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VOLUME VI
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A. I. Consideration of the Sources: The rise of Christianity was a phenomenon of too little apparent significance to attract the attention of the great world. It was only when it had refused to be quenched in the blood of its founder, and, breaking out of the narrow bounds of the obscure province in which it had its origin, was making itself felt in the centers of population, that it drew to itself a somewhat irritated notice. The interest of such heathen writers as mention it was in the movement, not in its author. But in speaking of the movement they tell some-

1. Heathen Writers. tell us far from being of little moment. He was, it seems, a certain "Christ," who had lived in Judea in the reign of Tiberius (14-37 A.D.), and had been brought to capital punishment by the procurator, Pontius Pilate (q.v.; cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44). The significance of his personality to the movement inaugurated by him is already suggested by the fact that he, and no other, had impressed his name upon it. But the name itself by which he was known particularly attracts notice. This is uniformly, in these heathen writers, "Christ," not "Jesus." * Suetonius (*Claudius*, xxv.) not unnaturally confuses this "Christus" with the Greek name "Chrestus"; but Tacitus and Pliny show themselves better informed and preserve it accurately. "Christ," however, is not a personal name, but the Greek

rendering of the Hebrew title "Messiah." Clearly, then, it was as the promised Messiah of the Jews that their founder was revered by "the Christians"; and they had made so much of his Messiahship in speaking of him that the title "Christ" had actually usurped the place of his personal name, and he was everywhere known simply as "Christ." Their reverence for his person had, indeed, exceeded that commonly supposed to be due even to the Messianic dignity. Pliny records that this "Christ" was stately worshiped by "the Christians" of Pontus and Bithynia as their God (Pliny, *Epist.*, xvi. [xcvii.] to Trajan). Beyond these great facts the heathen historians give little information about the founder of Christianity.

What is lacking in them is happily supplied, however, by the writings of the Christians themselves. Christianity was from its beginnings a literary religion, and documentary

2. The Apostle Paul. records of it have come down from the very start. There are, for example, the letters of the Apostle Paul (q.v.), a highly cultured Romanized Jew of Tarsus, who early (34 or 35 A.D.) threw in his fortunes with the new religion, and by his splendid leadership established it in the chief centers of influence from Antioch to Rome. Written occasionally to one or another of the Christian communities of this region, at intervals during the sixth and seventh decades of the century, that is to say, from twenty to forty years after the origin of Christianity, these letters reflect the conceptions which ruled in the Christian com-

* In Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII., iii. 3. XX., ix. 1, "Jesus," "Jesus, surnamed Christ," occur. But the authenticity of the passages is questionable, especially that of the former.

munities of the time. Paul had known the Christian movement from its beginning; first from the outside, as one of the chief agents in its persecution, and then from the inside, as the most active leader of its propaganda. He was familiarly acquainted with the Apostles and other immediate followers of Jesus, and enjoyed repeated intercourse with them. He explicitly declares the harmony of their teaching with his, and joins with his their testimony to the great facts which he proclaimed. The complete consonance of his allusions to Jesus with what is gathered from the hints of the heathen historians is very striking. The person of Jesus fills the whole horizon of his thought, and gathers to itself all his religious emotions. That Jesus was the Messiah is the presupposition of all his speech of him, and the Messianic title has already become his proper name behind which his real personal name, Jesus, has retired. This Messiah is definitely represented as a divine being who has entered the world on a mission of mercy to sinful man, in the prosecution of which he has given himself up as a sacrifice for sin, but has risen again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God, henceforth to rule as Lord of all. Around the two great facts, of the expiatory death of the Son of God and his rising again, Paul's whole teaching circles. Jesus Christ as crucified, Christ risen from the dead as the first fruits of those that sleep—here is Paul's whole gospel in summary.

Into the details of Christ's earthly life Paul had no occasion to enter. But he shows himself fully familiar with them, and incidentally conveys a vivid portrait of Christ's personality. Of the seed of David on the human, as the Son of God on the divine side, he was born of a woman, under the law, and lived subject to its ordinances for his mission's sake, humbling himself even unto death, and that the death of the cross. His lowly estate is dwelt upon, and the high traits of his personal character manifested in his lowliness are lightly sketched in, justifying not merely the negative declaration that "he knew no sin," but his positive presentation as the model of all perfection. An item of his teaching is occasionally adverted to, or even quoted, always with the utmost reverence. Members of his immediate circle of followers are mentioned by name or by class—whether his brethren according to the flesh or the twelve apostles whom he appointed. The institution by him of a sacramental feast is described, and that of a companion sacrament of initiation by baptism is implied. But especially his sacrificial death on the cross is emphasized, his burial, his rising again on the third day, and his appearances to chosen witnesses, who are cited one after the other with the greatest solemnity. Such details are never communicated to Paul's readers as pieces of fresh information. They are alluded to as matters of common knowledge, and with the plainest intimation of the unquestioned recognition of them by all. Thus it is made clear not only that there underlies Paul's letters a complete portrait of Jesus and a full outline of his career, but that this portrait and this outline are the universal posses-

sion of Christians. They were doubtless as fully before his mind as such in the early years of his Christian life, in the thirties, as when he was writing his letters in the fifties and sixties. There is no indication in the way in which Paul touches on these things of a recent change of opinion regarding them or of a recent acquisition of knowledge of them. The testimony of Paul's letters, in a word, has retrospective value, and is contemporary testimony to the facts.

Paul's testimony alone provides thus an exceptionally good basis for the historical verity of Jesus' personality and career. But Paul's

4. Other testimony is far from standing alone. **Epistolary.** It is fully supported by the testimony of a series of other writings, similar to his own, purporting to come from the hands of early teachers of the Church, most of them from actual companions of our Lord and eye-witnesses of his majesty, and handed down to us with credible evidence of their authenticity. And it is extended by the testimony of a series of writings of a very different character; not occasional letters designed to meet particular crises or questions arising in the churches, but formal accounts of Jesus' words and acts.

