miraculous in the Gospels by the familiar fact that there always grow up round the figure of popular favourites incredible stories of

wonderful feats, marvellous escapes, and so forth. The influence of this tendency in the human mind had been quite perceptible in the early history of Greece and Rome, and traditional stories had been discounted and allowance made for the inevitable incursion of the marvellous. The history of Jesus was singularly liable to the influence of this myth-forming propensity, because already in the Old Testament there abounded foreshadowings of what the Messiah was to be, and the Jewish people cherished in their minds an ideal to which the history must be conformed. Those who had not known the actual Jesus would necessarily ascribe to Him all that they had expected the Messiah to be and to do. They would unconsciously argue: "Such and such things must have happened to the Messiah—Jesus was the Messiah: therefore, such and such things happened to Him." The Messiah was to be greater than Moses; and as Moses had given the people manna, Jesus must be represented as feeding the hungry miraculously. Elisha raised the dead; Jesus therefore must also raise the dead. Jesus must have gathered up and surpassed in His own life and deeds everything that the ancient prophets had done and experienced. This weaving of a garland for the popular hero was not the work of premeditating deceit or of cunning invention: it was the inevitable growth of the feeling of the community.

Another influence was also at work. This influence Strauss exhibits in the following words: "Conceive a

recently-established community, revering its founder with all the more enthusiasm on his unexpected and tragic removal from his work; a community impregnated with a mass of new ideas, which were destined to transform the world; a community of Orientals, chiefly unlearned people, who therefore could not appropriate and express those ideas in the abstract conceptional forms of the understanding, but only as symbols and stories in the concrete fashion of the imagination. When all this is remembered, one can perceive that, under these circumstances, there must necessarily have arisen what actually did arise, viz., a series of sacred narratives fitted to bring visibly before the mind the whole mass of new ideas started by Jesus, and of old ones applied to Him, cast in the form of particular incidents in His life." According to this theory, it is the *idea* not the related fact that is true. The eternal truths of Christianity are embodied by the popular imagination in concrete incidents and actions. The reported resurrection of Christ was the rendering visible to the imagination, and sealing on the mind, of the great truth that man lives by dying. The narrative of the turning of water into wine, to continue the festivity of the wedding feasts at Cana, was merely a way of saying that the watery forms of Judaism were to be changed into the strengthening wine of spiritual religion by Jesus. Thus, although the fact disappears, the idea, the eternal truth abides. And it is only the idea which is of any account.

The difficulties in the way of accepting this theory are enormous. *First*, It proceeds upon the idea that the Messiah was expected to be a worker of miracles, and therefore after the death of Jesus miracles were freely ascribed to Him. But if during His life Jesus had wrought no miracles, how did He come to be acknowledged as the Messiah by persons who looked for a miracle-working Messiah? How was it possible that men who were so persuaded the Messiah would work miracles that they invented them for Him, should recognise as the Messiah a person who wrought none? If without miracles the first step could be taken, and they could be induced to believe in Him as the Messiah, why could not the easier subsequent steps be taken without the ascription of miracles? Something originated the idea that He was a supernatural person, what was it?

*Second*, It is not denied that Jesus Himself claimed to work miracles. This admission seems to me fatal to the theory. To say that He was compelled to work miracles against His inclination, is nothing to the point. To say that He professed to work miracles, but did not, is inadmissible. Whether a supernatural person or not, He was sane and He was honest. But to admit that He claimed to work miracles, and to maintain that He could not and did not, is to reduce the purest, truest Being we know to the level of the common charlatan. His own claim seems to me to settle the question.

*Third*, The mythical theory must have been elaborated

in forgetfulness of one of the most important factors in the origin of Christianity—the Apostle Paul. The miracles ascribed to Jesus are accounted for by the hero-worship of His followers: how are the miracles of Paul accounted for? A mythical theory is here impossible. If one is determined to exclude the miraculous, he must have the hardihood to maintain that Paul was again and again mistaken as to what was happening under his own observation and in his own experience. That, of course, does not deter those whose postulate is the impossibility of the miraculous; but it should deter them from advancing the mythical theory to account for the appearance of the miraculous in primitive records,—for here are records, the Epistles of Paul, to which the theory cannot be applied.

*Fourth,* The fourth difficulty which prevents our acceptance of this theory is that, admittedly, the formation of myths requires some time. Thus Strauss himself says: "It would most unquestionably be an argument of decisive weight in favour of the credibility of the biblical history, could it indeed be shown that it was written by eye-witnesses or even by persons nearly contemporaneous with the events narrated."<sup>1</sup> If it can be shown that the Gospels faithfully embody the primitive tradition, the observation and conviction of eye-witnesses, and that they are not the reflection of the thoughts and fancies of the second generation, then this theory falls to the ground. Hence the efforts constantly put forth to bring the Gospels down

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Jesus*, p. 55.

to a late date, and to deny to them the authority attaching to the reports of eye-witnesses. It is usually represented by this school of critics, that until the year 70 the story of the life of Jesus was not written down, but was at the mercy of oral tradition. But, notoriously, oral tradition not only preserves, it creates : each person that tells the story tries to tell it in a sharper and more impressive form. And thus, as time goes on, the story, in proportion to its popularity, becomes distorted, and its last state is irreconcilable with its original.

