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Seven lectures on th

THE GOSPELS  
ARE  
TRUE HISTORIES

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JOHN HENRY BARROWS. D.D.

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# SEVEN LECTURES

ON THE CREDIBILITY OF

# THE GOSPEL HISTORIES

BY

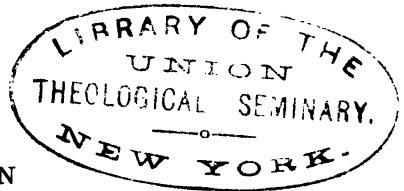
JOHN HENRY BARROWS

Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Chicago.

With an introduction by

REV. F. E. CLARK, D. D.,

President of The United Society of Christian Endeavor.



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TO  
MY FATHER AND MOTHER,  
WHOSE LIVES HAVE  
NOBLY ILLUSTRATED THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPELS,  
THIS BOOK  
IS GRATEFULLY AND LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE seven lectures in this little book are printed as they were delivered to audiences in which were gathered persons who are rarely seen in Christian Churches. The substance of the lectures, excepting the sixth and seventh, has already appeared in the *Golden Rule*. If the truth herein presented shall prove helpful to those who are in doubt, and also to the young disciples of Christ, the author will feel that his labor has had ample reward.

CHICAGO, Feb. 1, 1891.



## *INTRODUCTION.*

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**T**HE religion of Jesus Christ has practically won the reason of any young person when he is convinced that the Gospels are credible. To be sure, there may still be disputed points which are not cleared up, and doubts which are not fully resolved in regard to minor matters, but the citadel of the intellect has been captured when the young reader is compelled to admit that "The Gospels are True Histories." It is just such conquests as this which, I believe, this book will make. No candid reader can lay it aside without being convinced that, however infidels may rave and skeptics may sneer, the fundamental facts on which Christianity rests its claims have not been shaken by all the skeptical artillery of the ages. Many libraries of books on the evidences of Christianity have been written,

## *INTRODUCTION.*

but very scarce are the books which are so lucid, forceful and thorough, and at the same time interesting, as this volume. The distinguished preacher who is the author of this work never conceived a more important series of addresses on a more timely theme, and, in giving them to the still wider publicity of print, the public owes him a real debt of gratitude. As parts of these chapters have already appeared in a weekly journal they have called forth the warmest expressions of interest, not only from the young people for whom they were especially prepared, but also from their parents and pastors who realize even more fully the importance of the work. In this permanent form, I believe they will do much to establish in the faith many souls that otherwise might slip their moorings and drift out on the sea of unbelief.

F. E. CLARK.

BOSTON, Feb. 1, 1891.

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THE  
GOSPELS ARE TRUE HISTORIES.

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I.

ARE THE GOSPEL HISTORIES CREDIBLE?

THE RIGHT APPROACH TO THE GREAT QUESTION.

“Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”—1 THESSALONIANS V : 21.

I BEGIN to-night a series of Sunday evening Lectures on the most important question which concerns the human mind. If the Gospel history is true, if Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God who came into the world to redeem men from the curse and doom of sin, if His ministry was miraculously attested, as the Evangelists affirm and as the Church has always believed, and if He at

last vindicated His divinity and His supernatural mission by rising from the dead, then historic Christianity is true and ought to be accepted. Then each one of us should receive for himself this Divine Savior and profess allegiance to the Lord our Redeemer. What gives many men an excuse for not following the occasional impulses of their own hearts, and coming into the Christian Church, is a prevalent and pervading uncertainty of mind, occasioned by skeptical literature, with regard to the fundamental facts of the Gospel history. It is to meet this mental unrest that I offer you this series of lectures. I have myself experienced some of the difficulties which you may have met, and, therefore, I am able to speak sympathetically to what may be your condition of mind.

I acknowledge that, if the Christian creed cannot abide the severest testing of the intellect, it is doomed, and rightly so. Christianity lives in the light and does not fear the light. I am far from saying that, if you satisfy men as to the truth of the Gospel, they will all become Christians. I believe, having known it myself, that there is a disinclination in the human heart to accept and follow the holy teachings of God's Word. I believe that

if men could be induced to study the evidences of Christianity without any thought that the Christian religion is a personal matter, most of them would readily assent to the clear, close-linked and massive argumentation with which Bishop Butler and Paley and Whately and Coleridge and many others have defended the Christian system of truth. A great theologian with a legal habit and training, like President Finney's, had little difficulty in satisfying the minds of intelligent skeptics, when the appeal was made to the reasoning faculties alone. Scarcely ever did one young man go through Williams College, and come under the teaching of Dr. Mark Hopkins, without the intellectual conviction that Christianity is true. President Finney used to hold meetings in Rochester, New York, by invitation of judges, at which he addressed the lawyers, who came in large numbers, on the nature of God's Moral Government as taught by Christianity, and he always carried their intellectual assent. There his power ended. Then the power of prayer, the mighty persuasions of the Holy Spirit were needed, that the men whose minds had assented to the truth should consent and conform to it with their wills and their lives. The evidences of Christian-

#### 4 *THE GOSPELS ARE TRUE HISTORIES.*

ity may grow clearer, age after age, till they become like the legend of God's glory which is written out on the starry heavens above us, but so long as human nature remains unchanged, so long as men are disinclined to a self-sacrificing and holy life, there will be skeptics.

A hundred years ago, in Germany and England, the defenders of Christianity restricted themselves to those evidences which appeal to the logical faculties, the intellectual side of the three-fold nature of man. Many argued for the Bible as a lawyer would argue a point of law. The apologies thus offered effected a very limited result. Christianity appeals not only to the reason but also to the feelings, the choices, the life, and its greatest evidence is the power, lodged within it, of reforming the hearts of men. Hence Paley and Bishop Butler, with their labored arguments for Christianity, accomplished less than George Whitfield and the two Wesleys, who proved that the Christian religion had power to regenerate a dead Church and bring hope and joy and spiritual life to great multitudes of human hearts. The late John Richard Green, the Oxford professor of history, said of Methodism, or "Christianity in earnest," that the Wesleyan

reformation was the source of nearly all the movements which have since lifted the English masses, bringing in education, religious tolerance, parliamentary reform and even West India emancipation.

Whatever I say, in the course of these lectures, in my address to your reason, I pray you not to forget that the chief evidence of Christianity is one's personal experience of its truth. Most men come to an assurance that the Gospels are true by a personal knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ. They were not argued into faith, and they cannot be argued out of it any more than out of an affectionate trust in a mother's love. External proofs may help the doubting or troubled Christian, and occasionally may overcome the prejudice of the skeptic. It is said of two English unbelievers that they determined to expose the error of Christianity, and one of them chose for his subject of investigation the conversion of Paul, and the other, the resurrection of Lazarus. But the result of their studies was this, that each found his unbelief gradually departing under the powerful weight of the testimony to those supreme events. But, as Dr. Richard S. Storrs has written: "The kind of faith which is based simply on extrinsic proofs is never

6    *THE GOSPELS ARE TRUE HISTORIES.*

one to quicken joy, inspire service or win from others sympathetic response. A man may come to hold religion in consequence of its external proofs, but that religion will not hold him in its constant, subtle and stimulating grasp, except through his experience of it." It is a mistake to emphasize too exclusively the intellectual side of religion. This has been the terrible error of the schools in Germany. German Christianity has been largely petrified by an excess of rationalism. The Christian Gospel has there been, too often, a matter of mere speculation and of life-long scientific investigation. The pulpit has lacked evangelistic zeal and spiritual power. At the beginning of this century Schleiermacher, the great preacher and spiritual genius who brought new life to the German Church, said: "I found everybody devoted to the intellect, worshipping the intellect, and I saw the bodies of young men dangling from the trees." Students committed suicide, rushed out of life in despair, finding that the intellect could not content the soul. The whole emotional nature had been starved in the general prejudice against a religion of feeling, of spiritual enthusiasm, and, therefore, Schleiermacher took his stand on this extreme ground, that religion

consisted in the feeling of dependence upon God, that it had its origin in the sense of the Infinite by which man feels that his life is surrounded and sustained. In America and Great Britain, we have never run to the mortal extreme which deifies the intellect and destroys the heart, partly because Christianity here has not been de-vitalized by connection with the State, and partly because religion has always been a personal matter with us, something which each man must settle for himself.

And yet, I do not question that there are many inquiring and candid minds who may be greatly helped by an earnest and thorough consideration of the question which I propose to discuss. Christ gave evidences for the faith which He commanded. Luke speaks of the "many proofs" of the Resurrection. And Paul, the mightiest intellect of his time and perhaps the greatest heart that ever warmed the Christian Church, wrote these words: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." A wise Christianity welcomes investigation, though the Church has not always done so. One part of Christendom vouches for a lot of dubious, ecclesiastical miracles, and might lose much if men carefully considered the weakness of the testimony to

these marvels, contrasted with the massiveness and completeness of the evidences for the miracles of the New Testament. The pulpit usually is rightly busy in preaching the Gospel, and not in defending it. But when subtle, powerful and perilous attacks are made on historic Christianity in books of high moral and intellectual quality, which everybody reads, the pulpit should be ready to make answer by showing the reason for the faith it holds.

What I shall say in these lectures pre-supposes a belief in a personal God who loves His children, and whose children need His favor here, and the assurance of His blessing in a life beyond. More than eighteen centuries ago the shrewd, Jewish counselor, Gamaliel said, at the very beginning of the Church, when it comprised only a few hundred believers, beset by the hate of disappointed Judaism: "If this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow it." These words, which have been written on the base of the great statue of Martin Luther at Wittenberg, have in them no small amount of wisdom. What has been the result of the numberless and violent attempts to overthrow Christianity? The tiny and persecuted



Church which Gamaliel confronted holds within the circle of its influence the leading nations of the globe. Never before has the Gospel history been so widely accepted by the controlling races of the world. The missionaries who teach the Christian faith have pushed their conquests into nearly every land, and Christianity is the only religion, as scholars believe, likely ever to gain a world-wide authority. The Kingdom of Christ, with its conquering front, is itself a presumption for the truth of that history out of which it sprang. It is difficult to explain the noon-day without granting that there has been a sunrise. This Gospel history was preached as true at the very dawn of Christianity, and on its truth were built up institutions and usages which have come down to us, and which were never so strong and wide-spread as now. Each one of you writes at the head of his letters, 1890, and thus records the fact that 1890 years have passed since the coming of Jesus Christ among men. In the Church, in the observance of the Lord's Day, in the sacraments, we have monuments of the primitive Christian history. For eighteen hundred years and more, men have been commemorating the events of the Gospel record, as the

Jews commemorate the departure of Israel out of Egypt on the Passover night, and as Americans commemorate the giving forth to the world of their Declaration of Independence. Few events in secular history have had such monumental evidence as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There surely is a presumption in favor of the truth of the Gospel history, in the fact that it centers in the life and character of such a matchless being as Jesus Christ. We cannot think of Him as the product of the imaginations of the rude fishermen of Galilee. They were not competent, and indeed, who among the greatest of men is competent, to frame such a portrait of perfect character? Theodore Parker said: "It would take a Jesus to forge a Jesus." The most penetrating mind of Germany, the great poet Goethe, once wrote: "I esteem the Gospels to be thoroughly genuine, for there shines forth from them the reflected splendor of a sublimity, proceeding from the person of Jesus Christ, of so divine a kind, as only the Divine could have manifested on earth." Said the great Napoleon: "I think I understand somewhat of human nature; Jesus Christ was more than man." I might accumulate page after page of these testi-

monies of the world's greatest men as to the spiritual pre-eminence of Jesus. Must there not have been at least a large substance of historic truth in the Gospels which give us almost our only knowledge of One too great and perfect to have been the product of fancy, and too mighty to have been only a legend or a dream? The fact remains that these Gospels, which tell of a Divine Incarnation, which relate the life of the Founder of Christianity, which rehearse His discourses and His miracles in the same breath, which bring their four-fold testimony to His death and Resurrection, are now repeating their story in more than three hundred languages. You can find nothing parallel to this in human history. Into how few tongues have the Sacred Books of other religions been translated? And these few translations have been made not so much in the zeal of propagandism, as in the eagerness of scholarship. A little more than a year ago, there assembled in London, in prolonged conference, a company of fifteen hundred earnest and scholarly men of European or American birth, speaking scores of these missionary tongues, and among that company in this great, foreign missionary gathering, were none who did not believe that

these Gospels are to have universal acceptance. In our own land, the number who have publicly professed their belief in this supernatural history, has increased in the last century, three times as rapidly as the population. In the first fifteen hundred years of Christianity, it gained, according to Dr. Dorchester's tables, one hundred millions of adherents; in the next three hundred years, one hundred millions more; but in the nineteenth century it has gained two hundred and ten millions. That is, as our neighbor Dr. McPherson has put it, in an admirable sermon on this subject: "In the last eighty-nine years, Christianity has gained more adherents than in the previous eighteen centuries," and this in the time of the greatest general enlightenment. At the present rate of progress there will be over ten hundred millions of nominal Christians in the world in the year two thousand. It has been shown that in our own land evangelical Christianity has been growing far more rapidly than unorthodox Christianity; that in our colleges the percentage of communicants has, in the last thirty years, greatly increased; that, whereas thirty years ago, only nine per cent. of the students at Harvard were professed Christians, to-day the pro-

portion is over thirty per cent. It has been shown that since 1810, this country alone has raised over seventy-five millions of dollars for Foreign Missionary work, and that the aggregate receipts for Missions are increasing about a million dollars every year. It is an undisputed historical fact that the Christian faith has been the great builder of colleges and universities. It is the mother of benevolence and the promoter of moral improvement. While the Church, as an organization, is marred by many defects of life and doctrine, while its history has been stained and disfigured by much of bigotry, corruption and tyranny, still, it can be safely maintained that these defects are perversions of the spirit and method of Jesus Christ. They are like the poison-ivy clinging to the oak, but not a part of it. And never were the Christian spirit and faith more active and beneficent than to-day. Never was the Church so free from those excrescences which have disfigured it in the past.

Picking up a Greek Testament which had fallen on the floor, Ewald, the profound scholar and relentless critic, once said to Dean Stanley: "In this little book is all the wisdom of the world." But is this precious Book, whose messages to us are

all interwoven with so-called history, built on a mass of fables or fancies? It surely cannot be considered audacious in me to argue for the credibility of the Gospel narratives which have been maintained as true by all the great historic churches and by most of the minor denominations. The belief even in Christian miracles should not be considered a proof of imbecility, or of any lack of mental soundness, since the believer finds himself in the company of such men as Dante, Aquinas, Leibnitz, Bacon, Pascal, Sir Isaac Newton, Milton, Grotius, Copernicus, Kepler, Luther, Bossuet, Schelling, Cuvier, Julius Müller, Neander, Delitsch, Bishop Butler, Lightfoot, Sir William Herschel, Rawlinson, Chief Justice Marshall, Daniel Webster, Mark Hopkins, James McCosh, Sir Lionel Beale, Tischendorf, Coleridge, Sir William Hamilton, Faraday, Thomas Arnold, Herman Lotze, Sir William Brewster, Ulrici, Luthardt, Guizot, Bunsen, Niebuhr, Guyot, Dana, Rothe, Schleiermacher, Ewald, Dorner, Christlieb, and thousands of the chief philosophers, scholars and scientists of the past and present, including a recently published list of seven hundred of the leading scientific investigators of Great Britain who have given their

names to a declaration of faith in the Biblical history.

What is Christianity? It is not merely a system of ethics, that is, of moral teachings, coming from Jesus Christ and, like the teachings of Confucius and Buddha, giving instruction as to how men ought to live. Christ's ethical teachings are found in scattered fragments in the Old Testament. Christ rings a chime of bells in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, but it has been truly said that the metal of which they are composed is found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Christianity is not, as one has said, "a definite quantity of truths or moral teachings, but a series of facts. It is Christ Himself, His person and work. . . . In other words, Christianity is essentially miraculous. . . . All the chief facts of redemption are nothing but miracles." We ought to pause a moment to fix this important distinction. What is peculiar in Christianity, even as a system of ethics, is this, that its ethical teachings are all embodied and illustrated in a divinely perfect Teacher, whose redemptive work fills them with a new and life-giving power. But that Teacher Himself is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of Chris-

tian faith. Christianity is Christ as set forth in the Gospels. This has been the faith from the beginning, and it is this faith that has given the Gospel its power. The wonders which it has wrought have not sprung from the teaching, "Be good, for it is good to be good." Such teaching alone may have no more force to renew and elevate human nature than the propositions of Euclid or the facts of zoölogy. The marvelous force of Christianity has sprung from the preaching of a supernatural history, namely, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, who took upon Him our nature, lived a life of lowliness and suffering, speaking with unparalleled tenderness and unimpeachable truthfulness, and with Divine authority, confirming His word by miraculous attestation, dying on the cross for our offences, and rising from the grave through Divine Power for our justification, sending forth His apostles with a supernatural commission, and giving His Holy Spirit to make His Word mighty unto salvation to the believer.