Among these attention is attracted first by a great historical work, the two parts of which bear the titles of "the Gospel according to Luke" and "the Acts of the Apostles." The first contains an account of Jesus' life from his birth to his death and resurrection; or, including the opening paragraphs of the second, to his ascension. What directs attention to it first among books of its class is the uncommonly full information possessed concerning its writer and his method of historical composition. It is the work of an educated Greek physician, known to have enjoyed, as a companion of Paul, special opportunities of informing himself of the facts of Jesus' career. Whatever Paul himself knew of the acts and teachings of his Lord was, of course, the common property of the band of missionaries which traveled in his company, and could not fail to be the subject of much public and private discussion among them. Among Paul's other companions there could not fail to be some whose knowledge of Jesus' life, direct or derived, was considerable; an example is found, for instance, in John Mark, who had come out of the immediate circle of Jesus' first followers, although precise knowledge of the meeting of Luke and Mark as fellow companions of Paul belongs to a little later period than the composition of Luke's Gospel. In company with Paul Luke had even visited Jerusalem and had resided two years at Cæsarea in touch with primitive disciples; and if the early tradition which represents him as a native of Antioch be accepted, he must be credited with facilities from the beginning of his Christian life for association with original disciples of Jesus. All that is needed to ground great confidence in his narrative as a trustworthy account of the facts it records is assurance that he had the will and capacity to make good use of his abounding opportunities for exact information,

5. The Gospel of Luke. It is the work of an educated Greek physician, known to have enjoyed, as a companion of Paul, special opportunities of informing himself of the facts of Jesus' career. Whatever Paul himself knew of the acts and teachings of his Lord was, of course, the common property of the band of missionaries which traveled in his company, and could not fail to be the subject of much public and private discussion among them. Among Paul's other companions there could not fail to be some whose knowledge of Jesus' life, direct or derived, was considerable; an example is found, for instance, in John Mark, who had come out of the immediate circle of Jesus' first followers, although precise knowledge of the meeting of Luke and Mark as fellow companions of Paul belongs to a little later period than the composition of Luke's Gospel. In company with Paul Luke had even visited Jerusalem and had resided two years at Cæsarea in touch with primitive disciples; and if the early tradition which represents him as a native of Antioch be accepted, he must be credited with facilities from the beginning of his Christian life for association with original disciples of Jesus. All that is needed to ground great confidence in his narrative as a trustworthy account of the facts it records is assurance that he had the will and capacity to make good use of his abounding opportunities for exact information,

The former is afforded by the preface to his Gospel in which he reveals his method as a historian and his zeal for exactness of information and statement; the latter by the character of the Gospel, which evinces itself at every point a sincere and careful narrative resting upon good and well-sifted information. In these circumstances the determination of the precise time when this narrative was actually committed to paper becomes a matter of secondary importance; in any event its material was collected during the period of Paul's missionary activity. It may be confidently maintained, however, that it was also put together during this period, that is to say, during the earlier years of the seventh decade of the century. Confidence in its narrative is strengthened by the complete accord of the portrait of Jesus, which its detailed account exhibits with that which underlies the letters of Paul. Not only are the general traits of the personality identical, but the emphasis falls at the same places. In effect, the Jesus of Luke's narrative is the Christ of Paul's epistles in perfect dramatic presentation, and only two hypotheses offer themselves in possible explanation. Either Luke rests on Paul, and has with consummate art invented a historical basis for Paul's ideal Christ; or else Paul's allusions rest on a historical basis and Luke has preserved that historical basis in his careful detailed narrative. Every line of Luke's narrative refutes the former and demonstrates the latter supposition.

Additional evidence of the trustworthiness of Luke's Gospel as an account of Jesus' acts and teaching is afforded by the presence by its side of other narratives of similar character and accordant contents. These narratives are two in number and have been handed down under the names of members of the earliest circle of Christians—of John Mark, who was from the beginning in the closest touch with the apostolic body, and of

6. Mark and Matthew. Matthew, one of the apostles. On comparison of these narratives with Luke's, not only are they found to present, each with its own peculiar point of view and purpose, precisely the same conception and portrait of Jesus, but to have utilized in large measure also the same sources of information. Indeed, the entire body of Mark's Gospel is found to be incorporated also in Matthew's and Luke's.

This circumstance, in view of the declarations of Luke's preface, is of the utmost significance for an estimate of the trustworthiness of the narrative thus embodied in all three of the "Synoptic" Gospels. In this preface Luke professes to have had for his object the establishment of absolute "certainty," with respect to the things made the object of instruction in Christian circles; and to this end to have grounded his nar-

7. The Primitive Narrative Source. In the prosecution of this task, he knew himself to be working in a goodly company to a common end, namely, the narration of the Christian origins on the basis of the testimony of those ministers of

the word who had been also "eye-witnesses from the beginning." He does not say whether these fellow narrators had or had not been, some or all of them, eye-witnesses of some or of all the events they narrated; he merely says that the foundation on which all the narratives he has in view rested was the testimony of eye-witnesses. He does not assert for his own treatise superiority to those of his fellow workers; he only claims an honorable place for his own treatise among the others on the ground of the diligence and care he has exercised in ascertaining and recording the facts, through which, he affirms, he has attained a certainty with regard to them on which his readers may depend. Now, on comparing the narrative of Luke with those of Matthew and Mark, it is discovered that one of the main sources on which Luke draws is also one of the main sources on which Matthew draws and practically the sole source on which Mark rests. Thus Luke's judgment of the value and trustworthiness of this source receives the notable support of the judgment of his fellow evangelists, and it can scarcely be doubted that what it contains is the veritable tradition of those who were as well eye-witnesses as ministers of the Word from the beginning, in whose accuracy confidence can be placed. If the three Synoptic Gospels do not give three independent testimonies to the facts which they record, they give what is, perhaps, better,—three independent witnesses to the trustworthiness of the narrative, which they all incorporate into their own as resting on autoptic testimony and thoroughly deserving of credit. A narrative lying at the basis of all three of these Gospels, themselves written certainly not later than the seventh decade of the century, must in any event be early in date, and in that sense must emanate from the first followers of Christ; and in the circumstances—of the large and confident use made of it by all three of these Gospels—can not fail to be an authentic statement of what was the conviction of the earliest circles of Christians.

By the side of this ancient body of narrative must be placed another equally, or, perhaps, even more ancient source, consisting largely,

8. The Sayings of Jesus. but not exclusively, of reports of "sayings of Jesus." This underlies much of the fabric of Luke and Matthew where Mark fails, and by their employment of it is authenticated as containing, as Luke asserts, the trustworthy testimony of eye-witnesses. Its great antiquity is universally allowed, and there is no doubt that it comes from the very bosom of the Apostolical circle, bearing independent but thoroughly consentient testimony, with the narrative source which underlies all three of the Synoptists, of what was understood by the primitive Christian community to be the facts regarding Jesus. This is the fundamental fact about these two sources—that the Jesus which they present is the same Jesus; and that this Jesus is precisely the same Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels themselves, presented, moreover, in precisely the same fashion and with the emphases in precisely the same places. This latter could, of course, not fail to be the case

since these sources themselves constitute the main substance of the Synoptic Gospels into which they have been transfused. Its significance is that the portrait of Jesus as the supernatural Son of God who came into the world as the Messiah on a mission of mercy to sinful men, which is reflected even in the scanty notices of him that find an incidental place in the pages of heathen historians, which suffused the whole preaching of Paul and of the other missionaries of the first age, and which was wrought out into the details of a rich dramatization in the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels, is as old as Christianity itself and comes straight from the representations of Christ's first followers.