It is essential, therefore, that we know the facts regarding the origin of the Gospels. Are they, as represented, the embodiment of an oral tradition which, for a full generation at least, had been at the mercy of popular fancy ? If this description can apply to any of our Gospels, it must be to Luke's. Now, Luke has fortunately given us a few words of preface, in which he himself tells us something of his opportunities for arriving at the historical truth. In this preface he implies that he himself had not been an eye-witness of what he records. But are we therefore to conclude that he merely gathered together the current oral tradition, and that therefore we have little or no security for the truth of his narration ? Are we to think of Luke as a youth of twenty or thirty years of age, sitting down in the year 80 or thereby to compile, partly from uncertified documents, partly from current and popular stories, what we now accept as the Third Gospel ? That certainly is the impression left



on the mind by the representations given by critics of this school. But this is far from correct. Luke was one of the most intimate of the companions of Paul—the trusted, faithful, confidential friend of the men of the first generation, and himself born certainly before the year 30, probably before 20, and possibly much earlier. He shows that he quite understood the value of the testimony of eye-witnesses by the manner in which he speaks of it; he shows that he was aware that carefulness and accurate investigation were requisite in narrating events which he himself had not witnessed; he tells us that he had carefully investigated all he narrates, and he narrates it to impart assurance to Theophilus. The accuracy of Luke is confirmed year after year, by the discovery of inscriptions and of local peculiarities by which his narrative in the Acts can be checked, and it is now maintained by all who know the subject at first hand that he is an accurate historian.

One feature of this Gospel cannot escape observation. A full third of it, from the ninth to the eighteenth chapter, is a solid block of narrative not found in the other Gospels. This section of the Gospel contains several of the most beautiful of our Lord's parables and sayings, which, by their form as well as their substance, are self-authenticating. So genuine a record is this, that, not without plausibility, it has been supposed to be the work of one who accompanied our Lord at this period of His ministry. But embedded in this genuine narrative are accounts of miracle. I

own to a feeling of disingenuousness if I propose to accept the one part of the narrative and reject the other.

Further, an examination of the Third Gospel reveals the fact that the writer made use not only of oral tradition but of written material. Is it an incredible supposition that some at least of the "many" narratives already in circulation were ten years older than Luke's own Gospel? But if that is not only credible, but most probable, then we are taken back to a period when a considerable number of the contemporaries of Jesus were still alive and indeed in their prime, and well able to contradict or to corroborate accounts of what had taken place under their own observation.

Criticism is not as yet in a position to declare with certainty the date of Luke's Gospel. Lower than the year 80 A.D. it can scarcely be brought, but the latest German criticism of the Gospel, published two or three months ago (Hahn), maintains that it was written by a contemporary of our Lord. And indeed it is as open to any one to suppose it was written in the year 60 as in the year 80. The second work of the author, the Book of Acts, terminates abruptly, and the obvious and simple reason for that abrupt termination is that, when the book was written, there was no more to tell, that he had written it up to date; in other words, that he was writing in the year 63 or 64. No other reason has been assigned for its abrupt close. Strauss follows the easier course of saying,

“The breaking off of Acts *might have* been the result of many other causes.” But he mentions none.

It is, therefore, a misrepresentation to say or to imply that the Third Gospel is the mere embodiment of an oral tradition which has been for a generation at the mercy of popular fancy. It is the work of a man who more than fulfils Strauss's requirement of being “nearly contemporary,” of a man who was the companion of eye-witnesses, and who, as a careful historian, knew the value of first-hand testimony. That such a book, so composed, may have admitted embellishments is likely enough; that everything here narrated occurred precisely as it stands it might be hazardous to maintain: but that it is little more than a mass of myths is incredible.

In the present state of criticism, it is impossible to speak with certainty of the origin of the First Gospel. That the apostle by whose name it is still called had something to do with its composition is tolerably certain, but it is also certain that it passed through more hands than his before it reached its present form. Certainly we cannot accept all that we find in Matthew's Gospel as the testimony of Matthew, *i.e.* of an eye-witness. If criticism can prove anything, it can prove that much that is in this Gospel was not written by an eye-witness. At the same time, critics who have an instinctive taste for style, such as Renan, admit frankly that the sayings of Jesus recorded in this Gospel bear upon them irresistible marks of authenticity. But many of these sayings affirm the

miraculous, and arise out of discussions regarding the miracles wrought by Jesus. We have, therefore, in this Gospel incontrovertible evidence that Jesus Himself believed that miracles could be wrought and were wrought by Himself. Through these sayings we are brought into the very presence of Jesus Himself, and we find that both He and His contemporaries, friends and foes, believed that He worked miracles. No room is found for a mythical theory, for a theory which says that the belief that the Messiah must have wrought miracles grew up in the second generation, and the Gospels reflect that belief. That belief existed in the first generation.