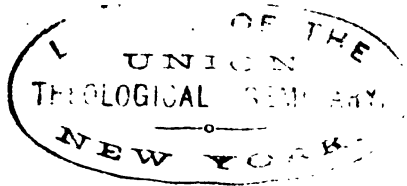
In studying any chief question we ought not to give heed merely to the latest talkers from the plat-



form, but to ask also, what have been the convictions of the greatest and most serious minds who have given their lives to its study? You will hear some neighbor saying that Christianity is only a system of moral teachings, like Buddhism, though perhaps a little better, and you may be tempted to give greater weight to such an individual remark than to the testimonies of all the Christian generations. This surely is a mistake. This surely cannot lead to a right estimate of things. What Mr. Gladstone has called the "solemn voice of the ages" ought to weigh something in our judgment of what Christianity is, and also with our judgment of its truth. Now the solemn voice of the Christian ages, whether it comes to us in the claim which Jesus made, that His miraculous works bore witness of Him as sent from God, or whether it be the earnest declaration of Paul in the epistle which even Strauss and Baur and Rénan affirm that Paul wrote within thirty years after the death of Christ, that Jesus rose from the dead; or whether it be that which comes from the early formed and generally accepted "Apostles' Creed," that voice, which was not smothered in the Catacombs nor silenced in the Colosseum, which persecution could not choke in

Paul and John and Clement and Polycarp and Tertullian, which has sounded in Christian hymns and martyrs' testimonies from the days when the incense of heathen sacrifices rose from the temples by the Tiber, and which finally burst from the lips of Chrysostom in the capital of an Empire which had chosen the cross of the Galilean peasant as its triumphal battle-sign; that solemn voice of the centuries, which breaks on our ears from the ancient councils of Nice and Chalcedon and from the later assemblies of Dort and Augsburg, from Greek basilica and Romanist temple and Protestant cathedral, heard amid the ranks of crusaders storming Jerusalem, and of Puritans fighting for liberty on the plains of England, and of Pilgrims touching the icy shores of the New World; coming to us from the cloister of the recluse and the study of the scholar, sounding beneath the storied arches of Westminster, and among dusky tribes on pagan shores who have learned to sing the faith of all the Christian ages; that voice, which breathes its grandeurs into the music of Handel's oratorios and whispers celestial solace into the heart of the dying believer, a voice speaking to-day from the thousand Christian colleges of the world and its four hun-

dred thousand pulpits, and which gives no sign of being silenced by the protests of a Matthew Arnold and a Professor Huxley, everywhere affirms, as its grand first announcement, that the Christian Gospel is a disclosure of God manifest in the flesh, in Jesus Christ His only Son, who lived a sinless life and displayed His Divine nature and commission in miraculous signs from heaven, crowning all by His resurrection from the dead.



## II.

### WHO WROTE THE FOUR GOSPELS?

“For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty.”

—II PETER i: 16.

THE unanimity of the Christian Church in all ages with regard to the truth of that wonderful history out of which it sprang, the high character and services of the men who, after long investigation, have given in their adherence to historic Christianity, and the wonderful and unequalled transforming power which the Gospel of Jesus Christ has manifested, all these facts are presumptions in favor of the credibility of the Evangelical narratives. Skepticism has a right, of course, to question generally received opinions,

however well-grounded. But skepticism has nothing, as yet, to show which will place it on the same moral level with Christianity. Men will do well to ponder the words which Mr. Lowell uttered before a certain Club in London: "When the microscopic search of skepticism has found a place on this planet, ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort and security, educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted, a place where age is revered, infancy protected, manhood respected, womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard; when skeptics can find such a place on this globe where the Gospel of Christ has not gone before and cleared the way and laid the foundation and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the skeptical *literati* to move thither, and there ventilate their false theories."

We have already seen what Christianity is. It is the miraculous Christ as He appears in the Gospels. This Christian faith, the faith of apostles and martyrs, the faith of the first century and of the nineteenth, has been found effective in working moral wonders, delivering from the oppression of guilt, filling the heart with peace, firing it with

love, lifting the victims of drunkenness and the children of barbarism into holiness, sending its missionaries into all continents, showing its adaptation to every need, contenting the mind of the philosopher and filling the hearts of faithful disciples in the hour of death, whether dying in the huts of India or the palaces of Europe, with a triumphant faith in Jesus Christ as the resurrection from the dead and the assurance of life eternal. It must be conceded that the events which these Gospels record, are central in all human development. Apparently all preceding events lead up to the coming of Christ. Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, seem but stepping-stones to the life of Jesus and His world-wide mission. And apparently all subsequent history has flowed, as it were, from those events recorded by the Evangelists, a new life and hope entering into the world as men came to receive the story of God's love in Jesus Christ, a pagan empire changing finally to a Christian empire, European nations accepting the Gospel and, with their spiritual children in America, coming at last to the control of the globe. Even the ancient Greek philosophy, with its guesses, its hopes, its insufficiencies, appears like a school-master, guid-

ing the Greeks towards Him who satisfies all the nobler longings of the human mind, who makes God our Father real to our lives, who provides redemption from the guilt and pollution and domination of sin, and who confirms by His resurrection the hopes of immortality. A great scholar has said of heathenism: "There glimmered through all its idolatries and sacrifices a strange, unearthly light, in fitful search for an incarnate Savior. Ancient history converged to His cross; modern history has received from Him its organizing law."

We come to this question of the credibility of the Gospels, I hope with all candor and modesty, and yet with the strong, rational presumption in our favor that the solidest, most beneficent and most commanding facts in the world to-day did not spring out of, and have not been built upon, a collection of myths and fancies which were palmed off on a hostile world and finally accepted as truth. Furthermore, if we repeat believingly the sublime sentences of the Apostles' Creed which contains the substance of the Gospel, we have, in them, what all will acknowledge as a sufficient explanation of the origin, growth and approaching triumph of the Kingdom of Christ. But you will feel the inade-

quacy of the anti-miraculous creed which some modern rationalists would substitute for the faith of the Church. It has thus been summarized by a German scholar: "I believe in Jesus who allowed Himself to be called the Messiah, the illegitimate son of Joseph the carpenter, our brother who, Himself, was not quite free from sin and error, who was naturally begotten and conceived, born of Mary, wife (?); who, merely on account of His resistance to the rulers, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and probably hastily interred in some dishonorable burying-place, remained in death and did not rise again, but was only in after years believed to have done so; whose body decayed in the grave, whilst His spirit was raised to Heaven, if indeed, there be such a thing as immortality and eternal bliss; who also spoke of His second coming, which was either visionary or else intended impersonally, and of His judging the world, which was undue self-exaltation." It need not be said that this residuum which extreme modern rationalism would leave us of the Gospels, is not the Christian faith of the early disciples, as indeed the rationalists themselves confess, is not the faith which has wrought the grandest achieve-



ments of Christian history, and is not a faith which explains to us the person of Jesus Christ.

What we know of Him is mostly contained in four books which we call Gospels, or Glad Tidings. Their record may be true even if they were not written by the men whose names they bear. Christianity may be divine, whether Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, or some other persons, wrote these Gospel-books. The facts contained in John Marshall's *Life of Washington* are true, even though it were proved that some other and later person wrote that life of the Father of his country. But, if it is true that Matthew, who was one of the Apostles of Jesus, and Mark, who was an early disciple and a companion and friend of Peter, and Luke, who was an intelligent physician and companion of Paul, and John, who was the most intimate of the chosen friends of Jesus, wrote these narratives, then we have contemporary accounts of the Gospel history, the records of eye-witnesses, or the friends of eye-witnesses, to these supreme events. It need not be said that no autograph manuscripts of the sacred writers, or of the Greek and Roman classic writers, are now in existence, but it can be truthfully said that we have a consensus

of testimony that certain epistles of Paul and that the four Gospels were written by the men whose names they bear, far greater and stronger than the testimony to the authorship of the poems of Virgil and the histories of Livy and Tacitus. We ascertain the authorship of a New Testament book, as of any English, German or Latin work, by the testimonies of those who were competent to know, or who received their evidence from earlier witnesses. Now it cannot be questioned that these New Testament books are referred to as genuine by a greater number of early witnesses than any volumes of Greek and Roman literature. Says Dr. Angus, and his statement has the confirmation of Dr. Bentley, the famous classical scholar: "In not less than one hundred and eighty ecclesiastical writers whose works are still extant, are quotations from the New Testament introduced, and so numerous are they that, from the works of those who flourished before the seventh century, the whole text of the New Testament might have been recovered even if the originals had since perished." It is well known that the oldest existing manuscripts of the New Testament date from the fourth century, but of early manuscripts, later than the earliest, the

New Testament can show a list far greater than that of the Greek and Roman classics. Of Herodotus we are told that only fifteen manuscripts are known to exist, the oldest being of the tenth century. In preparing editions of Livy or Tacitus or Cicero, scholars are not able to consult more than a score or a score and a half of manuscripts. On the other hand, in preparing the recent critical editions of the Greek New Testament, upward of six hundred manuscripts have been consulted, two of them belonging to the fourth century, three to the fifth, six to the sixth, and so on until by the eleventh century they are reckoned by the hundred. It appears then, as one has said, "that the New Testament has an enormous advantage over the classics in respect to the number and antiquity of the manuscripts."

Now when we take these Gospels into our hands with any scholarly knowledge of the tongue in which they are written, it cannot be denied that they were composed in the language in use during the first Christian century, that is, in what is called Hellenistic Greek, a dialect "modified both by the Hebrew cast of thought and the Hebrew idioms"; it cannot be denied that these writings have as wit-

nesses to their genuineness ecclesiastical writers of the first three centuries; that to this is added the testimony of the heretical writers of that period, and of the Pagan skeptics, since, as has been remarked, "Celsus, Porphyry and Lucian do not dispute the authenticity of the New Testament, but its credibility and authority." And superadded to all this, are the early translations or versions, of the New Testament which have come down to us, the Syriac version dating from the first half of the second century, thus indicating the general belief of the Church in the genuineness of these writings. The doubts which were raised concerning some of the books which were finally accepted show that the critical spirit was not wanting in the early Church.

The primitive Christians were not credulous in this matter; they received only on testimony and evidence. From the writings of the first three centuries, which have been preserved, the greater part of the New Testament has been gathered, showing how abundantly it was quoted and how universally it was received. From the works of Tertullian, born within ninety years of the fall of Jerusalem, quotations "from the New Testament books and

indirect allusions to them have been brought together in a volume of about five hundred pages." He says of the four Gospels that they have existed "from the beginning," and "are coeval with the churches themselves." Surely this testimony is of quite as much value as the unscholarly remark of some skeptical writer of to-day that the earliest Gospel is not earlier than the year one hundred and eighty-six! Contemporary with Tertullian is Clement of Alexandria, a writer who appeals to the four Gospels as being the only authentic history of Christ that has been handed down to us. So, at this early day, the confidence and regard of the Churches for these four histories were already established. Earlier than Clement was the Bishop of Lyons, Irenæus, a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John. The quotations of Irenæus are numerous; a hundred and ninety-three verses are quoted from the first, and seventy-three from the fourth Gospel. Earlier still was Justin Martyr, born in Palestine about the year one hundred, and composing his most important writings as early as the year one hundred and fifty. He refers to the "Memoirs of the Apostles," making one hundred and twenty allusions to the Gospel

history which are correspondent to the records which we hold to-day, some of his allusions evidently referring to phrases in the fourth Gospel. He speaks of "these Memoirs" as composed by "the Apostles and their companions." As Professor Norton has written: "It is an indisputable fact that throughout a community of millions of individuals, scattered over Europe, Asia and Africa, the Gospels were regarded with the highest reverence as the works of those to whom they were ascribed, at so early a period that there could be no difficulty in determining whether they are genuine or not, and when every intelligent Christian must have been deeply interested to ascertain the truth. And this fact does not merely involve the testimony of the great majority of Christians to the genuineness of the Gospels; it is itself a phenomenon admitting of no explanation except that the four Gospels had been handed down as genuine from the Apostolic age, and had everywhere accompanied our religion as it spread through the world." As Professor Fisher, our learned American historian, has said: "The universal reception of the four Gospels as having exclusive authority by the churches in the closing part of the second century

requires to be accounted for if their genuineness is denied." "Christians had become numerous enough to excite anxiety more and more in the rulers of the empire. The question to be answered is, how this numerous, widely-dispersed body had been led unanimously to pitch upon these four narratives as the sole authorities for the history of Jesus." If later writers palmed off their own compositions and forged Apostolic names, why should one Gospel have been ascribed to the obscure Matthew, about all we know of whom is that he was a despised and hated publican, a tax-gatherer, deemed a traitor by his own people, but who, at the call of Christ, left his office and became one of the chosen twelve? Canon Farrar has said: "It would have been natural to forge an epistle of St. Peter; no one would have thought of forging a writing of St. Matthew." And why should Mark and Luke, neither of whom was an Apostle, have been pitched upon as the authors of two of the narratives, if later writers were palming off their own work?

Scholarship is more and more unanimous in holding the four Gospels to be genuine. The most candid of American writers and critics, Professor Fisher, declares that erudite and fair-minded scholars, both

German and English, whose researches entitle them to speak with confidence, unite in affirming the following as facts; "The early formation, under the eyes and by the agency of the immediate disciples of Jesus, of an oral narrative of His sayings and of the events of his life: its wide diffusion, its incorporation into the second Gospel, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, by an author who had listened to Peter; the authorship of at least the foundation of the first Gospel by the Apostle Matthew; the completion of the first Gospel in its present compass at about the date of the fall of the city, and the consequent dispersion of the Christians, who fled at the coming of the Romans; the composition of Luke by a Christian writer who had access to immediate testimony, as well as to writings in which this testimony had been set down by disciples situated like himself." At this point it may be well to hear again the opening words of Luke's Gospel: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled (or fully established) among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed



good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

We come now to the fourth Gospel, which differs in many respects from the first three, which are called the synoptics, and are so called because, in narrating the life of Christ, they follow a common plan, or synopsis. The Gospel bearing the name of John is confined almost exclusively to Christ's Judean ministry, while the others relate more particularly to His Galilean work. The fourth Gospel gives us what appears to be an interior view of the Saviour's mind and teaching, by one who had intimate personal knowledge, and it is usually regarded as the noblest book of the four. There have been learned critics who denied that Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe were great poets, and there have been also those who denied the fourth Gospel to be an extraordinary work. But the general consensus of worthy minds, from Chrysostom the preacher, to Lessing the critic, and to Meyer the scholar, pronounces it to be amongst the loftiest compositions which ever came from the mind

of man. This book is a unit, composed throughout by a single hand, as Baur has conclusively shown, unless we except the last two verses of the final chapter as the attestation of the elders at Ephesus that John wrote the record. Now, if the author were not an eye-witness of the events recorded, but a writer of the second century, then he is falsifier, for he declares that he himself saw what he describes, as when he says: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." If this book came to light in the second century, we seek in vain for any man approximating its high standard. We have writings enough from the second century to show that the author of the fourth Gospel towers above them all. If one desires what, to most persons, will be a sufficient evidence of the genuineness and truthfulness of the four Gospels, he will only need to read, by way of contrast with them, the so-called Apocryphal Gospels, which are unquestionably forged, and in which the writers gave the freest scope to their imagination in ascribing fictitious wonders to Jesus of Nazareth. There are seven of these fictitious histories, and they show what the human fancy will do when

it begins to devise miracles. Herein we read that the child Jesus, lying in His cradle, said to His mother: "I whom thou hast brought forth am Jesus, the son of God, the Logos, as the Angel Gabriel announced to thee"; and that, when the Holy Family came to Egypt, the idols fell down, and that a three-year old child, son of a priest, was seized with a frenzy and ran to the public house where Mary was washing the linen clothes of Jesus, one piece of which the demoniac boy placed on his head, when at once the devils came out of his mouth, and fled away in the forms of rams and snakes; and so on with a superabundance of fooleries and childish superstitions, contrasting with the simplicity and naturalness of the references to Jesus in our Gospels. I might dwell on this at length as an evidence that the four Evangelists, who seem to hide themselves, giving no play to their emotions or their fancies, are faithfully recording only what they have seen and known.