Valuable, however, as the separation out from the Synoptic narrative of these underlying sources is in this aspect of the matter, appeal can not be made from the Synoptics to these sources as from less to more trustworthy documents.

9. Individual Sections of Luke and Matthew. On the one hand, these sources do not exist outside the Synoptics; in them they have "found their grave." On the other hand, the Synoptics in large part are these sources; and their trustworthiness as wholes is guaranteed by

the trustworthiness of the sources from which they have drawn the greater part of their materials, and from the general portraiture of Christ in which they do not in the least depart. Luke's claim in his preface that he has made accurate investigations, seeking to learn exactly what happened that he might attain certainty in his narrative, is expressly justified for the larger part of his narrative when the sources which underlie it are isolated and are found to approve themselves under every test as excellent. There is no reason to doubt that for the remainder of his narrative (and Matthew too for the remainder of his narrative) not derived from these two sources the accident of their common use by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, or by Matthew and Luke, reveals, he (or Matthew) derives his material from equally good and trustworthy sources which happen to be used only by him. The general trustworthiness of Luke's narrative is not lessened but enhanced by the circumstance that, in the larger portion of it, he has the support of other evangelists in his confident use of his sources, with the effect that these sources can be examined and an approving verdict reached upon them. His judgment of sources is thus confirmed, and his claim to possess exact information and to have framed a trustworthy narrative is vindicated. What he gives from sources which were not used by the other evangelists, that is to say, in that portion of his narrative which is peculiar to himself (and the same must be said for Matthew, *mutatis mutandis*), has earned a right to credit on his own authentication. It is not surprising, therefore, that the portions of the narratives of Matthew and Luke which are peculiar to the one or the other bear every mark of sincere and well-informed narration and contain many hints of resting on good and trustworthy sources. In a word, the Synoptic Gospels supply a threefold sketch of the acts and teachings of Christ of exceptional trustworthiness.

If here is not historical verity, historical verity would seem incapable of being attained, recorded, and transmitted by human hands.

Along with the Synoptic Gospels there has been handed down by an unexceptionable line of testimony under the name of the Apostle John, another narrative of the teaching and work of Christ of equal fulness with that of the Synoptic Gospels, and yet so independent of theirs as to stand out in a sense in strong contrast with theirs, and even

to invite attempts to establish a contradiction between it and them. There is, however, no contradiction, but rather a deep-lying harmony. There are so-called Synoptical traits discoverable in John, and not only are Johannine elements imbedded in the Synoptical narrative, but an occasional passage occurs in it which is almost more Johannine than John himself. Take, for example, that pregnant declaration recorded in Matt. xi. 27-28, which, as it occurs also in Luke (x. 21, 22), must have had a place in that ancient source drawn on in common by these two Gospels which comes from the first days of Christianity. All the high teaching of John's Gospel, as has been justly remarked, is but "a series of variations" upon the theme here given its "classical expression." The type of teaching which is brought forward and emphasized by John is thus recognized on all hands from the beginning to have had a place in Christ's teaching; and John differs from the Synoptics only in the special aspect of Christ's teaching which he elects particularly to present. The naturalness of this type of teaching on the lips of the Jesus of the Synoptists is also undeniable; it must be allowed—and is now generally allowed—that by the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, and, it should be added, by their sources as well, Jesus is presented, and is presented as representing himself, as being all that John represents him to be when he calls him the Word, who was in the beginning with God and was God. The relation of John and the Synoptists in their portraiture of Jesus somewhat resembles, accordingly, that of Plato and Xenophon in their portraiture of Socrates; only, with this great difference—that both Plato and Xenophon were primarily men of letters and the portrait they draw of Socrates is in the hands of both alike eminently a sophisticated and literary one, while the evangelists set down simply the facts as they appealed to them severally. The definite claim which John's Gospel makes to be the work of one of the inner circle of the companions of Jesus is supported, moreover, by copious evidence that it comes from the hands of such a one as a companion of Jesus would be—a Jew, who possessed an intimate knowledge of Palestine, and was acquainted with the events of our Lord's life as only an eye-witness could be acquainted with them, and an eye-witness who had been admitted to very close association with him. That its narrative rests on good information is repeatedly manifested; and more than once historical links are supplied by it which are needed to give clearness to the Synoptical narrative, as, for example, in the chronological framework of the ministry of Jesus and the

culminating miracle of the raising of Lazarus, which is required to account for the incidents of the Passion-Week. It presents no different Jesus from the Jesus of the Synoptists, and it throws the emphasis at the same place—on his expiatory death and rising again; but it notably supplements the narrative of the Synoptists and reveals a whole new side of Jesus' ministry, and if not a wholly new aspect of his teaching, yet a remarkable mass of that higher aspect of his teaching of which only occasional specimens are included in the Synoptic narrative. John's narrative thus rounds out the Synoptical narrative and gives the portrait drawn in it a richer content and a greater completeness.

This portrait may itself be confidently adduced as its own warranty. It is not too much to say with Nathaniel Lardner that "the history of the New Testament has in it all the marks of credibility that any history can have." But apart from these more usually marshaled evidences of the trustworthiness of the narratives, there is the portrait itself which they draw, and this can not by any possibility

have been an invention. It is not merely that the portrait is harmonious throughout—in the allusions and presuppositions of the epistles of Paul and the other letter-writers of the New Testament, in the detailed narratives of the Synoptists and John, and in each of the sources which underlie them. This is a matter of importance; but it is not the matter of chief moment; there is no need to dwell upon the impossibility of such a harmony having been maintained save on the basis of simple truthfulness of record, or to dispute whether in the case of the Synoptics there are three independent witnesses to the one portrait, or only the two independent witnesses of their two most prominent "sources." Nor is the most interesting point whether the aboriginality of this portrait is guaranteed by the harmony of the representation in all the sources of information, some of which reach back to the most primitive epoch of the Christian movement. It is quite certain that this conception of Christ's person and career was the conception of his immediate followers, and indeed of himself; but, important as this conclusion is, it is still not the matter of primary import. The matter of primary significance is that this portrait thus imbedded in all the authoritative sources of information, and thus proved to be the conception of its founder cherished by the whole of primitive Christendom, and indeed commended to it by that founder himself, is a portrait intrinsically incapable of invention by men. It could never have come into being save as the revelation of an actual person embodying it, who really lived among men. "A romancer," as even Albert Réville allows, "can not attribute to a being which he creates an ideal superior to what he himself is capable of conceiving." The conception of the God-man which is embodied in the portrait which the sources draw of Christ, and which is dramatized by them through such a history as they depict, can be accounted for only on the assumption that such a God-man actually lived, was seen of men, and was painted from the life. The miracle of the in-