But have we not in the Fourth Gospel precisely the testimony demanded—the testimony of one who lived on familiar terms with Jesus, who was with Him from day to day during His ministry, who saw all that He did, who had liberty to question Him about all that He did, and who at length records for behoof of others the incidents and sayings which had produced in himself the conviction that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? This is denied, and of course must be denied, by critics who are resolved to exclude the miraculous. If the Fourth Gospel is from the hand of John, the apostle and friend of Jesus, then what Strauss calls a *decisive* weight is thrown into the scale of historicity. Deliberate falsification is out of the question, and is not suggested; ignorance plainly cannot be pleaded, and is not pleaded. The easier course is chosen, and it is affirmed that this Gospel is

not from the hand of that one only person to whom it was ever ascribed in early times. Of course no one now-a-days has so little regard to his reputation as to ascribe it, as Baur did, to the year 170. That is no longer possible. Every find of primitive literature which has recently been made is a nail in the coffin of these late dates, and forms one more link more certainly binding this Gospel to the first century. The current of criticism has set in strongly during recent years towards the Johannine authorship. Still, undaunted by the fact that the Gospel is quoted as early as the year 125, Professor Pfeiderer bravely holds the last post, and declares that the Gospel was written about 140. But, one would say, a man of learning and judgment, who knows all that has been urged on the other side, must have some substantial reason for declaring against the general voice. What is his reason? His reason is, that the governing ideas of the Gospel belong to a system of thought which only came into vogue in the third decade of the second century. "In order to estimate correctly the true value of this Gospel, we should not seek in it a historical work, which it did not at all mean to be, but it was a didactic way of writing which had invested its theological thoughts in the form of a life of Jesus." "The material of the evangelic tradition was only used to the extent that it was usable for the didactic purpose of the theologian John; the discourses of the synoptic Jesus were completely replaced by dogmatic treatises which would have been

as incomprehensible for the companions of Jesus and for His time and people as they were, in fact, intelligible and useful for the apologetic theology of the second century. Generally it was the experiences, feelings, and interests of the Church of his time which the evangelist saw typified in the life of Jesus." This is as nearly as possible the reverse of the truth. This Gospel could not have been written in the second century. It is saturated with the atmosphere, the thought, the mental movement of the first age.

Now, of course, this *method* of criticism is sound: that is to say, it is the task of criticism to show the relevancy of the contents of any document to the thought of the age to which it belongs. A document that claims to belong to the year 1750, and speaks of the independence of the United States, is thereby condemned as spurious. A scientific treatise claiming to belong to the sixteenth century is recognised as a forgery belonging to a much later age, if it speaks of the origin of man, of heredity and of evolution, in terms which have only come into vogue in our own day. The question is: Does John speak in a language more appropriate to the second century than to the first? Is his mind occupied with the ideas, controversies, prospects of the first or of the second century? Two main subjects occupied the thoughts of Christian people in the second century, the relation of the State to Christianity, and the relation of Christianity to the current Gnostic philosophy. The Apologies which remain from that period, those of Justin, Aristides,

Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, being addressed to heathen rulers or inquirers, are of an entirely different character from the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel was also an Apology, but in its framework and conception, its contents and its language, it is as far removed as well could be from the typical second century Apology. None of the later apologists attempts a life of Christ, or puts into His mouth discourses not found in the canonical Gospels; they fill their pages with explanations of Christian belief and Christian practice, and they defend Christians against the misconceptions and calumnies current among the heathen populace. One glance at them is enough to show that they could not have been written in the earliest period. Already the Christians are so numerous as to have attracted the attention of the State; the Church has become fixed in its creed and in its practices. Already it has a history. Place the Fourth Gospel in the midst of that literature, and the incongruity is at once apparent. The dullest critic must perceive at once that this Gospel belongs to a different class of literature, springs out of another atmosphere.

But there were other writers in the second century besides the apologists. There were semi-Christian Gnostics, continually spinning out of their brain philosophies more or less related to Christianity. These writers produced works of a very different character from the Apologies, but with as little resemblance to the Fourth Gospel. They use the material furnished by the Gospels, and hereby prove

themselves to belong to an age lower than the primitive. But with one of these, according to Professor Pfeiderer, the Fourth Gospel holds an obvious relationship. It is Basilides who is selected for the honour of inspiring the writer of the Fourth Gospel. It is from Basilides he borrows his dualistic opposition of light and darkness, God and the devil. Occasionally, too, the errors of Basilides are aimed at in the Gospel. John, *e.g.*, departs from the synoptic tradition, and makes no mention of Simon bearing the cross. Why is this significant omission made? According to this lynx-eyed German criticism, it was made because Basilides held that Simon not only bore the cross but suffered in place of Jesus, while Jesus, in the form of Simon, stood by and laughed at His enemies. But, concludes Professor Pfeiderer, since the Basilidian gnosis only emerged in the third decade of the second century, the Gospel cannot well have been written before the fourth decade.

Unfortunately for this theory, Basilides did not hold the docetic view of Christ's person; the story of Simon had no place in the theory of Basilides,<sup>1</sup> who explicitly admitted, unlike some other gnostics, that the sufferings of Christ were real and indeed necessary. And, still more unfortunately, instead of the Fourth Gospel being indebted to Basilides, Basilides quotes the Fourth Gospel,—quotes not words of our Lord,

<sup>1</sup> Irenæus and Tertullian, it is true, not to mention Epiphanius, ascribe this belief to Basilides, but the much fuller and more accurate account of Hippolytus, which is confirmed by Clement of Alexandria, excludes it.



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which might have been handed down by tradition, but quotes from the prologue written by the evangelist himself. Instead, therefore, of the Fourth Gospel being subsequent to Basilides, and belonging to the year 140, it must have been earlier than he, that is, earlier than the year 125, and therefore close upon, if not within, the first century. Indeed, as Basilides certainly belonged to the third generation after Christ, that is, as he certainly knew men and learned from men who had themselves known Christ, it may reasonably be concluded that he would not have quoted from an unauthorised, fictitious Gospel, which had come into existence in his own time.