But, turning from the Apocryphal Gospels to the ecclesiastical writings of the second century, we feel at once how immeasurably inferior they are to the words of the fourth Evangelist. Turning from them to him is like going from the atmosphere of

earth to heaven. "The forgery of this Gospel in the second century would involve a literary problem infinitely more difficult" than the appearance of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, with its literary peculiarities, in the days of Chaucer. "If," it has been asked, "in the middle of the second century there had been any man who could have produced such a book, is it conceivable that one who towered so immeasurably above all his contemporaries should have remained a nameless forger, unnoticed and unknown?"

John's authorship of the fourth Gospel had never been questioned in the time of Eusebius, the historian, except by an insignificant heretical sect. The serious modern attack upon it is not fifty years old, and after such defences of its Johannine authorship as those of Weiss, Meyer, Godet, Professor Ezra Abbot, Westcott, and a score of others, there is every reason to believe that the author was a Christian of Jewish origin, that he was a Jew of Palestine, that he was a contemporary of Jesus, that he was an eye-witness of what he recorded, that he was a disciple whom Jesus loved—in other words, that he was John, the son of Zebedee. Skeptical scholarship has been forced to put the supposed

date of its authorship further back than Baur thought necessary. No one has answered the question, "How could a book of this kind be palmed off on the churches, including the church of Ephesus, where John lived, so soon after his death?" If he did not write the Gospel that bears his name, how did these disciples and the churches come to believe that he did? How did all the churches in the second century acquire this conviction? There is no defect in the external evidence. Eusebius was aware of no dispute regarding its authorship. Origen, who was born 185 A. D., accounts it among the only "undisputed Gospels of the church of God under the whole heavens." The earlier Clement of Alexandria declares that John wrote "a spiritual Gospel"; Justin Martyr, still earlier, has traces of this book; Celsus, the unbeliever, resorted to it for materials wherewith to attack the church. The testimony of Irenæus, who cites from the elders an interpretation of Christ's words in the fourteenth chapter of John, carries us back to the lifetime of the contemporaries and pupils of the apostle. No later writer pretending to be John would have referred to that apostle in the peculiar way in which John refers to himself, as that "other disciple," or

“that other disciple whom Jesus loved.” No one doubts that this disciple, thus anonymously referred to, is John, and, as has been shown, “this covert method of revealing the author could only spring from a certain delicacy of feeling on his part which prevented him from giving his own name, especially since he was led by the plan and purpose of his work to speak of himself as standing in so tender a relation to Jesus.” This modest veiling of the author’s personality is not characteristic of the style of spurious writings.

Now, why has all this testimony been rejected? Not, I venture to say, because the fourth Gospel cannot be substantially harmonized with the others. It bears the marks of having been written by an eye-witness, whose purpose was not to repeat what others had said, but to supplement former accounts with which he was familiar, and to record the history of his own mind in order to show how his faith in Jesus as the divine Son of God came to be established. It bears the marks of being the autobiographic record of a profound and affectionate soul who had come to believe, and who desired others to believe, in the supernatural nature of the Messiah. It is because John’s tes-

timony, if acknowledged to be his, is so powerful in establishing the deity of his Master and the celestial authority of His mission that the anti-supernaturalists have so violently assailed the fourth Gospel.

### III.

#### THE STRENGTH OF THE TESTIMONY TO THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

*“And ye shall be witnesses unto me.” — ACTS i:8.*

**T**HE chief work of the Apostles, Evangelists and early disciples was to bear testimony to the life, miracles, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This testimony has found record in the Gospels and epistles of the New Testament, and has borne fruit in the Christian Church and the Christian civilization of the present. I have been careful from the beginning of these lectures, to emphasize the fact that Christianity cannot be separated from its supernatural history and accompaniments. The question is often asked, “Why will not the Church give us the substance of the moral teachings of Jesus, and throw aside the super-



natural history?" I reply, that the history is itself the chief and most important teaching, and that the effort, which has very often been made, to eliminate the miraculous elements from the Christian doctrine, has resulted only in disaster. Men who rejected supernatural Christianity have founded their churches, and great hopes have been entertained that the new Gospel would prove more fruitful and beneficent than the old. Men like Theodore Parker, have clung to the ethics of Jesus and thrown away the Christian supernaturalism, and what, after one generation, is the outcome of Parkerism? Free religion, spiritualism, irreligion, rank-est infidelity, distrust of all schemes that imply a God, these are some of the natural results of a plan of religious life which denies the supernatural in Jesus and in His Church. Is there the slightest reason to believe that the future outcome of such efforts will be any different? Will the new Gospel, which tells us that Jesus Christ was not the Divine Son of God, was not supernaturally commissioned and did not rise from the dead, reach and save the souls of poor and struggling and sinful men better than the Gospel of Mr. Moody? Will a merely human Jesus, our brother, accomplish

any such work for humanity as the Divine Christ who has been preached by Paul and Luther and Wesley? Is a Gospel which can give no celestial assurance of Divine love and forgiveness, which sinks Jesus to the level of a mere human philanthropist, and which can point with no certain faith to a world of blessedness beyond, likely to bring to sad hearts the comfort, and to broken lives the help, of that Gospel which is preached in the thousand mission-chapels of the great cities of Christendom?

From the beginning of Christian history, there has been substantial agreement as to the truth of the primitive narratives, and out of this catholic, historic faith has sprung a certain distinctive and noble type of Christian character. It seems plain to so wise a man as Mr. Gladstone, that if you cut away this faith and destroy these roots, the distinctive type of Christian character will soon die out. As that type is not found where Christianity has never been, why should it continue when historic Christianity is uprooted? Now that the Gospel of Christ has created the only conditions in which civilized men would be willing to live, how do we know that when the essential elements of the

Christian Gospel, as Paul and Calvin and Pascal and Chalmers and even Channing would have deemed them, are excluded, it will continue, age after age, to work its old-time wonders? Because the accomplished niece of Matthew Arnold, and the distinguished scientist, Professor Huxley, have been led to accept a philosophy of history and of nature, which forbids them to believe in miracles, shall we, therefore, call upon the Church, girding itself for triumph to-day as never before, to reconstruct its faith by taking out of it what the Church in all its great branches has always believed? Such an appeal is a summons to discord and defeat; it is asking an army in the thick of battle to throw away its long-tried weapons and manufacture new ones. The enemies of the supernatural will need to accomplish far more than they have succeeded in doing, before the Church will turn and follow them, instead of trusting the testimony of those whom Jesus promised to lead into all truth, and made His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth."

We have already considered some small part of the evidence going to show that the four Gospels

are genuine, that is, written by the men whose names they bear. The strength of their testimony to the events of the Gospel history appears the greater the more carefully we ponder it. We have here four accounts of the life of Jesus, from those who had every means of knowing the truth. These chronicles are very plain and calm. As Bernard has said, in his Bampton Lectures: "The style of simple recital, unclouded and scarcely colored by any perceptible contribution from the mind of the writers, gives us the scenes, the facts and the Person, as seen in the clearest light and in the most transparent atmosphere." These narratives are unique in this as well as in other respects. They recite in simple, unaffected language, with no apparent effort to make themselves minutely consistent one with another, as would have been the case with forgers, and with no purpose to heighten the sense of wonder, the marvellous events which cluster about the person of Christ. Each Gospel is different from the others, Matthew apparently written for the Jews, to show that Christ is the Messiah of the Old Testament; Mark, written, as it would seem, for the Romans, and as the ancient writers unanimously testify, under the

direction of Peter, to show in a vivid way Christ in action as the strong Son of God; Luke, written, it would seem, for the Greeks, under the direction of Paul, to show the universality, the mercifulness and the peculiar tenderness of the grace of Christ and of His teaching; and John, apparently written for all Christians, to show that Jesus is one with the Father. And yet, though different, the peculiarities of each are found, in some measure, in all the others. The Divinity of Christ is not taught by John alone, nor the graciousness and universality of His Gospel by Luke alone. The discrepancies between them, while they forbid the theory of verbal, mechanical inspiration, forbid also the theory of collusion and fraud, and tend to strengthen the conviction of the candor and faithfulness of the men who wrote of what they saw and believed. It must be remembered that these Gospels are not orderly histories; they are brief memoirs, sketches, all of them fragmentary, and not pursuing a chronological order of events. While they agree in their general portraiture of Jesus Christ as the Divine Son of God, having supernatural wisdom, goodness and power; while there are numberless indications of unintentional and often minute har-

mony in recording the same events, there is none of that mechanical accuracy which we should expect in those attempting a forgery.

Take the words which Pilate had written over the head of Jesus on the Cross. According to Matthew's record the inscription is, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews"; in Mark's record it is, "The King of the Jews"; in Luke's, "This is the King of the Jews"; and in John's, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". Here is substantial agreement in the one important thing, that the inscription of Christ's royalty was placed upon the Cross, and the differences do not impair the historic credibility of the narratives, but rather show the independence of the witnesses. Most of the differences in the Gospels relate to minor details, and have been explained by the harmonists. With so many gaps in the Gospel record, it may not be possible, and it is certainly not necessary, to show a perfect agreement. These differences are what would be expected in honest witnesses and narrators, and have been shown to be like the differences which appear in the two accounts of the death of Cicero by Appian and Plutarch, or, the three accounts by Whitelock, Algernon Sidney, and

Ludlow of Cromwell's dispersion of the Long Parliament. It is said by Paley that in the account of the Marquis of Argyle's death, Lord Clarendon relates that he was condemned to be hanged and was hanged on the day of his condemnation, while Burnet, Woodrow, Heath and Echard all say that he was beheaded two days after his condemnation, but these differences in the historians do not leave it uncertain whether the Marquis was executed or not. It must always be remembered that each Gospel mentions and omits some things that are omitted and mentioned by the others, and that, as has been suggested, a great deal of the discrepancy arises from omission. I think no one can honestly and carefully read the four narratives without the feeling that the variations confirm, rather than weaken, the total impression of reality and of faithfulness to the essential truth. Four times it has been said, "does the Lord walk before us in the glory of grace and truth"; four times do we review, in these narratives this unparalleled life; each time we get some new glimpse of His grace and grandeur, as, in reading Plato's and Xenophon's descriptions of Socrates, we gain new impressions of the Athenian sage, or as, in the numerous

lives of Abraham Lincoln, we find various aspects of his many-sided humanity; but the total conception from the Gospels is that of a Being who is not essentially different when seen by the publican Matthew, or by the profound and spiritually-minded John. The best tonic for an enfeebled faith is simply to read and ponder, with a loving and a reverent heart, these simple and self-evidencing narratives. They give no impression that their writers are either weak-minded, fanciful or untruthful. It is a common experience, that of the great French preacher, Lacordaire, who turned from the ingenious and erudite pages of Strauss, and found that it never needed more than ten minutes reading in the Gospels "to dissipate the charm of a vain science, and to enable him to smile inwardly at the impotence to which God has condemned error." A distinguished literary woman of Massachusetts has recently written: "The Bible itself has been to me its own witness. Its Divine origin is revealed to me from within entirely. Rénan's life of Jesus is the most convincing book of Christian evidences that I have ever read. It would be impossible for me to take his view of Jesus, which makes him a sort of philanthropic charlatan, in place



of the simple, straightforward, New Testament record."

To fully appreciate the value of these Gospels as witnesses to Christ, one should ponder what Channing has written on this point, namely, that "a book may be a better witness than its author. Suppose that a man claiming to be an eye-witness should relate to me the events of the three memorable days in July, in which the last revolution of France was achieved; suppose, next, that a book, a history of that revolution, published and received as true in France, should be sent to me from that country. Which is the best evidence of the facts? I say, the last. A single witness may deceive, but that a writer should publish in France the history of a revolution that never occurred there, or which differed from the true one, is in the highest degree improbable; and that such a history should obtain currency, that it should not instantly be branded as a lie, is utterly impossible. A history received by a people as true, not only gives us the testimony of the writer, but the testimony of the nation among whom it finds credit. It is a concentration of thousands of voices, of many thousands of witnesses. I say, then, that the writings of the first

teachers of Christianity, received, as they were, by the multitudes of Christians in their own times and in those that immediately followed, are the testimony of that multitude, as well as of the writers."

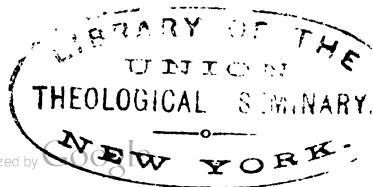
Besides the four Gospels we have in confirmation of the evangelic narratives, the four undisputed epistles of Paul, the Galatians, Romans, and First and Second Corinthians. The First Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon are added by scholars like Pfleiderer, Lipsius and Hilgenfeld. The four named first are acknowledged by Baur and Rénan, and the skeptical scholars generally, to have been written by the apostle Paul within about thirty years of the Crucifixion. As Dr. Schaff has said, "They refer to our Lord's birth from a woman of the royal house of David, His sinless life and perfect example, His atoning death, His triumphant resurrection on the third day, His repeated manifestations to His disciples, His ascension and exaltation to the right-hand of God, whence He will return to judge all men in righteousness; the adoration of Christ by His followers, the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem." Now these epistles are the destruction of the mythical theory. Not only does

Paul speak of the miracles which he himself wrought, thus showing that miracles were not an afterthought, or the growth of a later generation, and he refers to the chief events in the life of Christ as well-known and generally believed among the churches to whom he wrote. He narrates in detail the various appearances of Christ after His resurrection. Between the end of Christ's life and the time of Paul's writing, the period is too short for the growth of those mythical fancies to which Strauss attributed the miracles. Thomas Arnold expressed his amazement at the idea "of men's writing mythic history between the time of Livy and Tacitus, and St. Paul mistaking such as realities." Strauss's theory, which Professor Norton called "an outrage on common sense," is too thoroughly dead to be given much consideration, but it may be said in passing that the time was too brief for the growth of myths, by which, out of a merely human Jesus, such astonishing transformations were wrought, and certainly the skeptical paganism and despairing Judaism of that time are the marks of an age in which myths do not flourish. They belong to the dawn rather than to the decadence of nations. The Messiah whom the

Jews were expecting was so opposite in spirit and method to the Messiah who came, that the Jewish disciples, creating a Christ out of their fancies, would have shaped one entirely different from that which appears in the Gospels. Now Paul, writing in the midst of the men who knew Christ personally, nearly five hundred of whom were living witnesses of the resurrection, whose names were known, and who could be found and questioned, having received the right hand of fellowship from Peter and John, who acknowledged his apostleship, the Apostle Paul, I say, in various literature which cannot be successfully disputed, gives his mighty additional testimony to the truth of the Gospel history.

It is sometimes objected to the credibility of the Christian records that there is nothing in Jewish, Roman and Greek historians repeating and confirming the Scriptural accounts. To this it may be replied that the Romans paid but little attention to the affairs of the despised, fanatic and hated Jews. As ex-President Porter has said: "Their affairs were always ignored at the Imperial City. The people were regarded by its philosophers and historians as the devotees of a baneful superstition.