vention of such a portraiture, whether by the conscious effort of art, or by the unconscious working of the mythopoeic fancy, would be as great as the actual existence of such a person. Of this there is sufficient *a posteriori* proof in the invariable deterioration this portrait suffers in its secondary reproductions—in the so-called "Lives of Christ," of every type. The attempt vitally to realize and reproduce it results inevitably in its reduction. A portraiture which can not even be interpreted by men without suffering serious loss can not be the invention of the first simple followers of Jesus. Its very existence in their unsophisticated narratives is the sufficient proof of its faithfulness to a great reality.

II. The Portrait of Jesus: Only an outline of this portrait can be set down here. Jesus appears in it not only a supernatural, but in all the sources alike specifically a divine, person, who came into the world on a mission of mercy to sinful man. Such a mission was in its essence a humiliation and involved humiliation at every step of its accomplish-

ment. His life is represented accordingly as a life of difficulty and conflict, of trial and suffering, issuing in a shameful death. But this humiliation is represented as in every step and stage of it voluntary. It was entered into and abided in solely in the interests of his mission, and did not argue at any point of it helplessness in the face of the difficulties which hemmed him in more and more until they led him to death on the cross. It rather manifested his strong determination to fulfil his mission to the end, to drink to its dregs the cup he had undertaken to drink. Accordingly, every suggestion of escape from it by the use of his intrinsic divine powers, whether of omnipotence or of omniscience, was treated by him first and last as a temptation of the evil one. The death in which his life ends is conceived, therefore, as the goal in which his life culminates. He came into the world to die, and every stage of the road that led up to this issue was determined not for him but by him: he was never the victim but always the master of circumstance, and pursued his pathway from beginning to end, not merely in full knowledge from the start of all its turns and twists up to its bitter conclusion, but in complete control both of them and of it.

His life of humiliation, sinking into his terrible death, was therefore not his misfortune, but his achievement as the promised Messiah,

1. His Humiliation. by and in whom the kingdom of God is to be established in the world; it was the work which as Messiah he came to do. Therefore, in his prosecution of it, he from the beginning announced himself as the Messiah, accepted all ascriptions to him of Messiahship under whatever designation, and thus gathered up into his person all the preadumbrations of Old-Testament prophecy; and by his favorite self-designation of "Son of Man," derived from Daniel's great vision (vii. 13), continually proclaimed himself the Messiah he actually was, emphasizing in contrast with his present humilia-

tion his heavenly origin and his future glory. Moreover, in the midst of his humiliation, he exercised, so far as that was consistent with the performance of his mission, all the prerogatives of that "transcendent" or divine Messiah which he was. He taught with authority, substituting for every other sanction, his great "But I say unto you," and declaring himself greater than the greatest of God's representatives whom he had sent in all the past to visit his people. He surrounded himself as he went about preaching the Gospel of the kingdom with a miraculous nimbus, each and every miracle in which was adapted not merely to manifest the presence of a supernatural person in the midst of the people, but, as a piece of symbolical teaching, to reveal the nature of this supernatural person, and to afford a foretaste of the blessedness of his rule in the kingdom he came to found. He assumed plenary authority over the religious ordinances of the people, divinely established though they were; and exercised absolute control over the laws of nature themselves. The divine prerogative of forgiving sins he claimed for himself, the divine power of reading the heart he frankly exercised, the divine function of judge of quick and dead he attached to his own person. Asserting for himself a superhuman dignity of person, or rather a share in the ineffable Name itself, he represented himself as abiding continually even when on earth in absolute communion with God the Father, and participating by necessity of nature in the treasures of the divine knowledge and grace; announced himself the source of all divine knowledge and grace to men; and drew to himself all the religious affections, suspending the destinies of men absolutely upon their relation to his own person. Nevertheless he walked straight onward in the path of his lowly mission, and, bending even the wrath of men to his service, gave himself in his own good time and way to the death he had come to accomplish. Then, his mission performed, he rose again from the dead in the power of his deathless life; showed himself alive to chosen witnesses, that he might strengthen the hearts of his people; and ascended to the right hand of God, whence he directs the continued preparation of the kingdom until it shall please him to return for its establishment in its glorious eternal form.

It is important to fix firmly in mind the central conception of this representation. It turns upon the sacrificial death of Jesus to which the whole life leads up, and out of which all its

3. Central Conceptions. issues are drawn, and for a perpetual memorial of which he is represented as having instituted a solemn memorial feast. The divine majesty of this

Son of God; his redemptive mission to the world, in a life of humiliation and a ransoming death; the completion of his task in accordance with his purpose; his triumphant rising from the death thus vicariously endured; his assumption of sovereignty over the future development of the kingdom founded in his blood, and over the world as the theater of its development; his expected return as the consummator of the ages and the judge of all—this is the circle of ideas in which all accounts move. It is

the portrait not of a merely human life, though it includes the delineation of a complete and a completely human life. It is the portrayal of a human episode in the divine life. It is, therefore, not merely connected with supernatural occurrences, nor merely colored by supernatural features, nor merely set in a supernatural atmosphere: the supernatural is its very substance, the elimination of which would be the evaporation of the whole. The Jesus of the New Testament is not fundamentally man, however divinely gifted: he is God tabernacling for a while among men, with heaven lying about him not merely in his infancy, but throughout all the days of his flesh.