Evidence of a similar kind has so rapidly multiplied during recent years, that even the most cautious and reluctant of critics have been compelled to push back the date of the Fourth Gospel, until now it is wholly exceptional for any one to deny that it may quite well have originated during the lifetime of the Apostle John. No scholar of the past or present generation has been so familiar with the literature of the second century as the late Bishop Lightfoot. But he is decidedly of opinion that this Gospel is from the hand of the apostle. Professor Sanday has spent many laborious years in investigating with the most unbiassed of judgments, and the most thoroughly scholarly equipment, everything connected with the origin of the Gospels; he now stands alone, whether in Germany or in England, as an authority on this subject: it is his carefully-formed conviction that the

Gospel is no reflection of second century ideas, and could not by any possibility be such.<sup>1</sup> Add to this, that the writer of the Gospel himself declares that he was an eye-witness of what he relates: "He that saw it hath borne record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

Besides all this, there are what may be called watermarks in the Gospel itself, which witness to its being a careful record of facts. It is maintained that the Gospel is not a history but a doctrinal treatise in the form of a history, and that the doctrine it is intended to expound and inculcate is the doctrine of the Logos, or the Word of God. Is it not strange, then, that the writer never once puts this designation into the lips of our Lord Himself, although manifestly this would have given an authority to His teaching which it does not otherwise possess? Again, why does he give the number of the fishes taken in the miraculous draught? Not, certainly, for any of the absurd reasons of symbolism suggested by commentators, but simply because he was a fisherman, who must always count his take, and can never after forget it or abstain from mentioning it. In the other Gospels the same marks of historicity exist. The favourite title by which our Lord designates Himself is, "the Son of Man"; but this is a title *never* used by His followers, and entirely displaced by the title "the Christ" in the succeeding generation. Again, why, if not from a regard to fact, do the Gospels put in the

<sup>1</sup> Similarly Harnack.

mouth of the demoniacs a designation of our Lord not in common use, and represent them as calling Him "Son of the Most High God"? Instances of a similar kind, which demonstrate that the Gospels are trustworthy records, may be multiplied *ad libitum*.

The theory, then, that the Gospels are rather the reflection of the ideas of the second and third generations after Christ, than trustworthy records of what He actually said and did, finds no support in what is known of the origin, date, and composition of the narratives. The attempt to loosen faith in what they report by attributing to them a late date, and an admission of much that is entirely fanciful, will be abandoned by any one who for a while turns from philosophical presuppositions and studies questions of criticism. We have, at least, one Gospel from the hand of an eye-witness, who, knowing the difficulty of finding credence for the strange things he relates, emphatically declares that he saw what he records. To reject such testimony is to put ourselves out of court altogether, and to lose hold of all sound guiding principles of criticism. In another Gospel, as is admitted by critics of all schools, there are embedded reports of our Lord's sayings written down by one who heard them, and in these reports it is again and again implied that our Lord and His contemporaries believed He wrought miracles. In the Gospel of Mark, again, we have the stories Peter used to tell, as his friend Mark used to hear and interpret them. And in Luke's Gospel we have, from the hand of one

who has elsewhere proved himself a careful historian, and who had been the companion of those who knew our Lord, a digest of His works and words, compiled from their reports and from written records. In all these competent authorities for the history of Christ the miraculous is freely narrated. If these accounts are untrue, it is strange that of such a life we should not have one true narrative. That each is accurate in every detail we have no concern to maintain; that all are inaccurate, in what they consider the core of the history, it is impossible to believe. That the transmission of the story in an unwritten form should occasion considerable divergence in details of time, place, and circumstance, was to be expected; but that the entire complexion and most striking characteristic of the life should suffer such change as to become an entirely different thing, is simply not credible. That myth should be absolutely excluded, and that no one of the incidents narrated is touched by it, may be an extreme position to assume; but that the bulk of the narrative, or any considerable portion of it, is mythical, has certainly not been made out; and this method of accounting for the appearance of the miraculous may be dismissed as incompetent.

It may, however, be said that even granting that the Gospels are in the main trustworthy, admitting that they faithfully depict Christ's character, yet, when they give us accounts of miracles, we must draw the line at that point, and decline to follow them, *because* not even the evidence of trustworthy

men can impart credibility to the miraculous. It is here where cautious critics at present entrench themselves. Professor Huxley, *e.g.*, will not affirm the impossibility, but only the incredibility of miracles. Recently he has made a remarkable statement to this effect: "Strictly speaking," he says, "I am unaware of anything that has a right to the title of an 'impossibility,' except a contradiction in terms. There are impossibilities logical, but none natural. A 'round square,' a 'present past,' 'two parallel lines that intersect,' are impossibilities, because the ideas denoted by the predicates, *round*, *present*, *intersect*, are contradictory of the ideas denoted by the subjects, *square*, *past*, *parallel*. But walking on water, or turning water into wine, or procreation without male intervention, or raising the dead, are plainly not 'impossibilities' in this sense." It might, he thinks, be otherwise if our present knowledge of nature exhausted the possibilities of nature, but it is, he says, "sufficiently obvious, not only that we are at the beginning of our knowledge of nature, instead of having arrived at the end of it, but that the limitations of our faculties are such that we never can be in a position to set bounds to the possibilities of nature." And I own I cannot see why Professor Pfeiderer, or any one else who holds a Theistic as distinguished from a Pantheistic philosophy, is constrained to hold, or can even consistently hold, the impossibility of miracle.

