VIVIAN PHELIPS

THE CHURCHES AND MODERN THOUGHT

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The Churches and Modern Thought / An inquiry into the grounds of unbelief and an appeal for candour:

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Philip Vivian
The Churches and Modern Thought / An inquiry into the grounds of unbelief and an appeal for candour

TO MY WIFE AND CHILDREN

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

What does a man seek when he examines his religious creed? To this question Canon Liddon replies as follows:—"He seeks intellectual satisfaction and moral support. His intellect asks for reliable information upon certain subjects of the most momentous importance. How does he come here? Whither is he going? What is the purpose and drift of the various forms of existence around him? Above all, what is the nature, what are the attributes and dispositions, of that Being to whom the highest yearnings of his inmost self constantly point as the true object of his existence? In asking that the answers to these questions shall be definite, that what is certain shall be affirmed as certain, what is doubtful as doubtful, what is false as false, he is only asking that his religious information shall be presented in as clear and practical a shape as his information on other subjects. In no department of human knowledge is haziness deemed a merit; by nothing is an educated mind more distinguished than by a resolute effort to mark the exact frontiers of its knowledge and its ignorance; to hesitate only when hesitation is necessary; to despair of knowledge only when knowledge is ascertainably out of reach. Surely on the highest and most momentous of all subjects this same precision may be asked for with reverence and in reason; surely the human mind is not bound to forget its noblest instincts when it approaches the throne and presence of

its Maker?" (*Some Elements of Religion*, p. 24).

Again, in his New Year's message for 1905, the Archbishop of Canterbury condemns indifference to truth as a vice, and "drifting along the current of popular opinion" as a sin. He invites and persuades us to use "the sadly-neglected powers and privileges of rational thought and common sense."

The duty of thinking, therefore, is now recognised by the Church—it was not formerly. But what will be the result of this thinking? In his book, *The Hearts of Men*, Mr. Fielding tells us that "no man has ever sat down calmly unbiassed to reason out his religion, and not ended by rejecting it." Mr. Fielding adds: "The great men, who have been always religious, do not invalidate what I say.... There is no assumption more fallacious than that, because a man is a keen reasoner on one subject, he is also on another. Men who are strictly religious, who believe in their faith, whatever their faith may be, consider it above proof, beyond argument.... It is emotion, not reason; feeling, not induction." (*The Hearts of Men*, pp. 142–3.)

Does not this deep and sympathetic writer furnish us with a true picture of men's hearts? What if, after exercising their privileges of rational thought and common sense, the majority of men find that Christianity no longer gives them either intellectual satisfaction or moral support? What if they finally arrive at the conclusion that Christianity and all supernatural beliefs are but the survival of primitive superstitions which can no longer bear the light of modern knowledge? These are the grave questions

which now confront us.

A man may enter, and generally does enter, upon his inquiry biassed in favour of religious belief of some kind. He approaches the subject in a reverent frame of mind. In his private prayers to his God he does not neglect to ask for heavenly guidance. He evinces precisely the spirit which a divine would consider becoming. But as his inquiry proceeds there comes a time when his religious bias disappears—when he can no longer feel what he could honestly call reverence. He discovers that what he thought was known, and had actually been revealed, is unknown. How can he believe in and worship the Unknown? More than ever he feels his own insignificance and ignorance; but the feeling thus excited, while akin to awe, is divested of reverence. Pursuing his search far enough, he succeeds in extricating himself from a quagmire of demonstrably false superstitions. Finally he reaches solid ground, and builds his life upon it.

Unfortunately, many never pursue their inquiry up to this stage; they become fearful, or they give it up as a hopeless entanglement, or they find they have not the requisite leisure. Perhaps, therefore, the information gained by one of the more fortunate may be of some little service to others. It will be my endeavour to set forth in this book not only the destructive, but also the constructive, results of a search for truth.