III. Attempts to Naturalize the Portrait of Jesus: The intense supernaturalism of this portraiture is, of course, an offense to our anti-supernaturalistic age. It is only what was to be expected, therefore, that throughout the last century and a half a long series of scholars, imbued with the anti-supernaturalistic instinct of the time, have assumed the task of desupernaturalizing it. Great difficulty has been experienced, however, in the attempt to construct a historical sieve which will strain out miracles and yet let Jesus through; for Jesus is himself the greatest miracle of them all. Accordingly in the end of the day there is a growing disposition, as if in despair of accomplishing this feat, boldly to construct the sieve so as to strain out Jesus too; to take refuge in the counsel of desperation which affirms that there never was such a person as Jesus, that Christianity had no founder, and that not merely the portrait of Jesus, but Jesus himself, is a pure projection of later ideals into the past. The main stream of assault still addresses itself, however, to the attempt to eliminate not Jesus himself, but the Jesus of the evangelists, and to substitute for him a desupernaturalized Jesus.

The instruments which have been relied on to effect this result may be called, no doubt with some but not misleading inexactitude, literary and historical criticism. The attempt has been made to track out the process by which the present witnessing documents have come into existence, to show them gathering accretions in this process, and to sift out the

sources from which they are drawn; and then to make appeal to these sources as the only real witnesses. And the attempt has been made to go behind the whole written record, operating either immediately upon the documents as they now exist, or ultimately upon the sources which literary criticism has sifted out from them, with a view to reaching a more primitive and presumably truer conception of Jesus than that which has obtained record in the writings of his followers. The occasion for resort to this latter method of research is the failure of the former to secure the results aimed at. For, when, at the dictation of anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions, John is set aside in favor of the Synoptics, and then the Synoptics are set aside in favor of Mark, conceived as the representative of "the narrative source" (by the side of which must be placed—

though this is not always remembered—the second source of “Sayings of Jesus,” which underlies so much of Matthew and Luke; and also—though this is even more commonly forgotten—whatever other sources either Matthew or Luke has drawn upon for material), it still appears that no progress whatever has been made in eliminating the divine Jesus and his supernatural accompaniment of mighty works—although, chronologically speaking, the very beginning of Christianity has been reached. It is necessary, accordingly, if there is not to be acknowledged a divine Christ with a supernatural history, to get behind the whole literary tradition. Working on Mark, therefore, taken as the original Gospel, an attempt must be made to distinguish between the traditional element which he incorporates into his narrative and the dogmatic element which he (as the mouthpiece of the Christian community) contributes to it. Or, working on the “Sayings,” discrimination must first be made between the narrative element (assumed to be colored by the thought of the Christian community) and the reportorial element (which may repeat real sayings of Jesus); and then, within the reportorial element, all that is too lofty for the naturalistic Jesus must be trimmed down until it fits in with his simply human character. Or, working on the Gospels as they

stand, inquisition must be made for
2. Methods statements of fact concerning Jesus or
of His- for sayings of his, which, taken out of
torical the context in which the evangelists
Criticism. have placed them and cleansed from
the coloring given by them, may be
made to seem inconsistent with “the worship of
Jesus” which characterizes these documents; and
on the narrower basis thus secured there is
built up a new portrait of Jesus, contradictory
to that which the evangelists have drawn.

The precariousness of these proceedings, or rather, frankly, their violence, is glaringly evident. In the processes of such criticism it is pure subjectivity which rules, and the investigator gets out as results only what he puts in as premises. And even when the desired result has thus been wrested from the unwilling documents, he discovers that he has only brought himself into the most extreme historical embarrassment. By thus desupernaturalizing Jesus he leaves primitive Christianity and its supernatural Jesus wholly without historical basis or justification. The naturalizing historian has therefore at once to address himself to supplying some account of the immediate universal as-

cription to Jesus by his followers of
3. Its Em- qualities which he did not possess and
barrass- to which he laid no claim; and that
ment. with such force and persistence of con-
viction as totally to supersede from the very begin-
ning with their perverted version of the facts the
actual reality of things. It admits of no doubt,
and it is not doubted, that supernaturalistic Chris-
tianity is the only historical Christianity. It is
agreed on all hands that the very first followers
of Jesus ascribed to him a supernatural character.
It is even allowed that it is precisely by virtue of
its supernaturalistic elements that Christianity has

made its way in the world. It is freely admitted that it was by the force of its enthusiastic proclamation of the divine Christ, who could not be holden of death but burst the bonds of the grave, that Christianity conquered the world to itself. What account shall be given of all this? There is presented a problem here, which is insoluble on the naturalistic hypothesis. The old mythical theory fails because it requires time, and no time is at its disposal; the primitive Christian community believed in the divine Christ. The new “history-of-religions” theory fails because it can not discover the elements of that “Christianity before Christ” which it must posit, either remotely in the Babylonian inheritance of the East, or close by in the prevalent Messianic conceptions of contemporary Judaism. Nothing is available but the postulation of pure fanaticism in Jesus’ first followers, which finds it convenient not to proceed beyond the general suggestion that there is no telling what fanaticism may not invent. The plain fact is that the supernatural Jesus is needed to account for the supernaturalistic Christianity which is grounded in him. Or—if this supernaturalistic Christianity does not need a supernatural Jesus to account for it, it is hard to see why any Jesus at all need be postulated. Naturalistic criticism thus overreaches itself and is caught up suddenly by the discovery that in abolishing the supernatural Jesus it has abolished Jesus altogether, since this supernatural Jesus is the only Jesus which enters as a factor into the historical development. It is the desupernaturalized Jesus which is the mythical Jesus, who never had any existence, the postulation of the existence of whom explains nothing and leaves the whole historical development hanging in the air.

It is instructive to observe the lines of development of the naturalistic reconstruction of the Jesus of the evangelists through the century and a half of its evolution. The normal task which the student of the life of Jesus sets himself is to penetrate into the spirit of the transmission so far as that transmission approves itself to him

4. Its His- as trustworthy, to realize with exact-
torical ness and vividness the portrait of Jesus
Develop- conveyed by it, and to reproduce that
ment. portrait in an accurate and vital por-
trayal. The naturalistic reconstructors, on the other hand, engage themselves in an effort to substitute for the Jesus of the transmission another Jesus of their own, a Jesus who will seem “natural” to them, and will work in “naturally” with their naturalistic world-view. In the first instance it was the miracles of Jesus which they set themselves to eliminate, and this motive ruled their criticism from Reimarus (1694-1768), or rather, from the publication of the Wolfenbuettel Fragments (q.v.), to Strauss (1835-36). The dominant method employed—which found its culminating example in H. E. G. Paulus (1828)—was to treat the narrative as in all essentials historical, but to seek in each miraculous story a natural fact underlying it. This whole point of view was transcended by the advent of the mythical view in Strauss, who laughed it out of court. Since then miracles have been treated ever more and more

confidently as negligible quantities, and the whole strength of criticism has been increasingly expended on the reduction of the supernatural figure of Jesus to "natural" proportions. The instrument relied upon to produce this effect has been psychological analysis; the method being to rework the narrative in the interests of what is called a "comprehensible" Jesus. The whole mental life of Jesus and the entire course of his conduct have been subjected to psychological canons derived from the critics' conception of a purely human life, and nothing has been allowed to him which does not approve itself as "natural" according to this standard. The result is, of course, that the Jesus of the evangelists has been transformed into a nineteenth-century "liberal" theologian, and no conceptions or motives or actions have been allowed to him which would not be "natural" in such a one.