But Professor Huxley holds as strongly as Professor Pfeiderer the incredibility of the miraculous. And

with his accustomed perspicuity, if scarcely with his wonted sagacity, he puts the whole argument in a nutshell, when he asks if any testimony would make it credible that a centaur had been seen trotting down Regent Street. Now this illustration brings out with precision the weakness of this position.

For (1) the centaur is itself a monstrosity. The miracles of the New Testament are all on the plane of nature. Feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead,—all these are removals of obstructions which hinder nature from being the expression of God's goodwill to man. They are hints of an ideal state which nature will one day reach, accelerations of her slower processes. So far from the truth is Matthew Arnold's dictum, that "from the moment that the comparative history of all miracles is a conception entertained and a study admitted, the conclusion is certain, that the reign of the Bible miracles is doomed." So far is this from the truth, that it is when you bring the miracles of Jesus into comparison with the prodigies and portents of Greece and Rome, that you more clearly than ever discern the finger of God, and detect, perhaps for the first time, the essential and distinctive character of the works of Christ as truly revealing the God of the nature we know.

(2) But, secondly and especially, the centaur is an isolated phenomenon; proceeding from nothing, going no whither, accomplishing nothing, signifying nothing, meaningless, irrelevant, incredible. The fact that a

man of Huxley's sagacity, should compare such an appearance to the miracles of the New Testament is another warning to us to examine for ourselves, another demonstration that able men may often be satisfied with but touching the surface of a subject. The miracles of the New Testament were wrought by a unique Person, by one who actually revealed God and altered the world's conception of God; they were wrought as a part of that revelation, and they have actually enabled men to think of God as merciful; they appear as the natural outcome of a manifestation, which had been prepared for and expected through a long course of years. Between miracles so embedded in the supernatural, so significant, so congruous to the circumstances, and trailing such a history behind them,—and a centaur trotting down Regent Street, where is the analogy?

But it is precisely here where all assaults on the credibility of the Christian miracles fail. The very strongest evidence in their favour is their congruity with the Person who wrought them, and with the revelation in connection with which they were wrought; and this evidence is regularly left out of account. In this respect, Matthew Arnold, who compares them with the marvels recorded in Grecian history, is as superficial as Huxley. Of course we should find it difficult to believe in the resurrection of Julius Cæsar or of Trajan; but given a unique person, a person already miraculous in His sinlessness, and on whose resurrection the hope of the world de-

pended, and I find the incredibility immeasurably diminished. Is it nothing in favour of the miracles, that they were wrought for the accomplishment of the greatest end that is to be served in this world? Does it make them no more credible, that they were relevant, significant, congruous, necessary? The miracles are Christ's miracles, and that makes precisely all the difference.

But let us test the trustworthiness of the Gospel narrative at its critical point. Each of the Gospels tells us that after Jesus had been crucified, and His actual death certified to Pilate, He was buried, but that, after lying in the tomb two nights and a day, He rose again, and was seen alive by many of His disciples, and on several occasions. This, it is said, is incredible. It is possible that He may have healed persons afflicted with certain forms of nervous disease, much may be believed of the impression He made by His personality, but that He appeared in a bodily form after death is not to be believed. It is not doubted that His followers thought they saw Him alive after He had been buried, nor is it doubted that it was this belief of theirs which carried their drooping faith in His Messiahship, and produced the Christian Church. It is admitted that the faith, the ideas, the institutions of the Christian people, the faith which has brought the most healthy influence the world has known, was based on the Resurrection. If the Resurrection is a delusion, then we must accept the consequence that what has been best in human history is the result of a mistake.



That the disciples supposed they had seen the risen Lord is admitted. It is admitted that "the astonishing revolution, from the deep depression and utter hopelessness of the disciples at the death of Jesus, to the strong faith and enthusiasm with which they proclaimed Him as the Messiah in the succeeding Pentecost, would be inexplicable, unless something extraordinarily encouraging had taken place,—something, in fact, which had convinced them of His Resurrection. But that this cause of conviction was precisely a real appearance of the risen Jesus—that, indeed, it was necessarily an external event at all—is by no means proved."

Now, we may at once put aside some explanations of this belief which were current sixty years ago,—as that Jesus was never truly dead, but, being taken down from the cross in a swoon, the unguents of burial healed and revived Him. We may trust the Roman soldier for knowing what a *coup de grace* was; and we may also suppose that a pallid, almost dead, scarcely recovered body, could not be mistaken by the disciples for a risen, glorified Lord. Such explanations have been put out of court by advanced critics, because they are glaringly insufficient, and damage their cause.

But also we may put out of court the discrepancies in the Gospel accounts of the appearance of Jesus after His Resurrection. These discrepancies have been harped upon to an extraordinary extent. What do they amount to? Do they discredit the narrative, so that

we cannot accept their testimony to the fact of the Resurrection? On these terms we can have no history at all. It is impossible to reconcile the discrepant accounts we have of the signal given by Nelson at Trafalgar, or of the time at which the battle began. Are we therefore to conclude that there was no signal and no battle? The conclusion is monstrous, and can only be drawn by those whose views of inspiration require that they should reconcile every discrepancy. The accounts vary in many particulars, but as to the central fact that the Lord had risen, and had been seen over and over again, there is no variation, and such variations as there are, are merely such as exist in all similar accounts of one and the same event by different authors.