P. V.

January, 1906.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

"This book," writes one of its clerical critics,[1] "is evidently the honest, outspoken opinion of one who, having been brought up in an unquestioning acceptance of the orthodox doctrines of Christianity, has gradually drifted into the extreme of Rationalism." Up to a certain point my friend is right. I was indeed brought up in an unquestioning acceptance of the orthodox teachings of Christianity; but, while my conversion to Rationalism has certainly been gradual, I may fairly claim that the process has been something very different from merely drifting. Long and careful study, the reluctant abandonment of a cherished belief, the adoption of an attitude which is unpopular and which distresses many who are near and dear to me, the practical application of the principles of Rationalism to daily life, involving as it does the serious step of bringing up my children in strict accordance with my firm convictions—these are surely not the ways of one who has permitted himself to drift. A man might —he often does—drift into indifferentism, or, now that theology is so liberal and heterodoxy so rife, into latitudinarianism, but hardly into "the extreme of Rationalism."

I take this opportunity of cordially thanking all who have assisted me, and specially I have to thank Mr. Joseph McCabe

[1] In the June (1906) number of *Review of Theology and Philosophy*, edited by Professor Allan Menzies, D.D.

and Dr. H. D. R. Kingston for reading the MS. and the proofs in all their stages, and for pointing out verbal inaccuracies and suggesting improvements both in the matter and in the manner of presenting it. I am also much indebted to a lady, who does not wish her name to appear, for lightening the task of proof correction.

P. V.

January, 1907.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

The present edition consists of 10,000 copies, bringing the total issue to 31,000. Apart from a few alterations in the chapter dealing with ancient beliefs, the work is unchanged.

P. V.

April, 1911.

THE SITUATION
Chapter I.
THE GRAVITY OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

§ 1. The Truth of the Matter

Before entering upon an inquiry into religious unbelief, we need to form a correct estimate of its prevalence. If, as many would have us think, there is nothing unusual in the present situation—if the age of faith is returning,[2] it is hardly worth while to enter upon this inquiry at all. If, on the other hand, the forces hostile to the Christian faith differ essentially from those that stirred up waves of scepticism in the past—if there is overwhelming evidence that belief among educated men is fast decaying, it is surely high time to investigate the grounds of unbelief, and to welcome the fullest discussion concerning the best means of dealing with an entirely new and extremely grave situation. It is only the shortest-sighted policy that would shelve a disagreeable question until mischief had occurred. It is better to face the facts. From every point of view, concealment regarding

[2] As the Rev. John A. Hutton attempts to show in the *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1905.

a question of such vital importance as the truth of Christianity is to be deplored; while an attitude of indifference on a subject that should be of surpassing interest to us all can only be characterised as amazing—unless, indeed, the real explanation be that men have ceased to believe.

We must, then, determine, in the first place, whether we are witnessing simply a wave of scepticism that will shortly subside again, or whether the present situation in the religious world is altogether unprecedented. The truth of the matter will best be learnt from the lips of those to whom pessimistic admissions must be peculiarly distressing, and who would therefore be the last either to raise a false alarm or to be guilty of an exaggeration. The Bishop of London has warned us[3] that "the truth of the matter really is that all over Europe a great conflict is being fought between the old faith in a supernatural revelation and a growing disbelief in it." The Bishop of Salisbury lately[4] said: "There has been revealed to us the terrible and painful fact that a great many are giving up public worship, and that a large proportion of the people of England pay little attention to religion at all." Not long ago Lord Hugh Cecil expressed[5] the same opinion in the following words: "On all sides there are signs of the

[3] In his address at the London Diocesan Conference in April, 1904.

[4] When addressing a conference of clergy and church-workers at Blandford on September 7th, 1905.

[5] In the course of one of those remarkable orations of his which always command the thoughtful attention of the House. The speech was reported in the newspapers of March 15th, 1904.

decay of the Faith. People do not go to church, or, if they go, it is for the sake of the music, or for some non-religious motive. The evidence is overwhelming that the doctrines of Christianity have passed into the region of doubt." From Dr. Horton we learn that "vast numbers of people in England to-day have forsaken the best and highest ideal of life known to them before they have found a better and higher.... While Professor Haeckel and Professor Ray Lankester do in their way offer an alternative, and present to us the solution of the great enigma according to their light, the bulk of people in our day surrender the old and tried ideal, fling it aside, assume that it is discredited, live without it, and make no serious attempt to find a better ideal."[6]