The inevitable reaction which seems to be now asserting itself takes two forms, both of which, while serving themselves heirs to the negative criticism of this "liberal" school, decisively reject its positive construction of the figure of Jesus. A weaker current contents itself with drawing attention to the obvious fact that such a Jesus as the "liberal" criticism yields will not account for the Christianity which actually came into being; and on this ground proclaims the "liberal" criticism bankrupt and raises the question, what need there is for assuming any Jesus at all. If the only Jesus salvable from the débris of legend is obviously not the author of the Christianity which actually came into being, why not simply recognize that Christianity came into being without any author—was just the crystallization of conceptions in solution at the time? A stronger current, scoffing at the projection of a nineteenth-century "liberal" back into the first century and calling him "Jesus," insists that "the historical Jesus" was just a Jew of his day, a peasant of Galilee with all the narrowness of a peasant's outlook and all the deficiency in culture which belonged to a Galilean countryman of the period. Above all, it insists that the real Jesus, possessed by those Messianic dreams which filled the minds of the Jewish peasantry of the time, was afflicted with the great delusion that he was himself the promised Messiah. Under the obsession of this portentous fancy he imagined that God would intervene with his almighty arm and set him on the throne of a conquering Israel; and when the event falsified this wild hope, he assuaged his bitter disappointment with the wilder promise that he would rise from death itself and come back to establish his kingdom. Thus the naturalistic criticism of a hundred and fifty years has run out into no Jesus at all, or worse than no Jesus, a fanatic or even a paranoiac. The "liberal" criticism which has had it so long its own way is called sharply to its defense against the fruit of its own loins. In the process of this defense it wavers before the assault and incorporates more or less of the new conception of Jesus—of the "consistently eschatological" Jesus—into its fabric. Or it stands in its tracks and weakly protests that Jesus' figure must be conceived as

greatly as possible, so only it be kept strictly within the limits of a mere human being. Or it develops an apologetic argument which, given its full validity and effect, would undo all its painfully worked-out negative results and lead back to the Jesus of the evangelists as the true "historical Jesus."

It has been remarked above that the portrait of Jesus drawn in the sources is its own credential; no man, and no body of men, can have invented this figure, consciously or unconsciously, and dramatized

5. Its Issue.

it consistently through such a varied and difficult life-history. It may be added that the Jesus of the naturalistic criticism is its own refutation. One wonders whether the "liberal" critics realize the weakness, ineffectiveness, inanity of the Jesus they offer; the pitiful inertness they attribute to him, his utter passivity under the impact of circumstance. So far from being conceivable as the mold of the ages, this Jesus is wholly molded by his own surroundings, the sport of every suggestion from without. In their preoccupation with critical details, it is possible that its authors are scarcely aware of the grossness of the reduction of the figure of Jesus they have perpetrated. But let them only turn to portray their new Jesus in a life-history, and the pitiableness of the figure they have made him smites the eye. Whatever else may be said of it, this must be said—that out of the Jesus into which the naturalistic criticism has issued—in its best or in its worst estate—the Christianity which has conquered the world could never have come.

IV. The Life of Jesus: The firmness, clearness, and even fulness with which the figure of Jesus is delineated in the sources, and the variety of activities through which it is dramatized, do not insure that the data given should suffice for drawing up a properly so-called "life of Jesus." The data in the sources are practically confined to

1. In What Sense a "Life" Imposable.

the brief period of Jesus' public work. Only a single incident is recorded from his earlier life, and that is taken from his boyhood. So large a portion of the actual narrative, moreover, is occupied with his death that it might even be said—the more that the whole narrative also leads up to the death as the life's culmination—that little has been preserved concerning Jesus but the circumstances which accompanied his birth and the circumstances which led up to and accompanied his death. The incidents which the narrators record, again, are not recorded with a biographical intent, and are not selected for their biographical significance, or ordered so as to present a biographical result: in the case of each evangelist they serve a particular purpose which may employ biographical details, but is not itself a biographical end. In other words the Gospels are not formal biographies but biographical arguments—a circumstance which does not affect the historicity of the incidents they select for record, but does affect the selection and ordering of these incidents. Mark has in view to show that this great religious movement in which he himself had a part had its beginnings in a divine interpo-

sition; Matthew, that this divine interposition was in fulfillment of the promises made to Israel; Luke, that it had as its end the redemption of the world; John, that the agent in it was none other than the Son of God himself. In the enforcement and illustration of their several themes each records a wealth of biographical details. But it does not follow that these details, when brought together and arranged in their chronological sequence, or even in their genetic order, will supply an adequate biography. The attempt to work them up into a biography is met, moreover, by a great initial difficulty. Every biographer takes his position, as it were, above his subject, who must live his life over again in his biographer's mind; it is of the very essence of the biographer's work thoroughly to understand his subject and to depict him as he understands him. What, then, if the subject of the biography be above the comprehension of his biographer? Obviously, in that case, a certain reduction can scarcely be avoided. This in an instance like the present, where the subject is a superhuman being, is the same as to say that a greater or lesser measure of rationalization, "naturalization," inevitably takes place. A true biography of a God-man, a biography which depicts his life from within, untangling the complex of motives which moved him, and explaining his conduct by reference to the internal springs of action, is in the nature of the case an impossibility for men. Human beings can explain only on the basis of their own experiences and mental processes; and so explaining they instinctively explain away what transcends their experiences and confounds their mental processes. Seeking to portray the life of Jesus as natural, they naturalize it, that is, reduce it to correspondence with their own nature. Every attempt to work out a life of Christ must therefore face not only the insufficiency of the data, but the perennial danger of falsifying the data by an instinctive naturalization of them. If, however, the expectation of attaining a "psychological" biography of Jesus must be renounced, and even a complete external life can not be pieced together from the fragmentary communications of the sources, a clear and consistent view of the course of the public ministry of Jesus can still be derived from them. The consecution of the events can be set forth, their causal relations established, and their historical development explicated. To do this is certainly in a modified sense to outline "the life of Jesus," and to do this proves by its results to be eminently worth while.