Jesus, in their view, was but one more of the ever-pestilent and seditious rabbis, and Christianity but one additional Jewish sect." The Old Testament history "had for hundreds of years solicited the attention of Greek and Roman critics, but they had not condescended to honor it with a critical, even though contemptuous, judgment. Why should they send a commissioner or critic extraordinary to Syria, to report on the new movement of Christ?" But as soon as Christianity became a vigorous attack on paganism, the Roman historians do notice it. There is the famous passage in Tacitus in which we are informed that a certain person, named Christus, that is, Christ, was the founder of a sect, was executed by Pontius Pilate, that is, put to death as a malefactor, that this event took place in the reign of Tiberius the emperor, that it occurred in Judea, that instead of destroying the sect, it utterly failed in its purpose, and that shortly the hated superstition burst out once more and reached even Rome. This great historian, it should be remembered, was born within thirty years after the death of Christ. And later, Pliny the younger, who died A. D. 117, and who had no friendliness towards the Christians, writes to the emperor Trajan that they are



very numerous in Pontus and Bithynia and that he had learned concerning this people, after careful inquiry and use of torture, that "they were accustomed to meet together on one day in the week for the singing of hymns to Christ, as their God," and that they "bound themselves to each other by an oath not to steal, rob, commit adultery, break their word, or deny any trust committed to them." I say, then, that as soon as Christianity became formidable in any measure to the Roman paganism, the heathen writers do notice it, and since, in a short time, in spite of cruel resistance, the Greek and Roman world yielded its assent to the truth of the Christian history and the claims of Jesus to Divine Lordship, we have in this unparalleled fact an evidence far stronger than would have been an elaborate and probably contemptuous notice of the life of Christ in a Roman historian. The silence of Josephus, if he is indeed silent (for Dr. Schaff and others argue the genuineness of the famous panegyric of Christ which appears in Josephus), is certainly over-balanced by the testimony to the Gospel narratives which is given by such a violent enemy of Christianity as was Saul, the rabbi, and it weighs but little when set over

against the tremendous fact that the earliest disciples, in the capital of Judaism, appealed to the enemies of Christ for the truth of Christ's miracles. And this appeal "was not contradicted by the Jews, as it unquestionably would have been, had these miracles been the invention of the few followers of Christ." It is admitted even by Keim, a semi-rationalist, that in one of the earliest apologies addressed to the Roman emperor, "Quadratus appealed to the fact that of those who had been healed or raised from the dead by Christ, some were still alive and all were well-known." Peter said at Pentecost, within a few weeks of Christ's resurrection, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs (that is, miracles) which God did by Him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know." And had it not been for the stumbling-block of the Cross, with its solemn disclosures of human guilt, with its enthronement of meekness, goodness and mercy, and had Jesus proved the sort of Messiah that the Jewish leaders wanted, and not a flaming rebuke to their spirit of pride, formalism and national revenge, they would more generally have yielded to His

claims. As Edersheim, the learned Christian Jew, in his masterly *Life of Christ* has written: "Not denying His miracles, they regarded Jesus as the constant vehicle of Satanic influence, not because they convicted Him of any sin, but because His Kingdom of God was precisely opposite to their Kingdom of God." That one with such ideas should claim to be their Messiah, called forth the cry of 'blasphemy'. But history has shown that His idea, and not theirs, was Divine.

From the very beginning, then, the first preachers of Christianity appealed, as we have seen, to the Jewish people in behalf of the truth of what they asserted, and not till a later generation were the facts contradicted. Surely, there is no lack of evidence to the truth of the Gospel record, and no want of strength in what has come down to us. We do not demand the testimony of Egyptian, Persian and Hindoo historians for the assassination of Julius Cæsar at Rome, and yet, as one has written, "if there were any strong motive to deny the reality of that event, doubtless there would be men calling for more evidence than has been furnished." And yet these men believe in the authenticity of the works of Cæsar, Livy and



Tacitus on a small fraction of the evidence furnished by the Gospels. As we shall see, it is the supernatural element which disturbs and irritates the critics. They are not troubled in the case of the Gospel history by the weakness, but by the abundance and strength, of the testimony to its truth. Learned and able men would not be devoting their whole lives to ingenious and persistent toil in undermining some one fragment of the Christian citadel, if that citadel were a weak and decaying edifice. How many events of ancient history, from the battle of Marathon to the death of Cæsar, have been recorded by five separate, competent and apparently trustworthy historians, contemporary with the events described? But here we have five writers, including the Apostle Paul as a separate evangelist, who have recorded the Gospel history in such a way that it commends itself to the confidence of mankind.

There is no fear of the result of the most minute and careful study of this subject. The battle-ground, I may say the chief battle-ground, between those who hold and those who deny the credibility of the Gospels, is in the universities of Germany. It is the echoes of this conflict which are heard in

England and America. Men among us gather up and repeat the words of unbelief, sometimes long after they have died out in the fatherland of rationalism. Positions long abandoned there are taken and held here as if they were the foremost lines of attack. Professor Thayer, now of the Harvard Divinity school, says that, "American infidelity clothes herself in the cast-off rags of her German sister." When bold and immoderate utterances are freely made to the effect that scholarship traces the authorship of the Gospels no farther back than the middle of the second century, and has abandoned faith in the Evangelic history as miraculous, it should be said that the trend of German thought is rather in the opposite direction. After the freest and most prolonged and minute discussion of the Gospel documents and of the early history, one theory after another, which would account for Christ and the Gospels and the early Church, on the basis of anti-supernaturalism, has been abandoned. Strauss destroyed the form of skepticism which went before him; the learned Baur has revealed the untenable nature of the mythical theory of Strauss; and the disciples of Baur have divided along various lines, have lost their hold of German thought, have been

forced to bring back the date of the fourth Gospel from thirty to fifty years before the time fixed by Baur, and word comes to us from Berlin that Pfleiderer of the Tübingen school has finally yielded to the attack which Professor Weiss has made on the Tübingen theorists, so far as to place the authorship of Mark's Gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70! How are the mighty fallen! That most learned and able exegete of the New Testament, Meyer, whose studies of the Scriptures led him gradually away from rationalism, has written as follows: "We older men have seen the day when Dr. Paulus and his devices were in vogue; he died without leaving a disciple behind him. We passed through the tempest raised by Strauss, and with what a sense of solitariness might its author now celebrate his jubilee! We saw the constellation of Tübingen arise, and even before Baur departed its lustre had waned. A firmer basis and a more complete apprehension of the truth were the blessings which these waves left behind them." It is said that the first book which Tholuck put into the hands of his theological students was a volume giving the history of the rise and decline of German rationalism. I know

the Christian life of Germany is lacking in many things, but after a century of discussion we are informed that, to-day, "the rationalistic lecture-rooms are empty, and the evangelical, crowded." The testimony of German professors to the decline of skepticism in the German universities is abundant. We are told on good authority "that every prominent German university, except Heidelberg, is now under predominant evangelical influences, and that Heidelberg is nearly empty of theological students."

Surely, if the attacks thus far made on the Gospel history have been unavailing, we need not expect that they will soon succeed. Personally, I believe that all this discussion has sifted and improved the faith of the Church, that it has exploded the theory of the mechanical inspiration of the Scriptures, and that it has tended to confirm the general faithfulness and trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives. "The strength and consummate equipment of these attacks," as Farrar has said, "has but rendered more evident the impregnability of the sacred citadel." The Church of God, built on the Incarnation and Resurrection, and holding from her temple's top-most spire that Cross

which gathers about it all the light of human history, has seen imperial dominions, and hoary superstitions, and theologies of error, and ten thousand airy speculations disappear, while she steadily expands her sheltering walls and opens her shining gates to encompass all nations.

“Oh, where are kings and empires now  
Of old that went and came?  
But Lord thy church is praying yet,  
A thousand years the same.  
We mark her goodly battlements  
And her foundations strong,  
And hear within the solemn voice  
Of her unending song.  
Unshaken as eternal hills,  
Immovable she stands,  
A mountain that shall fill the earth,  
A house not made with hands!”

IV.

ARE THE GOSPEL MIRACLES CREDIBLE?

“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works’ sake.”—JOHN xiv : 11.

**I**F we leave out from the Gospels their miraculous elements, enough is left to satisfy many minds that Jesus of Nazareth was more than man. It is acknowledged that no one ever spoke with such perfect wisdom, and no one ever lived with such perfect goodness. He gave no evidences of mental weakness and eccentricity, and none of moral defect. And yet this man claimed to be the Son of God, one with the Father. He claimed to have all power and authority, including the right to forgive sins. He declared Himself the source of eternal life, and spoke of the glory He had with the

Father before the world was; He asserted His pre-existence, His omnipresence in the Church, and went so far as to declare that all nations should finally appear before His judgment seat to give an account of the deeds done in the body. And these claims of superhuman authority, made with such calmness and wisdom as to forbid the theory of insanity or of self-deception, and with such evidences of exalted moral goodness as to forbid the supposition or possibility of fraud, these startling and unexampled claims grew bolder, if possible, as He neared His ignominious end. In the Garden of Gethsemane He spoke of the twelve legions of angels whom he might summon to His rescue; and when nailed to the Cross, suffering a malefactor's death, between two thieves, He said to one of them, "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Here is a moral phenomenon unexampled, and the only rational explanation of it, as I believe, is that Christ was a truth-teller. He was what He claimed to be, and in view of His character and of His words, He has a right to say to us, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me."

But the clause which He added furnishes the introduction to our theme to-night: "Or else

believe Me for the very works' sake." While valuing most highly the moral evidences, Christ did not undervalue the miracles. There are many persons who say, with the late James Freeman Clarke, "We believe in the miracles because we believe in Christ." And there is force in the remark, for the personality of Jesus predisposes the mind to accept the record of Him, that his life was accompanied by miraculous signs from Heaven. Even one scene in the life of our Savior may make such an impression on the human soul as to lead to the conviction which the Roman centurion expressed, as he witnessed the superhuman majesty of Jesus in the agonies of crucifixion: "This truly was the Son of God." I have been told of an unbeliever who became convinced of the superhuman character of Jesus Christ from one scene which scholars believe is a part of the evangelic history, though probably not written by the Apostle John. It is that where the woman taken in sin, is dragged to the temple in the presence of Christ by the brutal scribes and unscrupulous Pharisees, who, mindless of the agonized shame and terror of the guilty woman, cared only, in their ferocious malice, to make the Messiah commit Himself to some judg-



ment or decision which could be turned to His hurt. The Mosaic law of death by stoning in such cases, had long been unenforced, but if Jesus, who was so friendly to the sinning classes, could be induced to declare against it, they could charge Him with heresy. If, on the other hand, He mercilessly ordered the execution of the slumbering statute, He would have created a disturbance leading to riot. Now think of that scene; the trembling, shame-covered and cowering woman, the black-hearted, malignant hypocrites, and Jesus, the spotless and merciful, with His head bowed to the ground and averted in holy disgust that human nature could sink so low, as in these men who paraded their wickedness before Him. He stooped and wrote silently with His finger on the sand of the temple-floor, meditating on this devilish disclosure. But the taunting, heartless, cunning villains clamored for a decision from this Rabbi of Nazareth; and at last Jesus rose, calmly looked at them and said, "Let him that is without sin among you, first cast the stone at her." There was no palliating of the woman's guilt, there was no abrogating at that time of the old law, but Christ flung a stone into their own guilty consciences which gave each

an inward start and called forth an inaudible shriek, and slowly, one by one, beginning at the eldest and reaching to the youngest of this brood of vipers, they crawled away and left "misery and mercy" alone by themselves. And, with His holy and gentle face turned toward her, Jesus then said, "Where are thine accusers, did no one convict thee?" And the only words she could speak were, "No man, Lord." "Neither do I convict thee; go and sin no more." Such tenderness, such holiness, such wisdom, such piercing insight into human hearts, such spiritual power, such calm authoritativeness, such transforming mercy, never flashed from any other scene outside of these Gospels. "It transcends all power of human imagination to have invented it," and not only this, but it transcends the moral grandeur of a merely human personality. When such a person as Jesus says to me: "I and my Father are one," "The works that I do testify of Me that the Father hath sent Me," "Believe Me for the very works' sake," "I am the Resurrection and the Life," "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest," when He makes any of the great claims which He constantly put forth, I am

disposed, I am inclined, to yield my adoring consent and say: "Thou hast the words of eternal life," "My Lord and my God." The miraculous seems harmonious with all else that we discover about Jesus Christ.

By miracles we mean works of ever-continuing wonder, worthy of the Divine character, the results of the exercise of God's power, put forth not in the order of the usual course of Nature, for the purpose of attesting a Divine revelation. This, of course, excludes all wonders which the progress of science may explain, and all the lying wonders of evil magicians and necromancers. It lifts the miracle to its proper and lofty place as a Divine act performed for the highest of ends. Now Jesus Christ appealed to such miracles as among the evidences of His supernatural commission. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), 'Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house'." Nicodemus said to Christ, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him," and we are told that many believed on Him when they saw what miracles He did. What does a miracle show? What

do these events, wrought by the direct interposition of Divine power, indicate? They prove not only the truth of the message, but the Divine authority of the messenger. It is the authority which miracles give to the Gospels which appears offensive to some men. The effort to-day is not to deny the moral truth of the Scriptures, but to put the Gospels on the same level with the ethical writings of Socrates and Seneca, of George Fox and Swedenborg. Now I believe it is a Christian duty to welcome truth from every quarter, and to cherish humane thoughts toward all other religions, so far as they are true; but if God has interposed, out of love toward man, and set the seal of miracle on certain Scriptures which we call the Gospels, then there belong to them a dignity, an inspiration and an authority setting them apart from and above all other writings. John Foster has called a miracle "the ringing of the great bell of the universe, summoning the multitudes to hear the sermon." And as Moses in the wilderness, when he saw the burning bush which was not consumed, turned aside, and then heard the voice of the Lord from the midst of the flaming shrub, so miracles have been the burning bush, drawing men aside,

both to hear this Divine Word, and to receive it as of Divine authority. Over such Scriptures flames an awful "light which never was on sea or land," a light above that of the sun, because it comes directly from the highest heaven, and the voice which speaks to us can be no other than the voice of God. And though we may stand with bowed and uncovered heads before the great sages and singers of humanity, yet when we come before this Book, we may well heed the word which says, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

I believe that the miracles, however, are far more than the bell calling us to hear the sermon; they are themselves a heavenly part of the Divine discourse, giving us a disclosure of God as helpful and blessed as any which shines from the Scriptures. And besides all else, the miracles clinch our faith at points where it is weakest; they set the seal of Heaven on the title-deed of our salvation. I can not think that any other document is worthy of such a celestial stamp. Were not the miracles there to convince the human mind, the wayward heart would often be self-deceived into giving up a Book that so rebukes its wickedness. And were it

not for the miracles we might distrust such glorious promises as are therein made to the believers in Christ. It is not so difficult to believe the hard things of the Word of God, as to believe the glorious things which are spoken to the Christian. When the Bible speaks of judgment, it has the power of conscience on its side. But when the Bible speaks of mercy to sinners, of forgiveness to rebels, of crowns and scepters and sonship with God, of Heavenly worlds with gates of pearl and streets of gold and the River of Life and joys surpassing all our dreams, then it is that we need, most of all, the miraculous elements of the Gospels to reinvigorate and perpetuate our faltering faith. This Book of Books which has entered into the highest literature, which has shaped the noblest art, which has been the life-blood of civilization, the mother of liberty, the enfranchisement of the oppressed, the conqueror of barbarism, this Book which has called forth the eulogies of the greatest minds, which has furnished the subject for the most profound and ennobling study, which has brought solace to the suffering and hope to the dying, and which makes itself at home in all lands, amid all nations, in all centuries, is so wonderful

that it alone appears worthy of such a Heavenly seal as miracles have given it.

In the previous lectures I have set forth some of the evidences which establish the general trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives. I have shown some of the reasons for believing that their record of the superhuman origin of Christianity is true. If any one does not accept these conclusions, then he must believe in the human origin of the Christian religion, and will have to face the difficulties which that faith imposes. I say to such, you will need to undertake the task in which so many unbelievers have passed their fruitless years, of explaining away the Gospel narratives on the ground of fraud or delusion; of attempting to break the force of the testimony sealed with the heroic, unselfish, suffering lives and martyr-deaths of those who declared that they were witnesses of the miracles of Christ and of His risen Person; you will have to undertake the work which has perplexed and baffled the skeptical scholarship of a hundred years; you will have to give a rational account of the person of Jesus, on the theory of His being a fallible and sometimes deluded and imperfect man, an undertaking in which Rénan

made such a grotesque failure; you will need to explain away the universal faith in Christ's Resurrection, for which men laid down their lives, a faith on which even Strauss acknowledges the Church was built, a faith which was not destroyed by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, not because they were unwilling, but because they were unable; you will need to tell us how the early Church, which made no appeal like Mohammedanism to pride and lust and human passions, which refused to use the sword, but espoused lowliness and purity as its distinctive virtues; you will need to tell us how that Church, with no power of miracles, as you claim, in its hands, and beset by such constant and terrible antagonism on every side, was not at once extinguished; and when you have failed in this you may possibly be more willing to learn what are the evidences on which historic Christianity is built and which have proved impregnable. It is not a marvel that so many Jews and others rejected the claims of the crucified Nazarene, but the wonder is that so many accepted them. "The reception of Christianity by them," it has been wisely said, "shows prejudice overcome by something, and the question is, by what?" Our answer is, in part by the miracles.



