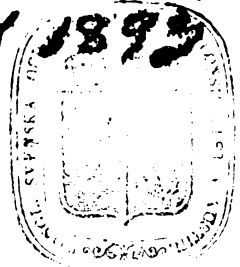


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LECTURES



ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

DELIVERED AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA,

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The Character of Jesus Christ,

AN

ARGUMENT FOR THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY,

BY

REV. JAMES W. ALEXANDER, D.D.,

NEW YORK.

In a contracted portion of ancient Asia, among a people seldom named by the elegant classics, and then only touched by the satiric thong of Horace and Juvenal, or the caustic sneer of Tacitus; in a country without arts and refinements, and without other letters, certain books have been handed down, originating at distant epochs, and carefully preserved to our day. These writings are partly in the language of the nation, and partly in that of their conquerors. From so obscure an origin, these works have spread over a great part of the earth, and are rapidly passing into every human language. Upon inspection they are found to lay claim to a divine origin; and this claim has been admitted, by numbers increasing with successive ages. In support of these extraordinary pretensions, two classes of argument have been alleged, one from external proof, the other from internal evidences. Of the latter there is one founded upon the singular fact, that the whole volume of doctrine, opinion and precept, in these books, revolves about the centre of an individual personage. Omitting for the present all other points, I invite you to consider the argument in favor of Christianity, derived from the character of Jesus Christ.

My first proposition is, that in the person of Jesus Christ, as presented in the Christian Scriptures, we have a perfect model of moral excellence.

The founder of Christianity stands forth in a character absolutely original and unique. The attempt was never made to trace it to any foregoing exemplar. Neither history nor fiction approach to anything which could serve even as the germ of such a description. It is a quality to which justice is seldom done, perhaps from our extreme familiarity with every trait; but it was doubtless felt by the great inquirers of antiquity, when first summoned into the sublime and winning presence. There are

objects in nature, which previous to all scrutiny or analysis, strike us with the impression, This is unlike all we ever beheld before. Such is the august personality of Christ, while as yet unstudied in its more delicate lineaments. The picture is intensely and sublimely moral. With a reserve almost without a parallel, there is not a touch or color thrown in, to gratify even what might be considered a reasonable curiosity. Hence there is not a syllable respecting the outward figure, countenance, or demeanor of our Lord. Even the intellectual development is left under a veil; while the moral and spiritual representation stands out with the austere simplicity of a sculpture.

Approaching more nearly, we observe that the character of Jesus is not such as would be produced by what is called the Spirit of the Age. In the philosophy of history there is an opinion, common if not prevalent, which refers every commanding personage to the necessary progress of the race. In the judgment of this transcendental school, the man is the product of the juncture, a necessary resultant of forces just concentrated in mature action. That Christ is not such a character, must be obvious at a glance. It was not in subjugated, unlettered Judaism to give birth to such an advent. The effect is too colossal for such a cause. It was not even the felicitous anticipation of an age about to dawn. It is not the embodied genius of any age. The ideal is one which no age of human progress has yet overtaken. We are the more surprised and confounded when we see its matchless proportions emerging from the mists and corruptions of such a period and such a nation. I will go further and assert that the character of Jesus Christ is one which would have been beyond the power of human conception, before its actual appearance.

If we look then more nearly, and inquire what accidental attractions surround the portrait here given, we find the character entirely devoid of the glare which beams from outward circumstance. As if to escape every appendage which belongs to the brilliant personages of human annals, and especially the subjects of fiction in all its forms, Jesus Christ is represented on the stage of simple and ordinary life. There is nothing of secular heroism. Even the platform of the events is a remote corner of ancient civilization, and a contemned province of the Empire. The action, though often great and startling, is within the circle of familiar life. The earthly origin of our Lord is obscure and unapprehended; and he walks among men in humble garb, as the

son of a carpenter, consorting with peasants and fishermen, in the most despised canton of his native tribes. Without possessions, without patronage, without any auxiliary of power or worldly greatness, he nevertheless shines with a lustre which many ages have not dimmed. From the frame of this lowliness, that countenance of moral loveliness looks upon us with a mysterious and imperative fascination. It is manifest that the delineation owes not a single grace to the external charms. If we examine the progress of the unvarnished narrative, we detect no semblance of display. The very suspicion of human glory is precluded from every beholder's mind. Except when some great misery calls for the breaking forth of hidden power, Christ pursues the noiseless tenor of his way in a manner so natural and unobtrusive, that we almost forget the public offices which he is afterwards seen to assume. Retirement and even secrecy cause some of his most wonderful actions.