The disciples, then, believed they had seen the Lord risen; but the Lord had not risen—whence the belief? Stated in its most plausible form, the theory is that the disciples, who before the Lord's death had believed Him to be the Messiah, found themselves after His death compelled to solve the contradiction between the ultimate fate of Jesus and their earlier opinion of Him. This they did by turning to the Old Testament Scriptures, and applying to the Messiah whatever was said about the man of God being bowed down even to death. But when once they could think of the Messiah suffering ignominy in death, they recognised that, through death, He had but passed to Messianic glory. But how could He fail, out of this glory in which He now lived, to give tidings of Himself to His

followers? And what more natural, when they read the Scriptures, and found their hearts burn within them as they gave them this Messianic interpretation, than to conceive of this as the actual presence of Christ conversing with them? And how conceivable is it that in individuals, especially women, these impressions were heightened, in a purely subjective manner, into actual vision.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, is the theory which is supposed to account for the belief in the Resurrection, and for the foundation of the Church. A few excited people, especially women, thought they saw, because they wished to see, the Lord. The belief created the Resurrection, not the Resurrection the belief. The theory fails at every point.

1. Take the narration of the Fourth Gospel. What convinced the writer of that Gospel that there had been a Resurrection? Not an appearance of the Lord to an eagerly expectant disciple,—not an appearance of the Lord at all to any one, but an examination of a tomb by matter-of-fact fishermen. Peter and John were convinced, by the very simple method of entering the tomb and finding it empty. They had not as yet seen anything which they could mistake for their Master; neither had their informant, Mary Magdalene. She was so little expecting a Resurrection, that when she saw the stone rolled away she merely supposed the body had been removed to be disposed of elsewhere. They were certainly excited when they ran out to the sepulchre, but their excitement did not

<sup>1</sup> So Strauss.

create a vision of their risen Lord. All that they saw was an empty tomb and deliberately folded grave-clothes. Here, then, the vision-theory utterly fails. One or two persons, in a peculiarly excitable state, might suppose they had seen a figure they very much desired to see, but how the belief that the tomb was empty could be merely imagined by men who actually entered it, passes comprehension.

2. If the belief in the Resurrection was a delusion, why was it not exposed at the time? Hundreds of persons must have visited the sepulchre during the succeeding weeks. The apostles affirmed the Resurrection when they were brought before the Sanhedrim. Why did not the authorities at once explode this nascent sect and dangerous heresy, by exposing the delusion on which it was based? Nothing was easier, if the body of Jesus still lay in the tomb. Nothing was more desirable or more desired. Is it credible that with the means of quelling all disturbance and resistance of their authority, with the means of justifying their own conduct in the eyes of the people, the Sanhedrim should not have used the opportunity which the affirmation of a Resurrection put in their hands, and at once and for ever have crushed this delusion?

3. Although the vision-theory might explain how one or two people believed in the Resurrection, it is wholly inadequate to explain the belief of the entire body of disciples. It implies that in a couple of days the belief of those who knew the Lord underwent an entire change; that there was not among them one

hard-headed person who could distinguish fact from fancy; and that in the most important of causes, and in a cause which imperilled their own lives, they jauntily proceeded upon the delusion, and were never thrown back on the fact. For it is remarkable that the witness of the apostles was unanimous and constant to the end. And yet this was all delusion. These are the miracles, these are the incredibilities which attach to this theory of the Gospel narrative.

It is, no doubt, possible that one or two persons who were anxiously awaiting the Resurrection of Jesus might persuade themselves that a sudden gleam of sunshine or a passing figure was the looked-for person. But what sane person, in a matter of such moment, would accept that as proof, and not take further steps to reach surer ground of belief? Besides, what we have here to explain is how not one but several persons, not together but in different places and at different times, not all in one mood of mind but in various moods, came to believe they had seen the risen Lord. He was recognised, not by persons who expected to see Him alive, but by women who went to anoint Him dead; not by credulous persons, but by men who would not believe till they had gone to and into the sepulchre; not by persons so enthusiastic and creative of their own belief as to mistake any appearance for Him they knew, but so slow to believe, so scornfully incredulous of Resurrection, so resolutely sceptical, and so keenly alive to the fear of being deluded, that they vowed nothing would satisfy them

but the test of touch and sight. It was a belief produced not by one doubtful and momentary appearance, but by repeated and prolonged appearances to those who had every opportunity of applying what tests they pleased to ascertain its reality.

It has been maintained by Strauss and his successors, that the vision-theory receives strong confirmation from the manner in which Paul speaks of the appearances of Christ. In 1 Corinthians xv. he enumerates the appearances of Christ after His Resurrection, and closes the enumeration by recording the fact that to him also had been granted a manifestation of the risen Lord. But, argue Strauss and Pfeiderer, when he places all the earlier appearances in one and the same line with that which he himself experienced, he implies that they were similar in form to that closing manifestation. But the manifestation to Paul was not a bodily but a spiritual manifestation. The apostle was convinced that he perceived a revelation of the heavenly *spirit-nature* of Christ, in the form of a luminous appearance. Therefore, "beyond all contradiction," says Pfeiderer, Paul thought of the appearances to the first disciples as appearances not of a risen body but of the heavenly Spirit of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Admitting that Paul considered that the appearance to him was of the same nature as the appearance to the rest, we precisely reverse the conclusion. Pfeiderer's argument is: All these appearances were of one kind; but the appearance to Paul was purely

<sup>1</sup> *Urchristenthum*, p. 6.

spiritual, therefore those to the first disciples were spiritual also. According to the evidence, the argument should stand: All these appearances were of one kind; but the appearance to Paul was of a risen body, therefore what the first disciples also saw was a risen body.