Right here let us acknowledge that the chief stumbling-block with the unbeliever, in any argument for the credibility of the Gospel history, is the miraculous character of the events described. If any are determined by a previously formed philosophy not to believe in miracles, however attested, even though by the Word of Him who claimed to be the Son of God, and who in the consciousness of perfect truth and holiness appealed to His miracles, they will contrive to reject them. But once acknowledge a personal God who loves mankind and, as John Stuart Mill has conclusively said, all rational objection to miracles disappears. All who believe in God believe that a Divine Person has already bridged, by a creative miracle, the chasm between the non-existent and the existent, the non-living and the living, the non-intelligent and the intelligent; so that, as Dr. Peabody of Harvard has shown, "Miracles make a large part of the history of the material universe." All who see a personal God working in and through the phenomena of the visible and the intellectual world, manifesting His glory in the birth of a star and in the birth of a Shakespeare, showing forth His power in the blossoms which cover with beauty

the sods of spring-time, and in the galaxies which sprinkle the midnight with sidereal fire, all who see a personal God in the annual resurrection of Nature, will not deny that such a God can raise the dead. Such a denial, as even Rousseau said, "would be impious if it were not absurd." It is logical for one who does not believe in a personal God to deny the possibility of miracles. All that Hume makes out in his celebrated essay, is, that no amount of evidence can prove a miracle to an atheist. And if God is thought to be an impersonal, indescribable, unknowable abstraction, or, if He is regarded as a great magician who has retired into the infinite deeps of space and left the management of our earthly life to dumb, mechanical laws in the midst of which He Himself can make no sign, then of course we talk in vain, to those thinking thus, about miraculous interferences. Such a poor and helpless exile as some men hold God to be would never have called forth Lazarus from his sepulchre or empowered the Christian Apostles to heal the sick. But, once acknowledge an omnipresent God, working in and through all natural laws, and, as unbelievers themselves confess, the objections to miracles vanish. If, in repeating the

so-called Apostles' Creed, you honestly utter the opening words, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," then you will have no difficulty in what follows, when it is said of Christ that He "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," and "the third day He rose again from the dead."

It is certainly irrational to say that miracles are events without an adequate cause; God is their cause, and He surely is adequate. And why should any thoughtful man feel that the Author of Nature cannot interfere with what He has made, especially if He has overwhelmingly important reasons for such interference? Even we interfere with Nature. We overcome or modify her laws; we throw a stone into the air and overcome gravitation, we ride in a car, and forces under human control overcome inertia. As Professor Fisher has said, "Whoever bakes a loaf of bread, brings into being a thing which the bare forces of Nature, not controlled and assisted by man's will, could not have produced." If the human will may thus interfere, why not the Divine will? As Mr. Gladstone has profoundly said, "It can be neither philosophical nor scientific to proclaim the impos-

sibility of miracles until philosophy or science shall have determined a limit beyond which this extraneous force of will cannot act upon or deflect the natural order."

Has there been any justifying reason for the Divine will which is love, to act upon and deflect the natural order in the working of miracles? I answer, human need. All of us will agree that man needed a revelation from God beyond that given in Nature. No one believes that even now we have too much light or assurance from heaven. Man required clearer disclosures than came from the stars, and a more hopeful revelation than that which came from his conscience. He needed to know more fully the character of God, especially in that which is hardest to credit to Him—mercy. He needed to escape from the terrible guilt and slavery of sin, and to find One able to deliver. He needed some solace of relief from the awful pressure of human sorrow. The New Testament reveals the Divine character as embodied in Jesus Christ; it illumines and makes surer all the truths of God, dimly disclosed in the light of Nature and of conscience, and it makes these truths effective. Before the Radical Club in Boston, Wendell Phil-

lips once remarked: "Suppose it was admitted that Confucius and Buddha did say just what Christ did (which he denied). Steam and water are the same elements; but water will not move a locomotive, and steam will. They might find a great deal in Confucius, but One was water, the other steam; One had moved the world, the other had not." Christianity has not only reilluminated the truths of natural religion, it has energized them. But it does far more; it provides a sufficient remedy for the malady of sin, a remedy which the testing of centuries has shown to be adequate. It brings God home to our affections in His dear Son; it lifts a future world with its vast, inspiring, consoling and restraining power before the vision of the human soul. It links the practice of the most perfect ethics with devotion to the person and Kingdom of a Divine Redeemer. Such merciful and lofty purposes on the part of God surely warrant and even demand that interference with the ordinary course of Nature which the Gospels declare did occur. The miracle is a sign from Heaven attesting the messenger or messengers commissioned to first teach the heavenly doctrine. When the flippant demand is sometimes made for

a miracle to-day in order that men may believe in the miracles of the Gospel history, I reply: When you can give us to order a new Bible equal to the old, and when you can furnish a new Jesus, resplendent with such moral glory, possessed of such matchless wisdom and justifying His supernatural claims by such a life and death as His, then you may expect a miracle to authenticate your work. If you believe that you have a system of truth better than the Scriptures, we say to you what Talleyrand said to a French skeptic, "The Founder of Christianity suffered Himself to be crucified and rose again; you should try and do as much." I confess that I have no respect for the miserable sophistry, the supercilious pertness and conceited irreverence that cry out for a sign from Heaven, in the spirit of the wicked generation that surged about the Cross of Jesus, and hissed out to the dying sufferer, who had trampled on the waves of Galilee, and raised Lazarus from the tomb, "If thou be the Son of God, come down." We should lose our reverence, even for the Messiah, did He ever appear as a mere magician, working wonders on the demand of a clamorous curiosity or a sneering unbelief. Some men's thought may be to order

a miracle in the same tone that they might order a breakfast at a restaurant; but God's thought is that only upon the revelation of His merciful plans for a guilty world should be placed the miraculous seal; that His prophets might be clothed with power, and that above all, His Son, the King of Glory, weak and poor on earth in His outward royalty, should yet retain and reveal at times the jewelled crown and golden scepter of His Divinity. A true apprehension of divine things would apparently crowd back the miracles to the Biblical ages and regard them as the potent forces of the Divine Word which gave it its victorious access into the ancient world. Had not the disciples of Jesus, who refused all kingly honors and disappointed all their ambitious hopes, seen in Him the miraculous might of God, there would have been no worshipful allegiance to Him and acceptance of His Messianic claims; and but for the supreme miracle of the Resurrection there would have been no Church to blast with its brightness the gates of hell.

Whoever by his philosophy denies the possibility of miracles, not only begs the question in advance, not only turns the early history of the Church into "a batch of insoluble problems," following the foot-

steps of men who have tried by miracles of interpretation to disprove and displace the miracles of Jesus, but he also darkens and narrows the sphere of his own thinking, the horizon of his own hopes, and robs his soul of that Divinest conception of God which ever gladdened and glorified our race; a God revealed in Him of Nazareth, who, healing the leper not only taught the vileness of sin, but that His blood can cleanse it, who, exorcising the evil spirit, not only pointed out that there is a personal enemy working against our souls, but that He is able to destroy the works of the devil, whose healing of the withered hand is an evidence that He can heal the withered heart, whose calming of the tempest is an evidence that He can give tranquility to the troubled spirit. God our Maker knows our needs, and speaking for myself, let me say that, however assured I may be of His forgiveness and merciful favor, still, in the midst of all the darkness that sometimes thrusts God from our sight, in the midst of what often seems the mechanical uniformity of law, in the midst of the clouds which hide from us the future life, in the midst of the agonies which smite our hearts, when the cruel clouds fall heavily on the coffin lid that covers the



dearest form our eyes have ever seen, I rejoice and grow strong as I see my Redeemer entering into human life through a miraculous birth, attested by a Heavenly voice above the baptismal scene at the Jordan, raising the dying who are passing away far from his sight, changing the sorrow in the village of Nain, and at the tomb in Bethany into worshipful gladness, trampling the stormy billows beneath His holy and kingly feet, overcoming the weakness and foulness of disease with the same hand that turned the desert into a banqueting-hall, stilling the storm with the same voice that blessed the little children, making His own sepulchre the gateway of immortality and the skies above Bethany to bloom with angelic personages, heralding His own Ascension into glory. To class the miracles of Christ through which poured such a tide of benevolence and wisdom, which are associated with such a personality as His, which reinforced such a celestial doctrine and launched into history the Kingdom of love, to class His miracles, in witness to which men gave up their lives in the tortures of martyrdom, with the prodigies of Hercules or with the puerilities of later legendary fancy, is not to show a superabundance of the true historical spirit.

V.

ARE THE GOSPEL MIRACLES CREDIBLE?

[Continued.]

“But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) ‘Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house.’ And he arose and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it they marveled and glorified God which had given such power unto men.” MATTHEW ix : 6, 7, 8.

THE miracles accomplished their primary work in helping to authenticate the supernatural message and the Divine messenger. They are in some respects like the scaffolding which for many ages surrounded the unfinished Cologne cathedral, and was taken down when that cathedral had been built. They were required to show what was the

chief work of the Son of Man, namely, to forgive sins, to provide redemption for mankind, and they were not needed when this Divine right had been fully established. The great work of pardon goes on age after age; it is wrought in our own souls and will be in the souls of our children to the end of time. But in other respects the recorded miracles of Jesus, left for our study, are like the gorgeous windows which glorify the vast interior of the great cathedral of Germany, looking at whose splendors wherein the Biblical scenes are disclosed to us, in "dyes as precious as the blood of kings," we get ever new and glorious revelations of the heart of Christ. Through His miracles while on earth, He was constantly preaching the Gospel: "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Through them He changed despair into praise, helplessness into hosannas; through them He disclosed His own compassionate heart, ever touched with a feeling of our infirmities. From the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee to the last miracle which added to the comfort of His hungry Apostles on the shores of Gennesaret, there shines a golden path of benevolence. He introduced the blessed and joy-laden power of Heaven into the stricken life

of earth, manifesting the mercifulness of God in the tenderness of His own heart toward the blind, the lame, the sick, the leprous, the sorrowing, the dumb, the hungry, the weary, the demonized, the imperiled, the wounded, the doubting, the anxious and the destitute. Here was a Being whose vast power was used, not for Himself but for others; and in the midst of such heavenly wonders, conscious of such superhuman might, He remained the tenderest, the humblest, the least selfish soul that ever glorified the human body. When we remember that the tendency of all forms of human power is toward immorality, toward sensualism, selfishness, ambition or pride, toward worldliness and the deadening of the moral sensibilities, when we remember how difficult it is for men of influence, prosperity, position, financial or political power, to keep the humility, the gentleness and the sweetness which are essential to sainthood, then, the unspotted holiness of Jesus who could say, "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and earth," the meekness and self-denial of His life become more wonderful than words can tell. Thus through the miracles, we feel to-day the royal touch of Christ's Divine nature, and see His immeasur-

able superiority even to Moses, the greatest of his predecessors, who was shut out of the land of promise because he laid some claim to that Divine power of which he was only the instrument.

In our discussion of miracles we have already seen how harmonious they are with such a personality as Christ's. We have seen that His claim to have wrought them is vindicated by His character; we have seen that the miracles lift the Gospels and the Scriptures generally above all other writings; we have seen that whatever evidences tend to establish the general trustworthiness of the four Gospels help to establish the reality of the miracles; we have seen the difficulty, I may say the impossibility, of explaining the Person of Christ and the facts of the early Church without granting the truth of miracles. We have seen that there should be no objection to them on the part of any who believe in a personal and a loving God. We have seen that the spiritual necessities of men were the justifying cause of a supernatural revelation, and that the objection that miracles do not occur to-day, points us to the supreme reason why they should have occurred when the Kingdom of Heaven was launched into a hostile world.

The primary object of the miracles of Christ, aside from their immediate benevolence, was to produce faith in Himself. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." In every possible way, of course limited by His wise purpose to produce in men a regard for spiritual truth, Jesus Christ strove to awaken in the human mind an adoring confidence in Himself. Every student has noticed the ease and completeness of his miraculous works, effected without effort and with the perfection which marks the Divine workmanship in the petals of the rose and the wings of the butterfly. Every one knows that these miracles were performed by His own authority, and are distinguished from those of His disciples, who, like Peter and John and Paul, wrought them in the Name of their Master, and that every miracle of Christ has some direct or indirect reference to faith. Faith could command the arm of the Almighty. Yonder, on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, we behold a humble and persistent woman whose mother's heart is wrung with anguish for her daughter. Yonder, on the throne of Jerusalem, we behold the gorgeous Herod clothed in pride and purple. Each of these asked for a mir-

acle. One appears before Christ as a suppliant. Christ appears before the other as a prisoner. Now if Jesus had been a vulgar worker of wonders we know which of these two would have had his request answered. But in the actual history the weak woman is infinitely more potent than the wicked monarch; he gets only scornful silence, but she turns the golden key of the treasure-house of Omnipotence, and upon her He pronounced that matchless eulogy—“O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.”

The faith which Jesus inspired in His earliest disciples, was of such a quality and force as to explain the early conquests of the Gospel. All admit that Christianity is now a great fact, the greatest, probably, with which the world has to do; that it had an origin; that it originated with Jesus, a man springing from a nation that was expecting a Messiah; that He claimed to be that Messiah; that one Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the Christians, was persuaded that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that he gave his life to publishing his new faith; that the Christians so multiplied in spite of attacks on every hand, that, in the reign of Nero, in the year sixty-four, as Tacitus tells us, a great number

were killed or tortured by that monster in Rome; that in the year one hundred and eleven, according to Pliny, these Christians were so numerous in Pontus and Bithynia that the heathen altars were nearly deserted, and that early in the fourth century this hated and despised Christian faith became the religion of the Roman empire. It is admitted that the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are histories, giving a generally truthful account of the beginning of Christianity, leaving out as disputed the miraculous elements. But the miraculous elements alone are adequate to account for the success which followed the tremendous claims of Jesus. They would naturally belong to the powers and mission of such a person as Christ is represented to have been. He certainly claimed to be the Divine Messiah, and how could He reveal Himself so as to be known as such unless by some supernatural tokens, and how could the Apostles, except by the same evidences, prove his Messiahship? As Paley has well said: "Here are no victories, no conquests, no revolutions, no surprising elevation of fortune, no achievements of valor, of strength or of policy to appeal to; no discoveries in any art or science, no great efforts of genius



or learning to produce. A Galilean peasant is announced to the world as a Divine law-giver. A man of mean condition, of a private and a simple life, and who had wrought no deliverance for the Jewish nation, was declared to be their Messiah. This, without ascribing to Him at the same time some proofs of His mission (and what other but supernatural proofs could there be?), was too absurd a claim to be either imagined or credited." Mr. Gladstone is of the opinion that there never was so unequal a contest as that of Christianity with the Roman world. "Tainted in its origin by its connection with the detested Judaism, odious to the prevailing tone by its exclusiveness, it rested originally upon the testimony of men, poor, few and ignorant, and for a length of time no human genius was enlisted in its service with the single exception of St. Paul." Gibbon, the historian, in his famous fifteenth chapter, elaborately describes five causes for the rapid, early spread of Christianity. The third of these is the miraculous powers attributed to the early church. The other causes are the intense zeal of the early Christians, a zeal mingled with love, the profound and pervading belief in immortality as a state of reward and pun-

ishment, the active virtues of the early believers and the mild and equitable form of Church-government among them for a century after the death of the Apostles. But when we go back of these secondary causes and ask why Christian men had such a self-denying zeal, in an age of utter selfishness, why they were so confident with regard to the future, when the world generally had become skeptical, why they manifested such virtues far above the men about them, and lived as loving brethren in their Church life, in the midst of a hate-ridden world, we strike immediately their belief in Christ's Resurrection, the supreme evidence to them of their immortality; we strike their belief in a Divine Person who was their risen King, to whom they were bound by a deathless love, who inspired in them every active and passive virtue, and before whose majesty all were equal and all should be loving. The system of truth which originated with a Jewish carpenter and a few rough fishermen, could not have fought its way to world-wide acceptance against the combined hostility of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, against synagogue and philosophic school and armed antagonism, against all the external forces of imperial civilization, and

against the obdurate unbelief and wickedness of the human heart, unless it had been accompanied by the signature of Almighty God. Only the pierced hand of Him who rose from the tomb, to use Richter's eloquent expression, could have "lifted empires from their hinges and turned the stream of history into new channels."

A common way of attacking miracles is to point to their extreme improbability, coupled with the probability that the testimony to them is untrustworthy. But miracles cannot be rejected simply because they are improbable. Many improbable things do take place; our lives abound with them. It was improbable that President Garfield would be shot shortly after his inauguration; it was improbable, seventy years ago, that a city like Chicago would stand on the swamps at the foot of Lake Michigan. Archbishop Whately has shown that the life of Bonaparte contains "a much greater amount of gross and glaring improbabilities" than any equal portion of Scripture history. All will agree that the old Greek spoke wisely who said that "it is probable that many improbable things will happen." Our years are filled with events which, before their coming, would have seemed

vastly improbable. This is a wondrous universe that we live in. Mr. Edison, spending his life amid the miraculous atoms which combine so marvellously and so intelligently to form such diverse results, declares that there must be a God working behind all this chemistry. He who explores the secrets of organized life and finds a cell, a mysterious, and to the human eye, invisible something which weaves every tissue of every living thing, whether it be palm-tree or rose-bush, eagle or leopard, discovers at once that he is living in a marvellous system of things. It seems unbecoming in any who have been touched by the mighty mysteries of life, to scoff at miracles on account of their improbability. It may be no more an antecedent improbability that miracles should occur in connection with God's revelation of His redemptive plan, than that men to-day, three thousand miles apart and on different sides of the sea, should speak to each other in intelligible language, or that Lisbon should have been suddenly destroyed by an earthquake, or that the midnight sky above us should be illumined by innumerable suns of inconceivable magnitude and unimaginable remoteness.