But coming to that which is positive and essential in the moral image set before us, we are arrested by a trait which predominates over all: it is spotless Innocence. The testimony is of those who knew, that he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He could challenge his most blood-thirsty enemies with the question, Which of you convinceth me of sin? He did no harm, neither was guile found in his lips. A heavenly candor is radiated in every word and action. At the critical point of his last trial, no serious charge was advanced, and none whatever of moral import. False witnesses were sought in vain. The pureness of his character was known by the people, rehearsed by the wife of the procurator, asserted with reiteration by Pilate, avowed by the Roman centurion who stood guard at the cross, and attested by the traitor, when he cried in the temple, I have betrayed the innocent blood. The enemies of Christianity have been too discreet to allege any blemish on the snow-white purity of Jesus. The virtue is immaculate and has borne the inspection of ages. This is the more deserving of consideration, when we reflect that any age can discern spots upon a surface of alabaster; and that one undeniable delinquency in the character of our Lord would instantly vacate his whole claim to perfection. But it has not been discovered, and it is by an association common to all Christian nations that we connect with this impersonation of innocency the symbols of the lamb and the dove.

But mere innocence may be tame and neutral, or it may be se-

cluded and exempt from trial. The heavenly virtue of the Son of Man was not negative: it broke out into a running stream of well-doing. It was eminent activity. No biography in the world offers us a course of more ceaseless labor; it is a record of unremitting toil, from the outset of his ministry. Though he invited his disciples to rest, he took little for himself; but lived in journeys, healings, teachings, and throngs of men. The glory of the picture is that it is Virtue in action. As little was it a recluse or cloistered virtue. It is easy to be good in aphorisms and in the schools. Jesus gave his lessons in no retreat of Speculation. He philosophized in no Academy, Lyceum, Stoa, or Tusculanum, but in barks, in peasants' cots, on highways, mountains, beside wells, and at tables, among the hum of men. As he taught (and what he taught he practised), he stood side by side with the mass of the people at his toils and in his sorrows; and this, which adds to the difficulty of example, unspeakably enhances its beauty. The greatest elevation of positive activity belongs to the excellence of our Lord's character.

We must, however, contemplate the mode of this activity: it was more than all else *Beneficence*. On a topic which you have read and known from infancy, how can I enlarge without disparaging the memorial of your thoughts? Yet here lies the strength of our argument; for here is infinite benevolence, embodied in palpable action. Selfishness had scarcely been stigmatized by the moralists; and they had spoken of liberality and generosity for the most part in connection with human fame. With Jesus, it was the law of life. The most summary description of his career is, that He went about doing good. To give the proofs of his love would be to read you the four Gospels. The bodies and the souls of men were both his care. With equal sincerity of heart he spoke often and long to the multitude, or aided in the handicraft of his disciples, or hung over the bier of the departed. Are any of his wonders acts of vengeance? Is there one of them which was not a burst of mercy? When was his hand ever lifted in anger? When did his countenance ever wear a scowl? What single sufferer did he ever thrust away? When crowds hemmed him in, some to perplex, some to deride, and some to murder, did he ever decline to teach the inquiring? Who among us can number his benefactions? What book can contain the history of his cures? While he healed, he preached; yea, while he gave truth, he gave life, health, salvation

How prompt was his beneficence. My son dieth, said a certain nobleman. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. As Love was his great, his new, his last injunction to his disciples, so it was the reigning grace in his treatment of them; the very inspiration of his farewell discourse, and the crowning characteristic of his conversations after being restored to them. Love actuated his itinerancy, on foot, over the rough hills and torrid plains of Palestine, and flowed out to the poor and the dying in streams of relief. It was love that was personified and held up to the view of angels and of God on that "place of skulls" and that cursed cross. All human writings afford no such examples of beneficence.

But even benevolence has its modifications: that of Christ was displayed in singular tenderness and compassion. He taught to rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep. Infinitely was he distant from the affected apathy of the Stoics. He was a son of woman; and how much of tender manhood, of social, of strictly human affection, gushes forth in all the interviews with the family at Bethany, his sadness concerning Lazarus, his condolence, his tears—for "Jesus wept." How he hangs over lepers, cripples, blind men, lunatics and impotent wretches! Behold him at Nain, at Bethesda, at the Last Supper, and acknowledge not merely the good-will which relieves, but the most refined grace in the manner of relieving. So much of the mother and the sister, would in the hands of fictitious genius have degenerated into the soft, the timorous, and the effeminate; but the divine pencil does not thus depict. By the most happy blending of opposites, we observe in the same subject the union of gentleness and force.