A series of synchronisms with secular history indicated by Luke, whose historical interest seems

2. Framework of the "Life."

more alert than that of the other evangelists, gives the needed information for placing such a "life" in its right historical relations. The chronological framework for the "life" itself is supplied by the succession of annual feasts which are recorded by John as occurring during Jesus' public ministry. Into this framework the data furnished by the other Gospels—which are not without corroborative suggestions of order, season of occurrence, and relations—fit readily; and when so arranged yield so self-consistent and rationally de-

veloping a history as to add a strong corroboration of its trustworthiness. Differences of opinion respecting the details of arrangement of course remain possible; and these differences are not always small and not always without historical significance. But they do not affect the general outline or the main drift of the history, and on most points, even those of minor importance, a tolerable agreement exists. Thus, for example, it is all but universally allowed that Jesus was born c. 5 or 6 B.C. (year of Rome 748 or 749), and it is an erratic judgment indeed which would fix on any other year than 29 or 30 A.D. for his crucifixion. On the date of his baptism—which determines the duration of his public ministry—more difference is possible; but it is quite generally agreed that it took place late in 26 A.D. or early in 27. It is only by excluding the testimony of John that a duration of less than between two and three years can be assigned to the public ministry; and then only by subjecting the Synoptical narrative to considerable pressure. The probabilities seem strongly in favor of extending it to three years and some months. The decision between a duration of two years and some months and a duration of three years and some months depends on the determination of the two questions of where in the narrative of John the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Matt. iv. 12) is to be placed, and what the unnamed feast is which is mentioned in John v. 1. On the former of these questions opinion varies only between John iv. 1-3 and John v. 1. On the latter a great variety of opinions exists: some think of Passover, others of Purim or Pentecost, or of Trumpets or Tabernacles, or even of the day of Atonement. On the whole, the evidence seems decisively preponderant for placing the imprisonment of the Baptist at John iv. 1-3, and for identifying the feast of John v. 1 with Passover. In that case, the public ministry of Jesus covered about three years and a third, and it is probably not far wrong to assign to it the period lying between the latter part of 26 A.D. and the Passover of 30 A.D.*

The material supplied by the Gospel narrative distributes itself naturally under the heads of (1) the preparation, (2) the ministry, and (3) the consummation. For the first twelve or thirteen years of Jesus' life nothing is

3. Outline of the "Life."

recorded except the striking circumstances connected with his birth, and a general statement of his remarkable growth. Similarly for his youth, about seventeen years and a half, there is recorded only the single incident, at its beginning, of his conversation with the doctors in the temple. Anything like continuous narrative begins only with the public ministry, in, say, December, 26 A.D. This narrative falls naturally into four parts which may perhaps be distinguished as

* Ramsay, Sanday, and Turner prefer 29 A.D. for the date of the crucifixion. Turner's dates are: birth, 7-6 B.C.; baptism, 26 A.D.; ministry, between two and three years; death, 29 A.D. Sanday's dates are: birth, —; baptism, late 26 A.D.; ministry, two and a half years; death, 29 A.D. Ramsay's dates are: birth, autumn, 6 B.C.; baptism, early in 26 A.D.; ministry, three years and some months; death, 29 A.D.

(a) the beginning of the Gospel, forty days, from December, 26 to February, 27; (b) the Judean ministry, covering about ten months, from Feb., 27 to Dec., 27; (c) the Galilean ministry, covering about twenty-two months, from Dec., 27 to Sept., 29; (d) the last journeys to Jerusalem, covering some six months, from Sept., 29 to the Passover of (Apr.) 30. The events of this final Passover season, the narrative of which becomes so detailed and precise that the occurrences from day to day are noted, constitute, along with their sequences, what is here called "the consummation." They include the events which led up to the crucifixion of Jesus, the crucifixion itself, and the manifestations which he gave of himself after his death up to his ascension. So preponderating was the interest which the reporters took in this portion of the "life of Christ," that is to say, in his death and resurrection, that about a third of their whole narrative is devoted to it. The ministry which leads up to it is also, however, full of incident. What is here called "the beginning of the Gospel" gives, no doubt, only the accounts of Jesus' baptism and temptation. Only meager information is given also, and that by John alone, of the occurrences of the first ten months after his public appearance, the scene of which lay mainly in Judea. With the beginning of the ministry in Galilee, however, with which alone the Synoptic Gospels concern themselves, incidents become numerous. Capernaum now becomes Jesus' home for almost two full years; and no less than eight periods of sojourn there with intervening circuits going out from it as a center can be traced. When the object of this ministry had been accomplished Jesus finally withdraws from Galilee and addresses himself to the preparation of his followers for the death he had come into the world to accomplish; and this he then brings about in the manner which best subserves his purpose.

Into the substance of Jesus' ministry it is not possible to enter here. Let it only be observed that it is properly called a ministry. He himself testified that he came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and he added that this ministry was fulfilled in his giving his life as a ransom for many. In other words, the main object of his work was to lay the foundations of the kingdom of God in his blood. Subsidiary to this was his purpose to make vitally known to men the true nature of the kingdom of God, to prepare the way for its advent in their hearts, and above all, to attach them by faith to his person as the founder and consummator of the kingdom. His ministry involved, therefore, a constant presentation of himself to the people as the promised One, in and by whom the kingdom of God was to be established, a steady "campaign of instruction" as to the nature of the kingdom which he came to found, and a watchful control of the forces which were making for his destruction, until, his work of preparation being ended, he was ready to complete it by offering himself up. The progress of his ministry is governed by the interplay of these motives. It has been broadly distributed into a year of obscurity, a year of popular favor, and a year of opposition; and if

these designations are understood to have only a relative applicability, they may be accepted as generally describing from the outside the development of the ministry. Beginning first in Judea Jesus spent some ten months in attaching to himself his first disciples, and with apparent fruitlessness proclaiming the kingdom at the center of national life. Then, moving north to Galilee, he quickly won the ear of the people and carried them to the height of their present receptivity; whereupon, breaking from them, he devoted himself to the more precise instruction of the chosen band he had gathered about him to be the nucleus of his Church. The Galilean ministry thus divides into two parts, marked respectively by more popular and more intimate teaching. The line of division falls at the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which, as marking a crisis in the ministry, is recorded by all four evangelists, and is the only miracle which has received this fourfold record. Prior to this point, Jesus' work had been one of gathering disciples; subsequently to it, it was a work of instructing and sifting the disciples whom he had gathered. The end of the Galilean ministry is marked by the confession of Peter and the transfiguration, and after it nothing remained but the preparation of the chosen disciples for the death, which was to close his work; and the consummation of his mission in his death and rising again.