But we are told that human testimony to mira-

cles cannot be trusted. That is the very question at issue. Is the testimony to the Gospel miracles conclusive? Are the evidences that the Apostles told the truth sufficient to remove all reasonable doubt? That question is not to be answered by impugning human testimony in general. Every man who has heard Mr. Kennan's lectures, or read Macaulay's history, or the lives of Washington, Grant and Lincoln, believes many improbable things on human testimony. Because some testimony is likely to be false, are we to conclude that all testimony is? Every one will detect the fallacy in the following, which is adapted from Whately: Some books are trash. "Paradise Lost," and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" are some books. Therefore, these chief works of John Milton and Mrs. Stowe are trash! The skepticism which lumps together in indiscriminate condemnation and distrust the weak and doubtful testimony to the so-called miracles of mediæval and modern times, and the testimony which the Apostles sealed with their blood, is not grounded on rationality, on hard common sense. That accomplished and satirical critic, with mind more Greek than Christian, that poetical pessimist, the late Matthew Arnold, may

have concluded that historic Christianity rests on a fairy tale. He may have written that the miracles of the Bible must be resolved into natural causes, must be explained as myths, legends or as products of the imagination; he may have felt that the progress of science would explain them into fancies, but the fact is that the progress of science has no such tendency. As one has said, "The more we know of Nature and science, the more impossible it will be to account" for miracles "by second causes." "The progress of science does not leave the alternative, miracle or imagination; it leaves only the alternative, miracle or imposition."

When we consider the number and variety of the miracles alleged to have been performed, and their intimate connection with the other events recorded, it becomes more apparent that either the miracles are true, or that the Apostles told what they knew to be lies. If we turn from Matthew Arnold to his more rugged and sounder-minded father, Thomas Arnold, the great Rugby teacher who made himself a mighty name in sifting the legendary from the true in the history of ancient Rome, and to that most accomplished of modern scholars, Niebuhr, we find these men, accustomed

to weigh evidence, agreeing with nearly all the great judges of the world, in concluding from the testimony offered, that the historic basis of Christianity is impregnable. Dean Stanley says of Thomas Arnold, that "he placed the supernatural inspiration of the sacred writers on an imperishable historic basis." And Niebuhr wrote: "The fundamental fact of miracles must be conceded, unless we adopt the not merely incomprehensible but absurd hypothesis that the Holiest was a deceiver, and His followers either dupes or liars." But dupes or liars could not have given us such a portrait of a perfect personality as shines from the Gospels. Matthew and John, the publican and the fisherman of Galilee, unless painting from the life would have left some "action or omission to act" to stain the fair picture of an incomparable Being, "perfect," as one has said, "beyond what the most gifted impostors could fabricate and beyond what the most enthusiastic fanatics could have dreamed." We should not be ready to eulogize every man as a philosopher, lifted high above the superstitions of Christians, simply because he endeavors to place a miracle, recorded in the Gospels, in connection with such a character

as Christ's, in connection with such a revelation of Divine truth and love as the New Testament, a miracle recorded by several men who were known to be eye-witnesses, and re-affirmed by many others who had personal knowledge of the event, men who have every air of candor and every mark of good sense, and who made this and other similar miracles the substance of their preaching and testimony through lives of self-sacrifice ending in martyrdom, to place such a miracle, I say, on the same level of improbability or imposture with an isolated portent, recorded in some mediæval or earlier chronicle, by some one who heard that such and such a thing occurred, or who claimed to have seen it, but about whose careless testimony there gathers no such combination, no such a steel-linked net of weighty probabilities, arguments, evidences, concurrent, independent, supporting, confirming and morally conclusive, as has been shown again and again in connection with the Gospel narratives.

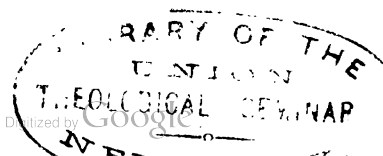
In the tenth chapter of his book on "The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," Professor Fisher has pointed out, with great care and fairness of statement, seven contrasts between the Gospel and the heathen and ecclesiastical miracles,



showing with regard to the latter the vastly inferior purpose they served, that they took place or were said to have taken place among those already believing and usually wildly credulous, "that there were the strongest motives to fraud which the Apostles did not have," that many of them can be easily explained by natural causes which are powerless in the case of many of Christ's miracles; that the testimony to them is weak, much of it not being contemporary, and these wonders not coming under the personal knowledge of the writers, the miracle-working power not being claimed by the saints, but ascribed to them by others; showing thus a marked contrast with the case of Christ, Peter and Paul who claimed to work miracles. And it is also shown that some of these wonders are as dubious as miracles as the curing of scrofula by the touch of English kings, and that others are unspeakably grotesque and silly, as when St. Bernard excommunicated the flies which annoyed his congregation, and thereupon these disturbers of the peace died and were swept out in heaps. The miracles of the Gospel had an important end to accomplish, the highest of all ends. They are worthy of God their Author. They were publicly

performed, as in the resurrection of Lazarus, in the presence of many witnesses who confessed a notable sign from Heaven; they were performed without intervention of other causes by the direct power of God, as when Jesus raised up the daughter of Jairus, and they were performed instantaneously, as when He said to the sea-waves of Galilee, "Be still," or when the eyes of the blind men of Jericho were opened. They were performed in the presence of learned men oftentimes, and men of the world who were hostile to the Author; they were performed, not by learned men, who might be deemed expert tricksters, but by a simple-minded mechanic and his friends, the peasants and fishermen of Galilee who called men to witness that these things were so, and risked their lives on the truth of what they said. The miracles were proclaimed in the age which witnessed them, and on their truth were built up usages and institutions which have come down to our day. They are so interlinked with other parts of the Gospel that they cannot be logically separated. Dr. Channing has said, "The miracles are so interwoven with all of Christ's teachings and acts that in taking them away there is next to nothing left." That we can-

not rationally tear out the miracles is evident from the fact that they are recorded with the same air of truthfulness and utter candor with the other events ; they are a chief part of books in which the writers, who are evidently not simpletons or frauds, relate many things to their own discredit, how, for example, they contended with their Master, how they quarrelled and how they forsook their Leader in the hour of trouble ; from the fact that when men invent the miraculous they fall into the silliness of the Apocryphal Gospels which are no more like the true ones, than the book of Mormon is like the Sermon on the Mount ; from the fact that the Gospel miracles have such a marked sobriety of tone ; leaving them and entering the field of ecclesiastical miracles, as in the lives of St. Francis, we enter the fogs of dreamland, the territory of a romancing sentimentalism, the dominion of Alice in Wonderland, where fish and birds become the auditors of the miracle-working saint, and a serpent swallows a purse of coin that the saint's followers may not break the vow of poverty, and the soul of St. Francis is seen parting from the body as a great luminous star ascending to Heaven. That we cannot logically and sensibly tear out the Gos-



pel miracles is also evident from the fact that many of the recorded sayings of Christ, which are indubitably genuine, involve the reality of the miracle, as when Jesus said, "Go and tell John the blind receive their sight, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up"; from the fact that while miracles are valued as signs from Heaven, they are not over-valued; from the fact that the Apostles and first witnesses having every opportunity to know about Jesus, staked and surrendered their lives in continued and solemn avowal of what they assuredly knew; from the fact that there was not among them, or among the people generally at that time, an easy and universal tendency to believe in the miraculous. It was an age when Roman law governed the world, when Roman roads ran through Palestine so that Judea was on the highway of a civilization and a commerce into which had entered the spirit of the Imperial City, a spirit hard, grasping, selfish, skeptical, clinging to things seen, and doubtful of the things of the spiritual world. It was not an age of easy credulity. The Apostles were slow to accept the chief of the miracles, the Resurrection, and the people were awe-struck by some of the miracles. "Since the world began it

has not been heard that any one opened the eyes of one born blind." A half-friendly Pharisee, learned and cautious, said of the miracles of Jesus that they proved the presence and favor of God. There was among the Apostles no appetite for the miraculous, no spirit that would beget credulity, as is plain from the wonderful simplicity and quietness of their records. If they had been forgers or crazy for miracles, why did they record their own failure to work a miracle? Why did they limit the miraculous in Christ's life to the short three years of His ministry? Why did they not begin with His infancy, as the myth-mongers have always done? Why did they record no miracle in connection with the life of John the Baptist, the great prophet in whom the nation believed, of whom Josephus writes, and whose testimony to their Messiah was so powerful and so important?

Thus we cannot tear out the miracles from the Gospels without sinking the Apostles to the level of fools or deceivers, a conclusion which is irrational, both from what they have written, from the lives they lived, and from the incomparable grandeur of the portrait they have drawn of Jesus Christ. That portrait was not the product of the imagina-

tion of the fishermen of Galilee; it was drawn from life, and that alone "is sufficient to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel history." It was natural that such a Being as the sinless Christ, who, with all His genuine humanity, manifestly did not belong to this world; it was natural that the Holy One of Nazareth whose touch is the life of our civilization to-day, whose Spirit is the very breath of God, should do the works of His Father. Miracles are the jewels which naturally adorn the brows of this celestial King. He who spake with the tenderness, the holiness, the wisdom and the authority of God, and with constant assertions of His supernatural origin and almighty power, is to be believed when He claimed to do the works of Heaven. Miracles are the burning-bush in the Divine Word, drawing men aside to listen to the voice of God, and when men ask why this burning-bush is not consumed, the answer, as in the day of Moses, is now, and ever shall be, "Because God is in it."

VI.

DID CHRIST RISE FROM THE GRAVE?

“And if Christ be not raised your faith is vain.”—  
I CORINTHIANS XV : 17.

ALL men agree that the early Church believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Primitive Christianity cannot be explained without this belief. The new Testament is largely the literature of the Resurrection. Without it the primitive Christian theology is unintelligible. Strauss rightly says, “Christianity stands or falls with it.” The greatest of the Apostles wrote to the Corinthian Church that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then their faith was idle and void, an insubstantial structure resting upon a dream, a myth, a falsehood. If Christ did not rise for their justification,

then they were not justified, they were yet in their sins. Their faith that He had died to remove these sins lacked the overwhelming proof which the Resurrection was supposed to have furnished to His redemptive work. If Christianity rests on a lie, then it all gives way. It is in vain for us to expect that the Christian religion will survive if its historic foundation, the Resurrection of Christ, crumbles. Christianity, if broken off from its historical growth, it has been truly said, "would be in our hands little better than a cut flower, it will soon fade and be thrown away for another."

But is it all a delusion? Do the "Syrian stars" look down on a grave from which the body of Jesus never came forth in the power of a resurrection-life? Is it an exploded myth, a fabulous story, like that of Hercules or Osiris, which is at the foundation of the sublime Easter hymns, and of the aspiring hopes of immortality which have sprung from the primitive Christian faith? Does all the Easter music which ever gladdened the world sound hollow to a God who knows that the body of Jesus perished in the grave? Then Christ and His Apostles were deceivers, false witnesses. The best reason of man's best hope, that of immor-



tality, is extinguished, and, as a result, though a few may gather up the fragments of moral truth that remain, and live lives of a somewhat cheerless righteousness, still clinging to the natural intimations of immortality, most men, if we may judge from the moral history following other eclipses of faith, will surrender all belief in God and a hereafter, and endeavor to extract from the present life every drop of pleasure which the most scientific sensualism may cause it to yield.

Did Christ rise from the dead? If we answer affirmatively, our answer carries with it a vast deal of most important and amazing truth. If Christ rose from the dead then He rose in a body which, though identical with that which was crucified, was yet possessed of new attributes, capable of appearing suddenly and disappearing as quickly, a body endowed with qualities spiritual as well as material, a body in which was not lodged the principle of death; in short, the glorified body in which, as the Gospels affirm, He ascended from earth and from the sight of His adoring disciples, and in which He appeared to Saul at the gates of Damascus. Here is a stupendous claim made upon our belief, and I confess that no ordinary amount and weight of

testimony will be sufficient in a case like this. The improbabilities are strong, but I have failed in all the previous lectures, if I have not shown in connection with Jesus Christ, that improbabilities are overcome and nullified by certain indisputable moral facts and historical effects. We have seen that the person of Jesus is unique, unexampled in human history. He looms before us solitary and unapproached. Judged either by His friends or His enemies He was "the mightiest among the holy, and the holiest among the mighty." Even miracles do not seem incongruous in connection with His superhuman personality. To Him, apparently, all the ancient Scriptures point as the fulfillment of their own prophecies. Ages before He appeared a multitude of predictions were made with regard to His coming, the time of His appearance, His birth in Bethlehem, His meek and holy character, His sacrificial and redemptive work. A whole system of offerings was set up, apparently prefiguring His priestly and atoning office. As interpreted by Him and His Apostles, with the amplest justification by subsequent scholarship, all the Scriptures were a witness to His coming, His character, His work, His death, His resurrection.

Jesus said to His disciples, as He explained to them the holy oracles, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day." And on the day of Pentecost Peter declared that David, being a Prophet, spoke of the Resurrection of Christ, "that neither was He left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption." The Resurrection of Christ in an immortal and spiritualized body makes an immense demand on our faith, but He who was the Truth itself, and who has become the standard of holiness for mankind, affirmed long before His death, again and again, that He was to rise from the grave. As the distinguished Unitarian scholar, Dr. Sears, has written, "The language and very life-plan of Jesus prophesied of His Resurrection." Now, when we consider the agreement between the ancient Scriptures and the facts which are recorded in the Gospels, and add to this the weight which the very character of Jesus brings to His testimony regarding Himself, and thus find the prophets, the Apostles and the Lord Himself in wonderful harmony regarding this unequalled life, some of the improbability which belongs to the narrative of the resurrection is removed. And furthermore, if it were

the purpose of God to bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel, if it were the Divine plan, as we have so many reasons for believing, to show men the certainty of life beyond the grave, how otherwise could it be so fully accomplished as through the resurrection of the great Typical Man in a body which should not see corruption, and should never again be subject to the power of death? I think it certain that the improbabilities which appear in the evangelic story of the Resurrection are at least balanced by God's purposes of redemption and the moral facts regarding the character of Christ, which have become apparent. He came from the grave to declare His own inherent divinity and the eternal life of His chosen and faithful ones, and to commission His disciples to evangelize all nations. That commission from the risen Christ is the hand of God laid on His Church to-day. He did not come forth to make a report on the mysteries of the future life, or to tell of His own experience in those three days. If He had deemed it best (as He did not) for men to know anything further about that world beyond, He could have revealed it in His three years' ministry. No, He came from the sepulchre to complete His

redeeming work, to comfort His disciples' broken hearts, to renew their faith in Him and fellowship with Him, and to send them out among men with the good news that He was the conqueror both of Sin and of the Grave.

We are left, then, to ask what is the testimony worth, which declares that Jesus, the crucified and dead, came forth alive from the tomb of Joseph? Is Christian civilization, which has been built on belief in the Resurrection, built on a rock of fact, or, as some affirm, on a ghost-story, believed and reported by a few credulous men and women? You will all agree that it is not impossible that Christ was actually raised from the dead. The possibility depends on the supposition that there is a loving God who has moral ends to accomplish so commanding as to warrant a miracle like this. We put to all men the Pauline question: "Why should it be thought incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" To all who see in Nature a Divine intelligence, to all who recognize the scientific fact that the food which builds up the living tissues of this body must first become non-living before it is transformed into life by a power and a process which the laboratory of human chemistry

cannot imitate, why should it seem impossible and incredible to you that God, for the most benevolent reasons should have raised from the tomb the holiest and most benevolent Being that ever walked this earth?