That Paul believed he saw the Lord in His risen body, is easily proved. In the passage to which allusion is made, and in which Paul enumerates these appearances, his purpose is to prove not the continued spiritual existence of the Christian, but his bodily resurrection; and only a reference to the bodily Resurrection of our Lord would have been relevant; (2) Besides, why mention His *burial*, unless it was His bodily Resurrection he had in view? His gospel, he says, was that Christ died, and was buried and rose again. Clearly it was a Resurrection of that which was buried that he had in view. (3) In arguing (1 Cor. ix. 1) that he was an apostle, he claims to have "SEEN Jesus Christ our Lord." The principal apostolic function was to witness to the Resurrection of Christ, and in order to discharge this function it was requisite that the apostle should, with his own eyes, have seen the risen Lord. (4) In several parts of his writings Paul lets us see that he considered the body to be an essential part of human nature, that redemption is not complete until the body shares with the spirit in the renewing and perfecting work of Christ's Spirit (*vide* Rom. viii. 23; Phil. iii. 10-21), and that our Lord Himself only became perfect as our Head, and the quickener of spiritual life in us, when

His body rose from the grave (Rom. i. 4 ; Col. i. 18). It is quite incredible that Paul should have conceived of the glorified Messiah as a disembodied spirit. In this case he could not have spoken of Him as the Head or Life-source of the Church, the First-born of the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence ; nor could he have called Him "the first-fruits of them that slept." Neither expression has any meaning unless we suppose that Paul understood that by His Resurrection our Lord had been declared the Son of God with power, having completed the curriculum of human experience, and perfect in body as in spirit.

But the more difficult question remains: Is Paul's belief that he saw the Lord proof that Jesus had risen from the dead? From Paul's belief that he saw Jesus, can we infer that he did actually see Him? This conclusion is rejected as incompetent by such critics as Renan, Weizsäcker, and Pfleiderer. They construe the incident of Paul's conversion in some such way as this: Paul's mind was deeply exercised with the question whether Jesus was the Messiah or not. The glorified face of Stephen, as he saw the Son of Man waiting to receive him, haunted his spirit. Some of Paul's own relatives were Christians, and he knew from their conduct, as well as from the bearing of the apostles and others, that some extraordinary spiritual influence was breathing through Jewish society. A righteousness higher and deeper than that of the law was being produced in the very men he knew ; and with one accord they referred this new



life to Jesus Christ. The passages of Scripture which they cited to prove that the Messiah must suffer, gradually found entrance into his mind. To his great alarm, he found his conviction that Jesus was a deceiver gradually loosening. He struggled, he kicked against the goad that was driving him into the Christian camp. He sought to drown conviction by plunging into fresh persecutions, and silencing the voices that tormented him. In pursuit of this purpose he obtained commission to follow the Christians to Damascus; but the quiet of the journey was too much for him. As he drew near the city, the debate that had been, consciously or unconsciously, agitating him reached a crisis. The credibility of the Christian testimony flashed upon him; his spirit was illumined with a blaze of light, which seemed to flow from the risen body of the Lord. The vision was a projection from his own mind, it was the embodiment of his own slowly-won conviction that Jesus was risen and was therefore the Messiah. In a word, the vision was the result, not the cause of his conversion.

Such a construction of the incident is only weakened by Pfeiderer's introduction of epilepsy, or by Renan's allusion to the fatigue of the journey. If Paul was an epileptic, then he had often had fits before, and must have known what to make of any visions so induced. Besides, the visions of epileptics are of a different character. The "epileptic" idea should be cancelled.

Such a construction of the vision is certainly

plausible; and it is possible to account for Paul's conversion in this manner, while yet it is believed that it was due to a Divine guidance of his mind and the influence of Christ's Spirit. But the immediate question is, not whether such a construction is possible and is consistent with belief in Christ, but whether it is correct.

Now there are several difficulties in the way of its acceptance:—First, on each of the three occasions on which the incident is related—and two of these are reports of Paul's own account—it is explicitly stated that not only Paul was affected by the vision, but also those that were with him. Their terror could not be the result of a process of conviction in their own mind, but only of some external manifestation. Second, had this vision stood alone, one would have been greatly inclined to listen to an interpretation of the scene which would seem to reduce its miraculous character. But it is only one of several manifestations of the risen Lord. It does not stand alone. And unless we reject all the accounts we have of our Lord appearing to the disciples, walking with them and talking with them, we cannot reject Paul's account.