There is a tendency to overrate what are called the masculine qualities of our nature; hence the overstrained effort and unnatural paroxysms of epic heroes, and many real soldiers. The great forces which perform their part in the heavenly spaces are silent. Such also is the usual state of true greatness. Our Lord's was such; he did not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. Yet there was a reserve of energy, zeal and holy boldness, which on rare but fit occasions could flash from the inner sanctuary of his mysterious nature. We see almost with surprise the same arm which lifted up the sinking disciple scourging the money-changers in the temple. The same voice which breathed benediction on the poor and simple, is heard uttering woes against



proud learning and hypocritical pretension, and this in the face of threats. It was to the great and powerful of his day that Christ said, O generation of vipers—Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees! It was to a prince on the throne that he sent, saying, Go ye and tell that fox,—Behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Intrepidity is requisite for the publication of unwelcome truth; and our Saviour sometimes so spake, that not only were his adversaries filled with rage, but “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Under his piercing discriminations and high claims, the Jews were indignant and even frantic, so that not content with reviling, they sought to kill him on the spot, and failing of this, obtained their hellish purpose in a more circuitous manner. Yet our Lord went calmly on, as wonderful in his courage as his love.

Though the topic assigned debars me from exhibiting Christ’s code of morals, as such, I am bound to allude to one of its qualities, as connected with his life. No ethical system was ever so severe, searching, and spiritual. He denounced the inward thought of evil. He pointed to anger as inchoate murder; to the two mites as outweighing all the donations of the rich; and the ejaculation of the publican as heard beyond the longest prayers. He exposed the reigning righteousness of the most learned and sacred clergy as whited sepulchres and washed putrefaction. He claimed the supreme love of God and the entire denial of self. Such was the sternness of his ethical demands. Now the point to which I invite your attention is this, that when our Lord comes to treat with the person of offenders, there never was judge so benign and lenient. To the Samaritan adultress he makes the most explicit avowal of his mission, amidst the gentlest offers of forgiveness. To another offender, dragged into his presence by pharisaic censors, he breathes the word of clemency, Woman . . . hath no man condemned thee? . . . Neither do I condemn thee: go, sin no more! To the bosom friend who shamefully denied him, he gives no reproof, but the question, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? more than these? Ah, my brethren, how few of us who claim to be disciples, have been able thus to mingle hatred of the sin, with benignity towards the sinner?

It should be carefully noted by those who sometimes quote our Master against all outward observances of religion, that he was as remarkable for his observance of religious rites as for the ab-

sence of all superstition or formality. To the established usages of the Hebrew ritual, both in the temple and the synagogue, he rendered punctual regard. Again and again his voice was lifted up in social prayer. He rises a great while before day for solitary devotion. He withdraws himself into the wilderness to converse with God. He continues all night in prayer to God. At his baptism, his transfiguration, his agony, and on the cross, he prays.

Now while thus devout, Jesus treats with disgust all the will-worship which passed in that day for religion. Witness the whole sermon on the Mount; the discourse respecting spiritual worship with the woman of Samaria; the unshackled converse with publicans and sinners; the bold refusal of fasts and washings and sabbatic extremes and uncommanded austerities. The voices of the populace tell us, as in echo, how he towered above all superstition, which was really the religion of the world at that day. "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? Behold, why do they on the Sabbath that which is not lawful? Why . . . eat bread with unwashed hands? Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" While there never was a moral teacher so full of true devotion, there never was one so remote from all that is ascetic. The element of penance and self-torture is absent from the New Testament and its Great Subject. And this is a leading charm in this model of humanity.