I now proceed a step further, and affirm, not only that it is possible, but also that it is probable, that Christ rose from the dead. The testimony which has come down to us was sufficient to convince many minds in the very beginning, in the city where it occurred, a great multitude of the priests of Jerusalem having given in their adherence to this faith. If it be asked, why Jesus did not appear in His resurrection body to some of His enemies and convince them, I reply, that He did appear before the most embittered and the greatest-minded enemy which Christianity ever had, a Rabbi, named Saul of Tarsus, and that, thus appearing, He transformed him into the chief Apostle of Christianity. The chosen witnesses of the Resurrection were so numerous, that their testimony, even by its numbers, is very weighty. It must also be plain that the testimony which comes down to us, so far as it is positive, could come only from believers. An unbeliever testifying that Jesus rose

from the dead would by that very fact give in his adherence to Christianity! But that Jesus did not make a spectacular display of Himself after His victory over the grave, is precisely what we might expect from all that we know of His character and His methods. If He had done so, we should at once say, "That is not our Jesus, but some pretender." The devil asked Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, and thus, by a theatrical disclosure, convert his enemies. The brilliant champion of American infidelity tells us that Jesus, after His resurrection, ought to have done a similar thing, to have appeared before all Jerusalem on horse-back, and thus by sensational methods gained their allegiance. So that Satan and infidelity are both in accord as to how Christ ought to have acted. But it was not in His mind to do anything of that nature. If the stories of the miracles were myths or frauds, why did the Apostles and evangelists limit the re-appearances of Christ to such a small number (ten in all), occurring within a definite time; and why, moreover, did they confine these first re-appearances to the circle of His disciples? The myth-maker, or the deceiver, could just as well

as not have had Jesus riding on a horse through the streets of Jerusalem and confounding all His enemies. On the theory of fancy or fraud the Apostles would not have limited the miracles of Christ to those occasions which would enhance His moral glory, would not have represented Him as refusing to work miracles when a thaumaturge or wonder-worker would surely have wrought them. Here is a phenomenon in regard to the Resurrection, and to all the Christian miracles, which the theory of myths or fancy or fabrication cannot explain. Christ would not feed Himself in the wilderness of temptation, miraculously, distrustfully, selfishly; He would not call attention to His Divine powers so as to incline worldly-minded men to make Him King. When a single miracle had this effect, He withdrew Himself into solitude. He would not divorce the miraculous from the highest moral ends, and therefore He declined to do mighty works in unbelieving Nazareth; therefore He treated the vulgar curiosity of Herod with silent inaction; therefore He disappointed the disciples by refusing to display His celestial energy before the malignant Pharisees; therefore in the Garden He would not summon the rescuing angelic



legions to save His person and defeat His Messianic work of sacrifice; therefore He remained silent, amid the tortures of the Crucifixion, when tauntingly asked to come down from the Cross and save Himself as He had saved others; and therefore He did not perform that act of unspeakable vulgarity which, as I have said, unbelief tells us He ought to have performed in order to prove His Resurrection, namely, mount a charger and ride in His risen body, through the gaping streets of awe-struck Jerusalem to overwhelm and convert His foes. It was not His purpose to confound and convert anybody in that way. All along He had refused to be a worldly, imperial Messiah, catering to the minds of the vulgar by conforming to their ideals and leading a national revolt against Rome; and thus He had brought on Himself the wrath of many pre-disposed on other grounds to accept His claims; He had refused to cast Himself from the temple and thus astonish Israel; He had declined to be lifted into kingship on the shouts of a well-fed mob; He persisted to the end, before and after His resurrection, in making such a disclosure of Himself that while His miracles confirmed His claims, attesting His Divine authority

and benevolence, men should nevertheless be won to His side, chiefly with the allegiance of grateful hearts toward a superhuman and sympathising Redeemer, who had saved them from their sins, and not with the selfish loyalty which regarded the loaves and the fishes, the offices and the crowns.

The least element in the probability that Jesus rose from the tomb, is itself very strong. I refer to the artless, fragmentary and not always superficially consistent narratives of the Resurrection, which the early Church has sent down to us in the Gospels. They do not read like forgeries or like the records of weak-minded dreamers. They give the impression of truthfulness. If the evangelists record what did not occur, they certainly record what they sincerely and completely believed. But the probability that the Resurrection took place as related, is increased by the peculiar origin and invincible strength of the early belief in it. The Crucifixion blasted the disciples' faith. When the Roman soldier's broad-bladed spear entered the Redeemer's side, there was no question of His death. The eleven chosen ones were plunged into hopeless grief; grief such as men never before knew—for Christ was their Hope, their Life, their

Messiah, their Deliverer, their all—and He was dead! In their broken-hearted stupor their minds refused to work; they even forget the prophecies of Jesus that He is to rise the third day. It is the enemies of Christ that recall His words concerning His Resurrection, and, in their uneasy guilt and fear, they petition Pilate for a guard of soldiers to watch the tomb. It is the theory of Rénan, that the disciples' enthusiasm and undying hope created a risen Jesus out of their own minds, or borrowed the ecstasy of Mary Magdalene, whose broken heart and half-broken intellect led her to fancy that she saw Him and heard Him. But this theory builds its improbabilities on a historic mistake. The disciples had no enthusiasm and no hope; they were incredulous in the extreme; they were slow to believe. That they did believe, and at last undoubtingly, and gladly bore torture and shame and death, adds to the probability that Jesus actually rose from the dead. It is unlikely that the disciples, who began preaching Jesus and the Resurrection in Jerusalem, where the supposed event occurred, and where their falsehoods could have been exposed, the disciples who, on the day of Pentecost, persuaded three thousand Jews and

others to accept their faith in Jesus Christ in the very city that crucified Him, and who continued their unvarying testimony in spite of hatred and imprisonment and persecution, until the leader of that persecution, a few years later, the proud-minded Saul, broke from his beloved Judaism to accept and proclaim and die for their faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, it is not likely, I say, that these disciples were deluded by the ghost-story of a weak-minded woman. The mental and moral hysterics of Mary Magdalene could not have misled the whole band of incredulous and despairing Apostles. If Christ did not rise from the dead, they in all probability knew it. And if the body of Jesus was not in the tomb, by whom was it taken away? "If foes had removed it," as Principal Fairbairn has wisely said, "how they could have crushed the nascent belief." And does any one doubt that if this were so, if the enemies of Christ had carried off His body, they would have mercilessly and immediately stamped out the faith in the Resurrection which was giving the Jewish authorities so much trouble? But if friends carried away the body of Jesus, "they could be silent in its presence only by conscious and wicked conspir

acy." It is unlikely that a religion of righteousness and truth and perfect purity, a religion that broke down the corrupt Judaism and corrupter paganism of the ancient world, a religion that was proclaimed with holy and self-denying enthusiasm and yet with marvellous intellectual self-possession unto heroic and martyr-deaths, that such a religion was proclaimed by men who were banded together in a conspiracy of deception and perfidy, and who endured the loss of everything, all dying in conscious guilt, but making no sign.

But the probability that Jesus actually rose from the grave is further enhanced by the character of the evidence that is furnished. It is the evidence of men who were entirely competent to say without any shadow of doubt or question, whether the Jesus who was crucified were the Jesus who afterward appeared alive again. Of course it is not pretended that any one saw Jesus when the Divine life re-entered His body, and it is not needful, in order to prove the Resurrection, that any one should have seen the miracle itself at the moment of its accomplishment. You plant a seed in the ground—you can testify to that fact; Jesus died—that fact is undisputed. You behold the plant which springs

from that seed, after it has risen into the air, though you did not see the Divine mystery of germination beneath the soil. And so the fact that Jesus appeared alive again may be proved from human testimony. Christ appeared in His Resurrection-body before witnesses whose incredulity at the beginning adds weight to their emphatic declarations which were subsequently made. There is not the least uncertainty in regard to their knowledge of Jesus, both before and after His death. Perhaps five hundred persons in this congregation to-night, were present last Sunday evening, and they have not seen me, their speaker, in the intervening time. Now, last Sunday night they would have taken an oath that they saw me standing in this pulpit and heard me addressing them. And to-night the testimony of their senses to the fact that they now see and hear me is complete and infallible, and yet seven days have elapsed between the two occasions, more than twice the time that passed between the death and resurrection of Jesus. If these five hundred persons had been individuals that had associated with me daily for three years, their certainty that the speaker of last Sunday evening is the speaker of to-night would

be, if that were possible, even stronger; and if, besides all this, they should meet me to-morrow morning to converse with me, lay their hands upon me, eat with me, and if this communication should continue at intervals through forty days, they would be willing to stake their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor on their testimony to the fact of my identity with the man who stood here last Sunday evening. If it be said that it would make a great difference if, between the two Sundays, I had been put to death, since in that case they would even doubt their own senses, I reply: First, it was precisely so with the disciples; they doubted in the beginning; and I reply, Secondly, that if it could be shown that I had predicted my resurrection on the third day, if that resurrection had been the natural culmination of a superhuman life and stood in any such relation to God's plans and to human redemption as did that of Jesus Christ, if all these absurd suppositions were true in the second case as in the first, then the evidence that I was the same person whom they had known before would have finally been completely satisfactory to these modern witnesses. So it appears, that while there is no testimony to

the effect that Jesus was seen coming to life again, and while the cause of the Resurrection, the spiritual Omnipotence of God is, as one has said, "inscrutable," there may be and there is satisfactory testimony to the historical fact that the Jesus who walked in Galilee and died on the Cross, was seen alive again by those who knew Him most intimately. It is the testimony of men who saw Him with their eyes, put their hands on His body, who beheld Him taking food, who listened to His words and made those words the guiding forces of their lives. As Dr. Thomas H. Skinner, of Chicago, has well written: "Eye-witnesses, ear-witnesses, hand-witnesses give their testimony. They knew Him through those forty days through the same senses by which they had known Him through those three years." They did not handle a ghost, they did not talk with a shadow, they did not see a phantom taking food, and phantoms do not appear in the day-time! "By what right," it was asked, "do men who accept the testimony of the senses to the fact of Christ's life before the Crucifixion, turn about and impeach its validity to the fact of His life after the Crucifixion? Either there is no evidence that Christ did live on earth at all before



His death, or there is just as valid evidence that He did live after His death. Deny that He rose from the dead, and we defy any mortal to prove that He ever appeared on the earth." "By many proofs," says Luke the evangelist, "He showed Himself alive." Christ appeared not on one day to those who had known Him best, but at ten different times through forty days; not to one disciple, but to many, as many as five hundred at once, according to Paul. In a debate on this theme with an unbeliever, a Christian once read as follows, from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom some remain unto this present, but the greater part are fallen asleep." The unbeliever at once put in the remark: "Yes, it was very convenient that most of the alleged witnesses should be dead; if it had been stated publicly that most of them were then alive, the evidence of the fact would have been very powerful." Then the Christian read what Paul actually wrote: "After that He was seen by above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

We are now prepared to affirm the historic cer-

tainty of this primitive and universal Christian faith. There are historic certainties, resting, it is true, for their evidence on testimony, but for which the evidence is so weighty that doubt is unreasonable. The voyage of Columbus, the death of Napoleon Bonaparte at St. Helena, these are historic certainties, though they rest on the credibility of human testimony. Such a complexity of probabilities encloses the Christian faith that Christ rose from the dead, and such a complexity of absurdities and moral impossibilities besets the denial of His Resurrection, that the event must be placed where Greenleaf, the great authority on legal evidence, places it, in the category of historic certainties. When we rise to behold this mighty miracle as the crowning revelation of the nature of Jesus, it seems altogether befitting that such a nature should receive such a diadem. The Resurrection belongs to the other parts of an unequalled life; it is not an isolated fact. And, as we abide in thought with the historic Jesus, as we contemplate the perfection of His goodness, the originality of His claims, the matchlessness of His wisdom, and as we hear from His sinless lips His sublime words concerning Himself, declaring that He had power

to lay down his life and power to take it again, it seems that a Being of another order and from a higher world was manifest in the Man of Galilee, and for such a life it seems congruous that there should be an end unique and glorious. And when we note what Divine hopes of immortality are made to walk the earth with assurance beneath them by the Resurrection of Jesus, when we see in His tomb the Divine purpose, which had been dimly disclosed to the men of old, breaking open at last to fully reveal man's eternal home in the bosom of God, all the prophecies of hope and conscience and love verified as the rejoicing Heavenly Bridegroom came out of His chamber of death on the Resurrection morning, and when we perceive how godless the moral universe would seem if such a Divine life as Christ's had in fact been beaten down into hopeless defeat by the Crucifixion, then all the overwhelming and invincible testimony that Jesus did rise again appears to be testimony to what is in accord with the higher order of the world, while the great miracle itself is explained by its Divine purpose that eternal life should be disclosed to men, and that Christ, our redeeming King who died for us on the Cross, "should be

declared the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead.”

The third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, the world began to be transformed. A company of humble men rose out of despair into ecstasy, out of weakness into unequalled spiritual power. The first day of the week began to be as sacred to them as the ancient Sabbath of Jehovah. Obstinate and almost ineradicable Jewish prejudices were uprooted, and a Divine and world-wide philanthropy was planted in their hearts. When fifty days had passed there came into their souls such heavenly power that they filled a vast number from many nations with their faith and their love. A new City of God rose out of the empire of the Cæsars; the conversion of a hostile and wicked world is nothing less than a Divine testimony to the supreme fact on which the Church was builded, and having reached this point, it would seem that the evidence of the truth of this event could scarcely be made stronger by the device of man, or, I speak it reverently, by the wisdom of God Himself. At least, we are ready to say with that relentless and destructive German critic, Ewald, “That nothing stands more historically certain

than that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared again to His followers, and that their seeing Him again was the beginning of a higher faith and of all their Christian work in the world." Therefore we conclude with Peter, that, "We did not follow cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and John adds, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life, declare we unto you." A solid rock has been placed under the feet of Faith, on which she may stand, and with eyes fixed on the risen and everlasting Christ, may pour forth her gladsome song, whose clear note, like the huntsman's horn amid the Alps, tumbles down the snowy avalanches of doubt. She sings the praises of the faithful and true Witness who has placed a miraculous seal upon an authoritative revelation. Her anthem discloses the universe as it lies within the thought of God; man, not chained in darkness to the sorrows and incompleteness of earth, the earth a vestibule and suburb of unwasting life, and Christ holding in His hands the keys of death and Hades, the Conqueror over sin and the King of Glory!

VII.

PAUL'S TESTIMONY. TO THE RESURREC-  
TION.

“And last of all He was seen of me, also, as of one born out of due time.” — I CORINTHIANS XV : 8.

**T**HAT Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised again the third day, were facts which Paul and the other Apostles everywhere affirmed. Paul declares that Christ was seen after he rose from the dead by Peter, who knew Him so well, by the twelve, by more than five hundred disciples at once, most of whom were then living, by the whole company of the Apostles again, and by James, the Lord's brother. But besides these witnesses, the last witness was Paul himself. He, the latest of the Apostles, and the least also, because he had been a persecutor and

had come into the apostolic fellowship like one abortive born, he, too, had seen the Lord. Unquestionably he refers to the sight of Jesus given to him at the time of his conversion near Damascus. Of that meeting, and its significance to the credibility of the Gospel history, I speak to-night. If that meeting did not take place, then the greater part of the New Testament is the work of a deceived or deceiving writer. If it did take place as Paul believed and taught, then the Christian religion is without question true. Since the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost no other event of equal moment has cast its light over the fortunes of men. The conversion of Constantine on the march toward Rome, the conversion of Augustine at Milan, the conversion of Luther in the Erfurt monastery, are stars of lesser light, differing from this star of surpassing glory which God hung out above the gates and gardens of Damascus.

The event that I am about to relate has long been regarded as one of the supreme historic evidences of Christianity. It comes down to us in three separate narratives. Men have begun the study of it with stubborn disbelief in the Christian religion, and have risen from it as radically

changed in their convictions as was Saul himself after his meeting with Jesus. The latest forms of European rationalism have found this a stumbling-block. It has been the fashion with skeptics of the school of Baur to exalt Paul as the author of Christianity, almost above Jesus. All scholars regard his four epistles, the two to the Corinthians, that to the Galatians, and that to the Romans, as unquestionably genuine, as having come from the hand of Paul before the year 60, that is, within thirty years of the death of Christ. "Now these four epistles are sufficient," as Schaff has said, "to establish all the prominent facts in the life of Christ as well known and generally believed among the Christians at the time when those epistles were written." "They refer also to the conversion and calling of Paul by the appearance of Christ to him at Damascus." The writings and life of the great Apostle, as they appear in these letters, presuppose the truth of his miraculous conversion. To explain away the miraculous conversion has been the unavailing effort of the rationalists. Just before his death, Baur abandoned his former explanation and confessed that in "the sudden transformation of Paul from the most violent adversary of Christian-



ity to its determined herald," he could see "nothing short of a miracle."