But no doubt the question ultimately is: What weight are we to give to Paul's testimony? Are we lightly to put it aside as that of a nervous, excitable, probably epileptic individual? That is impossible. He had visions frequently, it is said. Yes; and the common-sense way in which he puts himself on his guard against being carried away by such things

reflects a strong light on his sobriety of mind. In fact, no quality is more striking in Paul than his entire and perfect sanity. On every occasion when coolness, self-command, promptitude, physical and mental fitness were required, these qualities were forthcoming. Living in a state of society in which old ideas were being subverted, and speculations and proposals of every variety were rife, his was the one clear and steady judgment and firm hand that brought the ship of the Church through the turmoil and hazard. In ordinary circumstances, one would accept the account such a man would give of his own change of mind. He understood the influences usually moving men. His knowledge of men was wide, practical, and accurate; and if any one quality is discernible in his writings, it is a fearless frankness; and he never had but one account to give of his conversion. He always maintained that he believed Jesus was the Messiah, because he had seen Him risen. He carried this belief through every kind of circumstance that could compel him to test the reality of it. He proclaimed it at once in Damascus, where there were men to put him right if he was wrong. He quietly reflected upon it for nearly three years in Arabia, undisturbed and unexcited. Years made no impression upon the brightness of that vision, nor upon the depth of the conviction it had wrought in him. He checked excitement in others, he rebuked the tendency to be puffed up with visions and revelations; but not once did he apologise for his own conversion.

He threw away brilliant prospects, and accepted a life of hardship, danger, and suffering, so sure was he of the foundation on which he was building. He felt no need of comparing notes with the older apostles and the rest who had seen Jesus after His Resurrection: his own vision was enough for him. He felt no fear in returning to Jerusalem, where the facts were known. I must say, I do not see how a mind so sensitive to all reasonable appeal, so apprehensive of truth, so quick to see the point of an argument, could have withstood all that Gamaliel and his friends must have plied him with, had he not gone over the ground again and again in his own mind, and been quite sure of his standing. Had they been able to prove to him that Christ was not risen, had they been able to dispel the illusion of a risen Christ, and to show him that his vision was a dream of his own mind, no man, I do believe, would have been quicker to see and to own the point of what they urged than Paul.

But though all this went for nothing, the strongest argument, the most convincing proof remains. There remains that which drew to Christ His earliest, most convinced, and steadfast followers,—His own personality. It is in Him that we meet the highest we know. In His person, speaking human language, mingling freely in human society, the world saw that which permanently raised its idea of God. Seeing Christ, it was God men saw, and saw Him to be more and better than they had thought. But for any man, to plan and carry through what might seem to be an

incarnation of God, would prove itself to be an impossible audacity. To begin as a human child, to carry this idea through boyhood and youth, to exhibit a life congruous to this idea amidst all the temptations, excitements, and exigencies of manhood, is so impossible, that any one who attempted it would betray, in constant failure, that he had both inadequately conceived the part and could only inadequately play it. Inconsistency, extravagance, grotesque assumption, unjustified claims and unfulfilled pretensions, would betray the would-be incarnate one at every point. But in Jesus there is no such betrayal. In the judgment of generation after generation of godly souls, He has perfectly fulfilled the part. God is revealed in Him, and our hope of knowing God better is our hope of knowing Christ better.

For to escape from the admission of the supernatural at this point, by denying the sinlessness of Jesus, is a sorry shift. He says to us, as to His contemporaries, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" And this is the marvellous thing, that He, who by His own purity most clearly detected the faintest taint of evil, should Himself claim to be absolutely untainted. All other testimony fades before this. We have the honest Peter frankly owning that his Master was not as other men. We have Pilate washing his hands to clear himself of the guilt of condemning the innocent. We have Judas, who had marked Him with the keenest scrutiny, and who would have welcomed any excuse for betraying Him, sinking under his awful

guilt, unable to recall one act which might help to justify him. We have his own brother James, who himself was revered by all Jews as James the Righteous, and who had grown up with Him through all His boyhood and early manhood—we have this man, who judged by the severest standard, and with whom nothing was a claim to homage which did not come in righteousness, and who knew Jesus with the intimacy of a brother, speaking of Him as the Lawgiver and Judge of men. But more than all, we have the voice of Jesus Himself. The holier any one is, the more clearly does he see his own shortcomings; but with Jesus there is no sense of sin, no penitence, no prayer for forgiveness, no need of a Redeemer. This is the crowning, or, it should rather be said, the fundamental miracle—a miracle continuous, innate, and inseparable from His own person; a miracle unique, separating Him indubitably from all other men, and which makes all other miracles congruous and credible. Is a miracle in the spiritual world less, or is it greater, than a miracle in the physical? Which is the more divine, the turning water into wine, or the perfection of character that is impervious to sinful thought or desire? The one thing is as unexampled as the other, as truly beyond experience.

What, then, are we to make of this sustained spiritual miracle, inseparable from the person of Jesus? Here is one who stands alone in the history of mankind, who has also introduced and maintained a new life and the highest conceivable type of

humanity. By His three years of manifestation, He lifted the world once for all out of darkness into light, and has become the source of life eternal to the race. This, at any rate, is certain, that it is in His person we most surely find God. It is here God speaks to us most plainly, manifests Himself most indubitably. Whatever difficulties remain concerning Christ's Person, concerning the nature of God and His relation to the world and to Christ, it remains certain that in Him we meet God, and a God whom we can reverence, worship, and serve. Where the intellect gropes, stumbles, and falters, conscience leads straight on. Great harm may be done by misconceiving the Person of Christ; but the greatest harm, and the only unmitigated harm, is done when we deny that somehow God is in Him, and in Him most of all.

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