In common instances of virtue, we find gentleness and humility incompatible with decision, persistency and command: but not so with Christ. He is of all beings the most accessible. In no case does he manifest repulsion or undue reserve. His ear is open to the meanest and most misguided. The cases are too numerous for detail; from the time when, by Jordan, he turns to the two who follow him, saying, "Come and see," to the moment when he walks to Emmaus with Cleopas and his fellow. And as it regards Humility, a virtue missing in every pagan catalogue, he was its first teacher and example. For his mightiest deeds he sought no publicity, but repressed it by command. "See, thou say nothing to any man." "All men," said some, "seek for thee;" but he goes away to his work. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." "I am among you as he that serveth." In his only progress of seeming triumph, he enters Jerusalem on the lowliest of beasts; and shortly after, we see him

stooping to wash his disciples' feet. Couple with this the traits of dignity and imperative sovereignty, and the result is amazing. There occurs no moment of misgiving or weakness. From the very beginning his eye is fixed on certainty of success. In no instance does he seek for aid or counsel. His plan is mature and unwavering, and looks to the spiritual conquest of the world an idea too grand for the most soaring philosophy.

Let me ask you to contemplate our Lord's contempt of what worldly men salute as greatness, in connection with his condescension to the despised. If there were any to whom the edge of his censures were more keenly turned, it was the aspiring the rich, the learned, and the great. It is the rich man, promising himself ease and pleasure, whom he denounces as a fool; it is the dying beggar whom he transports to heaven. Among the beatitudes the leading welcome is to the poor, while the camel and the needle's eye furnish the symbol of the rich. There is not an approach to any courting of men in power, even for the best ends, but Jesus is eminently and beyond example the friend of the people. Among them were his cherished friends; for never was falsehood more glaring than that which erases Friendship from the virtues of our Redeemer. Over the humiliations of his country he sighed; for equally unjust is the assumption that Christianity repudiates Patriotism. The ordinary griefs of mankind moved his heart. He had compassion on the hanging thousands, as on sheep without a shepherd. In every part of the land he was the instructor of the populace. Over the city where his blood was to be shed, he wept, saying, If thou hadst known! And at another time, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Joined with this love of his people, and the race, was a quality which merits our closest attention. The cry of patriotism sometimes proceeds from fanaticism and faction, and under the colors of philanthropy we have sometimes discerned the torch and sword. The benevolence of Christ stands free from all taint of what is revolutionary. A single gesture would have raised that whole nation against the Roman; but he uttered no breath against the government. The attempt was made to entrap him, as when they brought him the denarius, but his language was, "Render the *æ*fore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which be God's." He refused to be a judge or

a divider. He retired from the multitude who would have hurried him to a throne. His kingdom, as he declared before the representative of Rome, was not of this world.

In regard to worldly training, Jesus of Nazareth belonged to the unlettered peasantry of a land whose only erudition at best was in their religious books. Hence the people exclaimed, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Yet with what authority did he speak, and how did thousands of Israel hang on the oracles of life! Never man spake like this man! Undisciplined in any school of philosophy he uttered a wisdom which has penetrated all nations and revolutionized the world. The striking instances occur to your memory in which amidst the craftiest attempts to inveigle him into contradiction, he escaped by a divine skill, without perplexity, without hesitation, and without an effort. This constellation of excellencies, intellectual and moral, has justly excited the wonder of all observers.

But there remains a crowning glory: this virtue was tried by suffering. The heathen were accustomed to say that a good man struggling with misfortune was a sight worthy of the gods. There never were such sufferings as those of Christ; ending in a death of ignominy, anguish and desertion, which is the holiest theme of our religion, while it is too familiar to your thoughts to need recital. It was under the pressure of pain, ingratitude, injury and insult, that a train of moral graces came into view, which but for this trial would have been unknown, and which have no parallel in Gentile ethics. He is seized by night, and hurried from his devotions, to be mocked at three several tribunals, arrayed in garb of shame, smitten, buffeted, spit upon, calumniated, scourged, and hung between robbers and murderers in the most disgraceful death then known. In all this series of mortifications and insults he is sublimely silent; never opening his lips in answer to the accusations, until he utters a claim which seals his condemnation. And when his brow is pale in death, his only language concerning his murderers is, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!

But here I awake to the presumption of an attempt to reduce the lineaments of such a portrait, and throw aside the pencil in despair. If you would have it in its proper colors of Divinity, go to the narrative of the Gospels. It is no small argument for the excellence of the writings, that all the grandeur of this image is conveyed by simple history. These traits reveal themselves in

life and action ; without eulogium, without reasoning on the case, and without summing up of the principles.

Of this character, then, I may safely say, produce any parallel. If the literature of centuries has given any equal personification of wisdom and goodness, let it be made to appear. Even with this model before the eye for ages, what approach has been made to a similar, not to say a superior, ideal ?