A miracle is designed to bridge over a providential emergency. God is ever on-looking, the Divine prophet of what men call the future. After the Christian Church had been founded and its first victories won, it might seem that all had been done which was needed to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. But the leaders of the Church were all of them men who had been the friends of Christ in the flesh, and their testimony to the resurrection, however conclusive, might yet seem to future skepticism as the possibly blinded witnessing of enthusiastic devotees. I know that a multitude of priests and others of the hostile Jewish party were converted to the Faith, but the testimony of one who had been a persistent and persecuting leader of that party would have special weight. Furthermore, an Apostle of consummate energy and mental power was required, who should be so thoroughly cut loose from Judaism that he could plant the Church on the broad foundations of Christian freedom. All these requirements were to be met in Saul of Tarsus. Intellectually, the greatest man of his age and the most determined

foe which the Christian religion ever had, a man whose moral soundness gave weight to all he said, such was the man that the Lord had selected in whom to manifest His grace, and to whom to reveal His Person.

One morning, in the year thirty-six of our era, this man, then more than thirty years of age, was seen riding with a company of others, out of the northern gate of Jerusalem. His face was disturbed with the fierce passions of his soul. He afterward described himself as "breathing out threatening and slaughter." In his possession were writs of arrest, or letters from the great Jewish council, of which he was probably a member, empowering him in connection with the Jewish officers in Damascus to seize the disciples of Christ in that city, whither some of them had fled. As he left the gate of Jerusalem, it was doubtless with the expectation that within three weeks, at the most, he was to enter that gate with a train of Christian captives, men and women chained to each other, who were to be cast into Jewish prisons and sentenced to death. But three years were to pass before he saw Jerusalem again, and he was to enter it as "the slave of Jesus Christ." He was to meet the Lord,

and from Him was to receive a commission which forever cancelled the letters which he carried to the authorities at Damascus. He was to retire into the solitudes of Arabia, where the law-giver, Moses, had dwelt with God, and there, with eyes and heart illumined, he was to study anew those Scriptures which testified of Christ. He was now exceedingly mad against all who bore the name of Jesus, but, on returning to Jerusalem, this proud, sensitive, ambitious man, mindless of the scorn of his old friends in the Sanhedrim and of his old teacher, Gamaliel, was to seek to join himself to the Christian disciples.

Saul left Jerusalem that morning for a week's journey, in which he had much leisure for solitary meditation. He had been living in the midst of most exciting events wherein he had had a notable part. He had carried into the extirpation of the Christian heresy all the fiery zeal of a resolute and masterful nature. To him the preaching of a Messiah crucified was so supremely offensive that it was useless to talk to him of Christ the Risen. He knew that the powers in Jerusalem who represented the theocracy, or Divine government, that the scribes who represented the precious wisdom of

the chosen people, and that Gamaliel, his teacher, "the beauty of the law," the "angelic doctor," had not favored the Nazarene pseudo-Messiah; and his conservatism, fired with Jewish zeal, and illumined with hopes of national deliverance and glory for which the teaching of the impostor of Galilee made no provision, was called out in angry protest against the new faith. He had wrestled, in one of the synagogues at Jerusalem, with a young man named Stephen; he had heard his defence before the council, and had shared in the furious outburst which killed that radiant preacher of Christ. He had entered many Christian homes and dragged men and women to prison and had heard their testimonies to Christ, and marked their gentleness, serenity and hope, and in his exceeding rage he had gone so far as to endeavor to make them blaspheme the name of Jesus in which was all their trust. Ignorantly, and in unbelief, he had made havoc of the Church of God, like some grim persecutor of the Middle Ages.

In his prolonged reflections, perhaps he had wondered what was really the source of the energy and faith and sweet hope of the poor disciples whom he had been so ruthlessly persecuting. Per-

haps, with a man of Saul's tender and sympathetic nature, there may have come to him questionings with regard to his conduct, but I doubt if these impressions from the past were strong enough to excite any struggle in his mind. They never swerved him from his path as a persecutor, and he never attributes to them his conversion. They are threads which, however, apparently join the old life with the new. It was not any moral misgiving in Saul's mind, but the futility of his opposition to Christ which the Lord appears to have noted when He said to him, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads," using a well-known proverb that pictures an ox at the plow, striking to his own hurt against the sharpened instrument which urges him on. But Saul was too strong a nature, he had been too long grounded in his antagonism to Christ to be wrenched from his path or from his convictions by the truth working from within; he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; he had the adamantine stubbornness, the steel-like tenaciousness of that most persistent and conservative of races. His brother rabbis in Jerusalem, less opposed to Christ than he, had seen and heard all that he had seen and heard up to this time, and they had not been

moved. The later added testimony of Saul, as of one raised from the death of Judaism, never overcame their invincible antipathy. Saul needed what God had designed for him—the flash of the eternal glory to melt his soul. As one has said, “The veil that covered his heart must be split from without if the light of Heaven was to visit the darkened chamber.”

The week's journey is about ended. The old city of Damascus which Abraham had seen, and from which Mohammed was to veil his eyes, is now in sight, lying on the horizon with its white buildings surrounded by groves of orange and tamarisk and palms, appearing, as the Arabian poet afterward said, “like a handful of pearls in a goblet of emeralds.” We do not know that Saul's eyes rested admiringly on this paradise of earthly beauty, but we do know that another sight was to be his which changed his whole future, and turned the stream of history with fuller volumes of blessings into new channels. To him was to come the vision of “the King in His beauty”, and that was to make this journey more fateful to human destiny than the march of Xerxes or the military conquests of Alexander, or perhaps any other journey in

human annals, unless we except the pilgrimage of Abraham, the march of Israel out of Egypt, and that of the Galilean prophet who went from Pilate's Judgment Hall to the Cross of Golgotha.

It was about noon-day when the Syrian sun was making everything bright with a brightness almost intolerable, that there suddenly came about, and over the travelers a new splendor, eclipsing all earthly radiance. It smote them all to the ground, and in that brightness Saul beheld the face of the Lord who had been transfigured on Mount Hermon, so that His garments were lucent like clouds shot through with solar fire, and whom John the Revelator again saw "like the sun in His glory". And he heard a voice speaking directly to him and saying in tones of tender reproof, in the language which He spoke on earth, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" His companions heard the sound of this voice, but not the words, which were meant for him alone. "It is hard for thee to struggle against the goads," said the voice. In his bewilderment, but conscious that he was in the presence of a Divine manifestation, Saul inquired, "Who art thou, Lord?" The answer came, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." That

was the declaration which, like a lightning bolt from heaven, shattered and melted his hard heart. If the Lord had declared Himself as the Creator of all things, the Jehovah that spoke to Moses out of the flaming bush, Saul would have felt and said that he was not persecuting, but endeavoring to honor that Being. But when the Lord identified Himself with the abused Nazarene, the hated and crucified Head of the church which Saul was striving to uproot, at that instant the one horrible mistake of his life was flashed into his mind with awful luminousness; the veil was rent, and from that hour the Redeemer of the world had bound to Him the most loyal and loving devotee that ever braved obloquy and death for the Name of Jesus. With perfect mental clearness of insight he perceived that he belonged to the Christ who, in that moment, he discovered had already come, and fulfilled the promises made to his fathers, and had been both a sorrowing and victorious Messiah; and Saul's obedient spirit inquires, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the reply came, "Arise, and go to Damascus, and it shall be told thee of all things that are appointed thee to do."

This Epiphany, or manifestation of Christ, was a



most real and mighty disclosure, leaving its impression not only on Saul's spirit but on his body. He rose blind, and the once proud persecutor is led by the hand, a spectacle of pity, into that city of groves and fruits and fountains which he had expected to enter at the head of his retinue in triumph. In the house of one Judas, in the street called Straight, Saul the blind found a resting-place. There his mighty spirit was shut up for three days to itself. He had time to reflect on the great revelation made by his Lord. What contrition, that he had wasted the flock of God that henceforth he was to feed! What new light with which to look on all that he had heard of Jesus and His followers! What marvelous mercy that to him the Lord had come and banished his spiritual darkness! And as he lay there fasting, he fed his soul on hope and love. He opened his lips in prayer, no longer the Pharisee's prayer which he had lifted so often, but the prayer of humble and grateful communion with the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham and of David, who was also the God of Stephen, and of these disciples in Damascus, his brethren now, but whom as yet he had not known. One of them, however, named

Ananias, God has commissioned to visit him. Ananias has been instructed that this persecutor of Jesus had been appointed to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. Into the house of Judas Ananias enters, and to the blinded and stricken man he says, "Brother Saul, receive thy sight," and those eyes, whose last look had been upon his glorified Lord, are opened, and he gazes on Ananias, the first disciple whom he ever looked upon in love, the representative of that Church of Christ for which henceforth he is to toil with ceaseless energy till he planted it so deep in the soil of the old Roman world that all the forces of earth and hell have not removed it.

And now came the revelation which Ananias had received, that Paul (for let us henceforth give him his Christian name) should be a witness to all men of what he had seen and heard. He is baptized, and joins himself to the disciples whom he had come to capture, showing how complete is his transformation, and straightway he begins preaching in the amazed synagogues of Damascus, where his Jewish brethren assembled, that Christ was the Son of God. Was Paul a liar? From that time

he began telling the story of his conversion and of the commission he had received from the risen Christ. He declares in sermon and letter, through thirty years of toil and suffering, that Christ had been revealed to him as he was revealed to the other Apostles after the resurrection, and that from this Christ had come his own Apostleship. The twelve at Jerusalem finally are persuaded fully that this persecutor has equal authority with them and he is acknowledged as an Apostle. Was Paul a liar and deceiver in all this? Did he renounce the friendships and ambitions of his life with the honored men at Jerusalem, and welcome poverty and hate, and one hundred and ninety-five cruel lashes on his back, and repeated shipwrecks, and perils from robbers, and stoning from the Jews, and ceaseless toil amid the scorn and persecution of Gentile and Israelite from devotion to a lie? Was it like a man of his training or any other training to espouse a falsehood which he knew to be such, and become the off-scouring of mankind, beseeching men with tears to accept this falsehood, never flinching in the proclamation of it, instinctively defending himself when mobbed in the temple or brought before King Agrippa twenty-five years after

his so-called conversion, by relating what was no more a reality than the legend that God had written His law on the hide of a ram which Abraham caught on Mount Moriah? If the authorities at Jerusalem had any evidence that Jesus did not rise from the dead, Saul, who was their protégé and confidant, knew it. If there was anything which hate could devise or invent that disproved that the Lord came alive out of Joseph's tomb, Saul knew it. Did his conversion make him a deceiver? Will you read Paul's letters, which lift us into the air of truth and have no more affiliation with lying than with lust and murder; will you read the story of Paul's life and dare for one moment to suspect that he was not as sincere and truthful a soul as ever breathed on earth? You can offer no credible explanation of Paul's heroic eagerness to preach a lie in Jerusalem, where all his friends would hate him; in Ephesus, where he would excite a many-sided opposition, and even in cultured Athens and imperial Rome, where his doctrine would make but little headway unless, indeed, the power and truth of God were behind it. The supposition that Paul was a liar nobody believes. How, then, will you account for his belief in his miraculous conversion?

Either it is a reality, as he related it, or else Paul was a dupe.

Was he deceived? So some have argued. A thunder-storm, a blinding flash of lightning, a sun-stroke, one of these acting on an excited mind occasioned, we are gravely informed, a mental illusion which Paul mistook for a sight of Christ! But if the occasion of Paul's conversion was some natural phenomenon, why did he not know it as such? Was he not a man of ordinary common sense? If that light from Heaven, out-shining the Syrian noon-day, were a flash of lightning Paul's companions knew it and could have easily discredited Paul's story. Then did the lightning in those days speak Hebrew, and utter a Greek proverb about ox-goads, and know the name of Paul, and repeat it after the peculiar manner of the teacher of Galilee who said, "Simon, Simon," "Martha, Martha," "Saul, Saul"? Did a thunder-storm or a sun-stroke give a Christian world its greatest preacher? Then we ought to pray that the thunder might roar about our theological seminaries to-day in the hope that there might be more lightning in the preachers that come out of them! Or, did the phenomenon, whatever it was, occasion in

Paul a delusive dream that he saw Christ and heard words which changed his whole life? Paul afterward had visions of Christ, as in the dungeon of the castle of Antonia, in the temple, and on the storm-driven ship, but he carefully distinguishes all these mental visions of his Lord from this first and only personal objective meeting. He classes this meeting at Damascus with Peter's meeting with Christ on the day of the Resurrection. Paul's Apostleship and all his faith in Christianity came from it. As he wrote to the Galatians, "Paul, an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead." And yet we are told by grave critics that this meeting which reversed the strong current of Paul's life, was only an imaginative conceit! If the waters of Damascus, bubbling in the courts of palaces and exhaling their cooling breath amid the crowded bazaars, should suddenly cease to flow, and should return along the channel of the Barada and cross the wide, parched plains, and passing up through the rocky cleft in the mountain, should climb the lofty heights of the Anti-Lebanon till they gleamed like a mighty glacier from the summit, you might persuade me that a child's hand

had wrought this marvel, before I could accept this flimsy theory regarding the transformation of Saul. If Luther and Pope Leo the Tenth had suddenly changed places and convictions, or William of Orange and Charles the Fifth, or Pascal and the Jesuits, or Milton and Archbishop Laud, or Garrison and Calhoun, or Charles Sumner and Jefferson Davis, we should witness transformations too fundamental to be explained by guesses or ghosts. And was Paul a man of such pliable weakness as to be changed from the ferocious persecutor into the heroic servant of Christ by a feverish and fantastic dream? Even Dr. Keim, who as a disciple of Baur would explain everything, if possible, on a naturalistic basis, opposes this folly by noting: "The whole character of Paul, his sharp understanding, which was not weakened by his enthusiasm; the careful, cautious, measured form of his statement; above all, the total favorable impression of his narrative and the mighty echo of it in the unanimous, uncontradicted faith of primitive Christendom." It is incredible that the superstructure of Paul's Christian manhood and Apostolic labors rested upon a lie or delusion. If delusion lay at the root of all this, Paul would sometimes have

doubted, and doubt would have paralyzed his activity. It is incredible that a feverish hallucination lay at the basis of that superstructure of Christian theology which has tasked the mightiest intellects, and also at the root of that life-long heroism ending in triumphant hope which kindles our noblest courage to-day. Above all, it is incredible that this thunder-bolt of Judaic fire, speeding on to blast the disciples of Jesus, should have been suddenly stopped and instantly changed into a torch of Christian light and love, still gleaming, now that David's throne and Cæsar's empire have been swept away, above the loftiest mountain-tops of humanity, by anything less potent than the hand of Almighty God. Christianity is no cunning fabrication; the pillars which Paul planted and which the intellectual earthquakes and wars of eighteen centuries have not overthrown, do not rest on error. The Lord of glory died for our sins, and was raised again, according to the Scriptures, and manifested Himself alive by many proofs, and last of all He came to one who would have stamped out in blood the remembrance of His name from the earth, revealing His Divine glory to that blinded heart and thus changing the Cross from the stumbling-



block over which Saul, the young rabbi, fell, into the one resplendent symbol of celestial love and human redemption about which, thereafter, Paul, the servant and Apostle of Christ, beheld the mingled splendors which streamed from the blazing top of Sinai, and from Aaron's jewelled breast-plate, and David's royal diadem, and from the flaming altars of Moriah, and the glowing pages of Isaiah, and even from the transfigured faces that surround the sapphire throne of Jehovah. Henceforth Paul's King was in the heavens, but with power to manifest His glorified Person everywhere, and he, himself, was commissioned to preach a Gospel transgressing the bounds and transcending the glories of Israel. Thus commissioned, his message is to us the truth of Heaven. It is no web-work of guesses, but the sure word authenticated by the hand that built the earth and belted the firmament with stars. That Gospel, which was sufficient for Paul, confronting the dainty skeptics of Athens and the hard-visaged Prætorian guards of Rome, is also sufficient for us, meeting the skepticism and barbarism of our time. May those who proclaim it, speak and live like Paul, with hearts of loyalty to the exalted Christ, and of love to the

fallen man, and with the solemn march of eternity keeping them alert, expectant, humble. And may those who hear it hold it in fullest faith. Thus doing, you shall continue and augment its blessed renewing energy and shall not lack the visitations of God's Spirit, and the comforts of His love, till at the gates not of an earthly but of a Heavenly Paradise, there shall come to you the beatific vision, and with it a change into the likeness of your Lord.