Are there not indications, moreover, everywhere in the literature of the day? The works of some of our greatest scholars are either covertly or openly agnostic. The more thoughtful of our magazines, such as the *Nineteenth Century*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Hibbert Journal*, *Independent Review*, etc., are continually publishing articles which teem with heterodoxy. The "Do We Believe?" correspondence in the *Daily Telegraph* (not to mention the more recent controversies in the *Standard*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily News*) was without precedent, and highly significant of the present state of religious unrest. In a lecture reported in the *Tablet*, Father Gerard voiced the growing feeling of apprehension when he referred to the "Do We Believe?" controversy and the "amazing success" of the Rationalist Press

[6] See Dr. Horton's letter to the *Daily News*, August 23rd, 1905.

Association as indicating a situation of "the utmost gravity, as gravely disquieting as any with which in her long career the Church has ever been confronted." Also it may be noticed that organised efforts have commenced all over England to answer inquiries concerning the truth of Christianity by means of apologetic literature and lectures. What do these inquiries portend? The reply is given in the warning of the Rev. Mark Pattison in his essay on "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England." "When an age," he says, "is found occupied in proving its creed, this is but a token that the age has ceased to have a proper belief in it."

Whichever way we turn the same spectacle confronts us. In France especially, and also in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Spain, the United States, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina (where the *men* are practically all agnostics), freethought is making rapid progress. Only in Russia, where ninety per cent. of the population are uneducated, is the growth small and confined to the "intellectuals." Never in the world's history has there been so much disbelief in the "supernatural"; and, with the advance of science and education, this disbelief appears likely to be one day almost universal. Militant Rationalism is jubilant; while the pastor of the Theistic Church[7] proclaims: "I see a battle coming. I do not, like Froude, predict that it will be fought once more, as of old, in blood and

[7] The Rev. Charles Voysey, in a sermon preached at the Theistic Church, Swallow Street, on February 5th, 1905.

tears; but I am as certain as I am of to-morrow's dawn that a mighty conflict is at hand which will revolutionise the religious thought and feeling of Christendom."

It is sheer folly for the Church to comfort herself with the reflection that this is not the first time in the history of Christianity that disbelief has manifested itself. In the early days of the Church the heretic was not in possession of the knowledge that we have since acquired. He could not support his views, as he can now, with the facts of science. At every step he could be met by arguments which he had no adequate means of refuting, and if he dared to deny the "supernatural" there was an enormous preponderance of public opinion against him. Indeed, he himself generally believed in the "supernatural," though he was sceptical of the particular evidence of it on which Christianity had been founded. Retarded by Christianity itself —or, shall we say, by its interpreters?—knowledge was unable to advance; it receded, and the clock was put back in scientific research. Darkness reigned supreme for over a thousand years. At last the dawn began to break. What was the result? The children of light suffered for their temerity; but their ideas were eventually absorbed, and beliefs were suitably reformed. Thus the Copernican system was gradually accepted, and so were the discoveries which followed, up to fifty years ago. Then, however, the established beliefs received shock after shock in rapid succession—shocks from which they do not yet show any promise of recovering. The myriads of worlds in the processes

of birth and death; the vast antiquity of the earth; the long history of man and his animal origin; the reign of natural law, and the consequent discredit of the supernatural; the suspicions aroused by the study of comparative mythology; the difficulties of "literal inspiration"; the doubt thrown by the Higher Criticism on many cherished beliefs—these and the like have shaken the very foundations of our faith, and are the cause of agnosticism among the vast majority of our leaders of thought and science.