The character of Jesus Christ satisfies every demand of our moral nature. Important as external testimony is in its place and for other ends, here is a point where we require no external testimony. The moral glory of such a character shines by its own self-evidencing light. Here there is an analogy between moral conclusions and judgments of taste. Whatever share the understanding may have in adjusting and presenting the object, the inward faculty judges immediately. Whatever the beautiful object may be, a rose, a Parthenon, or a faultless human countenance, our inward approbation is immediate. Nor are our moral judgments less direct. Here we apply, not bare logic, but the determinations of intuitive reason, the utterances of our sublimest instincts, promptly and unhesitatingly accepting a given character as good or evil. It is on these grounds that we yield our love, upon the perception of excellence, in all the tenderest relations of life. And the decision is all the stronger, quicker, and less fallible, in proportion to the exquisite harmony and united perfection of the object, as light is most undeniable in the effulgence of the sun. The Lord Jesus Christ commands our assent, and overwhelms us into admiration. Here is the great argument, which has carried the citadel of a thousand unlettered hearts, while neither they nor we can fully translate it into the terms of cold logic. So viewed, the representation of Christ in the New Testament is the greatest moral lesson ever given to mankind, infinitely surpassing all the ratiocinations of the schools and all the systematized precepts of ethics ; being virtue reduced to the form of tangible action, and offered to us with the reality of life. I trust, therefore, I may regard the position as maintained, that in the person of Jesus Christ, as presented in the Christian Scriptures, we have a perfect model of moral excellence.

My second proposition is, that this character thus portrayed, is not the result of weakness, enthusiasm or imposture.

Viewed simply as an effort of the human understanding, a representation like this is infinitely beyond the reach of imbecility

and ignorance. We will boldly claim for high moral achievement the greatest intellectual powers. A perfect character is the best and choicest product of constructive skill. No architectural or mechanic wonder shall ever demand a nobler faculty. The depiction of elevated and consistent character has been in every age of literature, a favorite but difficult task of genius. But when the ideal assumes to be morally perfect, what shall we say of the ability required? Who has accomplished it, or even approached it? Look closely at the harmonious and immaculate whole, and then at the age, the nation, and the untutored evangelists, and say, can such an effect spring from the inventions of ignorance and folly? The argument, though simple and needing little development, is irresistible; that sublime personage was never the imagination of feeble minds.

If it be argued that even genius is sometimes overmastered by morbid excitements, I reply, it is inconceivable that this portrait should have proceeded from enthusiasm. As if to give the lie to such a charge, every page exhibits a simplicity without example in other annals. It is fragmentary, and devoid of that rotundity and glow which belong to the works of heat and fusion. The manner of the biography is as surprising as its contents. The most odious assaults on the chief personage are related with coolness. The most astonishing acts of power and marvels of endurance, humility and meekness are related without a syllable of praise. There is not a word of panegyric, and scarcely a word of comment. The vastness and awfulness of the matter stand in contrast with the strongest equanimity and reserve in the expression. Whatever else this may prove, it demonstrates that the writers were neither enthusiasts nor fanatics. Had they been such, it would have somewhere distorted and exaggerated the teaching, somewhere cast a sinister expression or lurid glare on the divine countenance, or somewhere blazed forth in language of intemperance and fury. If the terms can be used without misapprehension, I would say of the gospel history, that it is unrivalled in common sense, well-balanced narrative, and sound judgment. As the character represented rises high above all mists of vagary, so the representation itself repels the thought of enthusiastic excess.

Seeing then that weakness and enthusiasm are excluded, we are shut up (unless we admit the narrative), to the hypothesis of imposture. The argument will then run thus: no such events

ever occurred; the character is an ingenious fiction. Violent as is this supposition, it has had defenders. The difficulty should be inextricable from which a reasoner would leap into such an explanation. The framers of this splendid figment must have been either good men, or bad: in neither case could the result have taken place. No good man could lend himself to so gigantic a falsehood; for that the narrative was meant to be credited, that it lays blood at the doors of a nation, that it involves the dearest interests of myriads, and that it was actually believed as true from the very date of its appearance, are particulars which no sane mind ever doubted. Of all pretensions, the most incredible is that the history of Jesus Christ was invented by virtuous men.