The instruments by which Jesus carried out his ministry were two, teaching and miracles. In both alike he manifested his deity. Wherever he went the supernatural was present in word and deed. His teaching was with authority. In its insight and foresight it was as supernatural as the miracles themselves; the hearts of men and the future lay as open before him as the forces of nature lay under his control; all that the Father knows he knew also, and he alone was the channel of the revelation of it to men. The power of his "But I say unto you" was as manifest as that of his compelling "Arise and walk." The theme of his teaching was the kingdom of God and himself as its divine founder and king. Its form ran all the way from crisp gnomic sayings and brief comparisons to elaborate parables and profound spiritual discussions in which the deep things of God are laid bare in simple, searching words. The purport of his miracles was that the kingdom of God was already present in its King. Their number is perhaps usually greatly underestimated. It is true that only about thirty or forty are actually recorded. But these are recorded only as specimens, and as such they represent all classes. Miracles of healing form the preponderant class; but there are also exorcisms, nature-miracles, raisings of the dead. Besides these recorded miracles, however, there are frequent general statements of abounding miraculous manifestations. For a time disease and death must have been almost banished from the land. The country was thoroughly aroused and filled with wonder. In the midst of this universal excitement—when the people were ready to take him by force and make him king—he withdrew himself from them, and throwing his

5. Instruments of the Ministry.

4. The Public Ministry.

circuits far afield, beyond the bruit and uproar, addressed himself to preparing his chosen companions for his great sacrifice—first leading them in the so-called "Later Galilean ministry" (from the feeding of the 5,000 to the confession at Cæsarea Philippi) to a better apprehension of the majesty of his person as the Son of God, and of the character of the kingdom he came to found, as consisting not in meat and drink but in righteousness; and then, in the so-called "Perean ministry" (from the confession at Cæsarea Philippi to the final arrival at Jerusalem) specifically preparing them for his death and resurrection. Thus he walked straightforward in the path he had chosen, and his choice of which is already made clear in the account of his temptation, set at the beginning of his public career; and in his own good time and way—in the end forcing the hand of his opponents to secure that he should die at the Passover—shed his blood as the blood of the new covenant sacrifice for the remission of sins. Having power thus to lay down his life, he had power also to take it again, and in due time he rose again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the majesty on high, leaving behind him his promise to come again in his glory, to perfect the kingdom he had inaugurated.

It is appropriate that this miraculous life should be set between the great marvels of the virgin-

6. The Virgin-Birth; the Resurrection.

birth and the resurrection and ascension. These can appear strange only when the intervening life is looked upon as that of a merely human being, endowed, no doubt, not only with unusual qualities, but also with the unusual favor of God, yet after all nothing more than human and therefore presumably entering the world like other human beings, and at the end paying the universal debt of human nature. From the standpoint of the evangelical writers, and of the entirety of primitive Christianity, which looked upon Jesus not as a merely human being but as God himself come into the world on a mission of mercy that involved the humiliation of a human life and death, it would be this assumed community with common humanity in mode of entrance into and exit from the earthly life which would seem strange and incredible. The entrance of the Lord of Glory into the world could not but be supernatural; his exit from the world, after the work which he had undertaken had been performed, could not fail to bear the stamp of triumph. There is no reason for doubting the trustworthiness of the narratives at these points, beyond the anti-supernaturalistic instinct which strives consciously or unconsciously to naturalize the whole evangelical narrative. The "infancy chapters" of Luke are demonstrably from Luke's own hand, bear evident traces of having been derived from trustworthy sources of information, and possess all the authority which attaches to the communications of a historian who evinces himself sober, careful, and exact, by every historical test. The parallel chapters of Matthew, while obviously independent of those of Luke—recording in common with them not a single incident beyond the bare fact of the virgin-birth—are thoroughly at one with them in

the main fact, and in the incidents they record fit with remarkable completeness into the interstices of Luke's narrative. Similarly, the narratives of the resurrection, full of diversity in details as they are, and raising repeated puzzling questions of order and arrangement, yet not only bear consentient testimony to all the main facts, but fit into one another so as to create a consistent narrative—which has moreover the support of the contemporary testimony of Paul. The persistent attempts to explain away the facts so witnessed or to substitute for the account which the New Testament writers give of them some more plausible explanation, as the naturalistic mind estimates plausibility, are all wrecked on the directness, precision, and copiousness of the testimony; and on the great effects which have flowed from this fact in the revolution wrought in the minds and lives of the apostles themselves, and in the revolution wrought through their preaching of the resurrection in the life and history of the world. The entire history of the world for 2,000 years is the warranty of the reality of the resurrection of Christ, by which the forces were let loose which have created it. "Unique spiritual effects," it has been remarked, with great reasonableness, "require a unique spiritual cause; and we shall never understand the full significance of the cause, if we begin by denying or minimizing its uniqueness."

For details see the separate articles on the several distinct topics, e.g., CHRISTOLOGY; GOSPELS; MIRACLES; PARABLES; RESURRECTION; VIRGIN-BIRTH.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

B. I. Limitation of the Field: The means of writing a satisfactory life of Christ have never existed. From the outset what the Church attempted was no more than the story of Jesus covering a twelvemonth. Even in this its object was not historical but apologetic. There exists a bare mention by a few secular writers of 110–120 A.D. of the origin of the obnoxious "Christians." Pliny, the earliest (112 A.D.), merely describes the sect. Tacitus, an accurate historian, c. 115 A.D., dates its rise from the execution of "Christus" by Pilate, procurator of Judea under Tiberius. Secular writers have no more to tell. They would have been compelled to refer inquirers to the tradition preserved by the sect itself. Now even the latest of our four Gospels can be traced in some form by its use in orthodox, heretical, and even anti-Christian writers, to about the same period; so that the whole question of the historical investigator resolves itself into a valuation and comparison of the writings preserved by the Church itself, in the interest of its own defense and edification.

II. The Sources: The story of Jesus included what was needful for the uses of the Church. Fortunately the severest tests known to the science of literary and historical criticism leave the Church in possession of two groups of writings which circulated in Christian conventicles 50–100 A.D. These are (1) apostolic letters, homilies and "prophecies," writings directly addressed to the edification of particular churches; and (2) etiological narratives, purporting to give account of Christian origins.