But we find as little relief in ascribing the forgery to bad men: for bad men could neither conceive the character, nor alight on a motive for depicting it. Bad men could not conceive the character. Shall I descend to argue this in detail? Is human nature reduced to this, that for the only consummate image of virtue we are indebted to the fabrication of impostors? Could the sublime ideal, at which we have taken a distant glance, be the offspring of corruption and vice? The thought transcends all powers of credulity, and may be rejected with summary contempt.

As undeniably, bad men would have no motive for such a representation. So costly an invention demands a sufficient reason. Vice was never yet its own reprover. Every lineament of this celestial countenance would have frowned on the attempt. Every light and shade of the picture goes to promote a virtue which must be hateful to the false and malignant. The life, the lessons, the death, of Jesus Christ were never given to the world by wicked men. We are driven by irresistible stress of conviction to the judgment, that those who have left us this narrative were simple and honest men, and that they believed what they related.

The more profoundly we examine the case, the fuller must be our persuasion, either that the record of facts is true, or that Christ himself is the impostor. From the latter alternative of the dilemma, every virtuous mind starts back with horror. To state it, is to present its confutation. What remains but that from difficulties, enigmas and absurdities, so varied and inevitable, we return to the solid ground of truth, and admit, as the easiest

and only solution, that the events recorded are matter of actual history?

Having attained to such a conclusion, we find it corroborated from another quarter. The character of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament presents internal evidence of actuality. It is not a vision or a fancy, but a real existence. There are representations in the guise of history which betray themselves to be fictitious. There are narratives and characters, of which we say, This must have been matter-of-fact. In some of these cases there is room for mistake, but in all the evidence is internal, and that evidence may rise so high as to remove all doubt. If ever there was such a case, it is the one before us. The most powerful demonstration that Jesus is a real person, is that which we receive when the book is open before us. Nor is this wonderful, when we consider that there are laws of sequence and harmony, even in the animal creation, which enable the eye of science to decide that this is a genuine remnant of a once living structure, though in a fossil of ages; and that a fabulous or factitious aggregation of discordant parts. Such sequence and such law there are also in moral action and in character. Their very nature, as indicated not by parts but by the whole, not by fragment but by harmony, not by isolated specimens but by the type of unity, forbid detail or example. For ages, impartial readers have rested in the conclusion, This inimitable character actually lived and died on earth.

Before leaving the contemplation of our principal object, let me add, that the character of Christ has commanded the respect even of enemies. Among many testimonies which might be adduced, it will be sufficient to cite that of the infidel philosopher Rousseau.

“I will confess to you,” says he, “that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel has its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers, with all their pomp of diction: how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and so sublime, should be merely the work of a man? Is it possible, that the sacred Personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manner! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims!



What profound wisdom in his discourses ! What presence of mind, what subtlety, what truth in his replies ! How great the command over his passions ! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness and without ostentation ? When Plato describes his imaginary good man, loaded with all the punishments of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ : the resemblance was so striking that all the fathers perceived it. What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the son of Mary ! What an infinite disproportion there is between them ! Socrates, dying without pain or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last ; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates, with all his wisdom, was anything more than a mere sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others, however, had before put them into practice ; he had only to say, therefore, what they had done, and to reduce their examples to precepts. Aristides had been just, before Socrates defined justice ; Leonidas had given up his life for his country, before Socrates declared patriotism to be a duty. The Spartans were a sober people before Socrates recommended sobriety. Before he had even defined virtue, Greece abounded in virtuous men. But where could Jesus learn, among his contemporaries, that pure and sublime morality, of which he only has given us both precept and example ? The greatest wisdom was made known among the most bigoted fanaticism, and the simplicity of the most heroic virtues did honor to the vilest people on earth. The death of Socrates, peacefully philosophizing among friends, appears the most agreeable that one could wish : that of Jesus, expiring in agonies, abused, insulted, and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that one could fear. Socrates, indeed, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed the weeping executioner who administered it ; but Jesus, amidst excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelical history a mere fiction ? Indeed, my friend, it bears no marks of fiction. On the contrary, the history of Socrates, which no one presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty without obviating it : it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should

agree to write such a history, than that one should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel; the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

My third proposition is, that consequently, the claims set up by Jesus Christ are worthy of our implicit credence.

It is an inconvenience growing out of the limited field assigned to me, that it is continually trenching upon the domain of other evidences. The claims of Jesus Christ rest on other proofs, the supernatural signatures of his divine legation. But even before a witness or a claimant opens his lips or breaks the seal of his certificate, we may have an antecedent presumption in his favor. We may find it in his reputation, his manner, his very countenance. The claims and assumptions of a great and good man differ from all other claims, and are allowed as soon as they are stated. This is however the very lowest ground which I will take, namely, that the perfection of Christ's character, as appearing in the record, affords precedent reason for crediting his testimony. From this humble step in the flight of arguments, I proceed to assert, that our foregoing conclusions force us to admit the claims set up for himself by this extraordinary Person. So sure as perfect truth cannot lie, or spotless innocence be malignant, or infinite benevolence break forth in ruinous imposture, so surely the demands of our Lord Jesus are entitled to our implicit credence. But here again I necessarily draw near a subject which will be ably treated by other hands, and which I dare only touch for an instant. In all our previous argument, we have viewed the character of Jesus in its bare humanity; we have from the law of the reasoning abstracted this from all that was supernatural and all that was divine. Yet having established the reality and the perfectness of Christ's character, we cannot proceed to the claim founded on this, without including that mysterious element. Always remembering that from these lips, thus endeared to us, nothing but infinite truth can drop, let us inquire what are the particular claims set up by the Redeemer. These may be mentioned, though they cannot be discussed. Among them are these: Jesus Christ claimed to be a perfectly immaculate being; to be a teacher sent from God; to have the authentication of his mission in wonders of supernatural power; to be the subject of prophecies uttered during many ages; to be the Messiah of the old Testa-

ment ; to be the great atoning sacrifice and only way of access to God ; to be endowed with glories far surpassing manhood ; to be an object of worship ; to be the incarnate God !

We pause in wonder before such claims ; but they are true, they are substantiated ; they won the assent of the best men of that age and of succeeding ages. The character of Christ gives credence to the demands, even prior to the external testimony. That however which most concerns my share of the argument, is, that in the portrait of character given in the New Testament, everything is in perfect harmony. The natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, do not clash. If it were hard to depict a perfect moral image, as human, how surpassingly difficult to blend this with the superhuman and divine ! The delicacy, the reserve, the consistent grace, the majesty, with which this is done, transcend expectation. Stupendous miracles are related with a quietude and simplicity such as enhance their glory. Compare with this the ghastly images of pagan gods, and the theophanies of the poets, and you at once apprehend the force of the argument. All that it concerns me here to show, is, that the personality of Christ, as portrayed by the Evangelists, has everything to make it credible, even in respect to its celestial side.

These claims of the Lord Jesus Christ have fought their successful way through every system of opinion, and commanded the grateful belief of multitudes. Other arguments may admit of being presented with more dialectic exactness, in mood and figure, but it is my sincere persuasion, that no argument goes so profoundly to the heart, or so irrefragably reasons down the prejudices of skepticism, as the person of Jesus as it shines out from the evangelical pages. Talk as we may, about the difficulties of this subject, the divine reasonableness of the truth here embodied and personified has carried away captive the minds of successive generations, and is going on conquering and to conquer. Among thousands of thousands of true Christians, every one has been smitten with this ideal, and has in his measure striven to reproduce it. Every one has not merely accepted the precepts of Christ, but imitated the person of Christ : and the Christianity which is in the world, is after certain reflections and refractions, that same light, mirrored forth with manifold variety, according to the subjective differences of various minds ; even as the morning sun comes to us in the hues of the mountain, the dancing waves of the sea the flowers of the field, and innumerable drops

of dew, each vying with the rest to show forth some beam of the great luminary. Such credence have these claims received, that it is the character of Christ which lives again, in each individual believer, and in the body of the Church. Did time permit, I might go further and show, that the civilization of the modern world is a modified effluence from the same centre. The humanity of Christian nations—what is it, but a poor copy of the benignity of Christ? The tendencies to universal amity among nations—what is it but the gradual imitation of the Prince of Peace? The hospitals, infirmaries, and asylums of our day, for the helpless, blind, deaf, lunatic,—what are they, but the life of Christ, to some humble degree, actuating the life of society? And when the process shall be complete; when the last recusant shall give in his allegiance; when all nations shall be connected, and the church and the world have the same boundaries; what shall it be, but the Body of Christ, in which every member shall derive strength and character from the Head!\*

\* It was at first intended to refer in the margin to the passages of Scripture, on which the allegations of the foregoing discourse are founded: but their number was found to be so great, that citation of chapter and verse would probably defeat the object in view.