Ecclesiastics, however, with certain notable exceptions, appear to be labouring under the delusion that a reconciliation has taken place of late between Religion and Science, and that the voice of the Higher Criticism has been hushed—at least, they are continually assuring us to this effect. They remain under this delusion for two reasons. First, because they are more or less ignorant of science and of the preponderating opinion of the scientific world concerning the truth of Christianity. Secondly, because they are lulled into a feeling of security through misconceptions regarding the attitude of the laity. There appears to be the same, or nearly the same, average of religious conformity as heretofore, and the consensus of opinion seems to be all on the side of church and chapel. Any falling off in religious fervour is attributed to sheer carelessness rather than to unbelief. From the days of Huxley until quite lately there have been no attacks upon Christianity worth mentioning. The Churches fail to realise that this religious conformity and goodwill towards the Christian faith has generally no connection whatever with a

conviction of the truth of Christianity, and that, where there is this conviction, it is usually among those who are ignorant of the chief causes for suspicion. I propose, therefore, in the first instance, to examine some of the more usual types among the laity. Obviously, in doing so I shall be omitting a great many shades of thought. I shall say very little about the opinions of the genuine believer or of the hopelessly thoughtless, and nothing of the opinions of evil-livers. My object is to set forth the types which are most likely to have been misunderstood by the clergy.

§ 2. The Attitude of the Laity

Let us commence, then, with the sceptical. *They are not inclined, for the present at least, to propagate their views.* Rightly or wrongly, they still hold the popular opinion that, while they themselves can dispense with belief, the masses cannot. All that is asked of a "cultured" man is that he keep his opinion to himself. He may be an agnostic or—whether he realises it or not—practically an atheist; but he must not think of calling himself by such ugly names. "The uneducated freethinker," our modern philosopher will say, "manifests a Philistine Voltaireanism—a spirit now disapproved by scholars and philosophers, who regard with serious consideration all the manifestations and products of human thought, from the earliest fetichism to the most recent developments of that religious tendency which appears to be a constitutional element in man." Such high thoughts, according to this philosopher, are not for the common herd, who must continue to wallow in their ignorance, feeding on husks, which, however unsuitable for his own refined digestion, will serve well enough to nourish the religious instincts of the masses.

If of a mystical turn of mind, he will tell you that Christianity, like all other religions, may be but a symbol of a great Reality; and this person, though sceptical regarding the Christian dogmas, will possibly consider himself a Christian. Or, again, he may be without any leaning towards mysticism, and merely hold that

religion, *if sincere*, is better for the mind than scepticism. "Better a belated and imperfect religion," he will say, "than none at all. The heart has its claims on our consideration as well as the intellect. Study Comte's *General View of Positivism*."

Many agnostics are just as firmly convinced as believers that their country's prosperity is bound up with the Christian belief. This is largely due to their still clinging to the Church's teaching concerning belief and morals. It is well to remember, however, that the feeling on this point of the average cultured Frenchman or Italian is quite the opposite. The measures now being taken by the French Government against the clergy are based upon the contention that the Church's influence is injurious to the State's welfare; and this feeling has reached such a pitch that Republican employees hardly dare admit their attendance at divine worship. During September, 1904, the Italian Government extended a cordial welcome to a Freethought Congress, and the proceedings were opened by the Minister of Public Instruction. But the average Englishman, be he ever so sure of the falsity of the Christian dogmas, can foresee nothing but immorality and anarchy as the result of the overthrow of Christianity. "*Cui bono?*" "*Quo vadis?*" he cries. "Leave well alone!" "It is easy enough to show that Christianity is false, but what have you to put in its place? What we want now is construction, not criticism and the flogging of a dying creed." He forgets, it seems to me, that people cannot be hoodwinked for ever, and that, as Mr. Froude tells us, the Reformation was brought about by people

refusing any longer to believe a lie. In addition to this concern for the public weal, the sceptic is influenced by motives of expediency. He is well aware of the odium he would incur should he proclaim his heterodox views concerning the popular religion. Such publicity might spoil his professional career, be the death-blow of his ambitions, cause him considerable pecuniary loss, alienate the friends he most values, and, worst of all, destroy the happiness of his home life. For these and similar reasons we find, in the case of the half-believer, that he does not care to verify his doubts, but prefers to leave his opinions vague enough to be able to call himself a broad-minded Christian. Whether half-believing or distinctly agnostic, he usually holds that very common opinion regarding women, children, and religion—that, however little store a man may set by belief, it is wise to encourage it in the women folk, and also to hand over the children to them for their religious instruction. Besides, militant agnosticism is not the fashion. It is looked upon as "bad form," or as smacking of socialism. Indifference is much the easier attitude.

Or, again, the average man is disposed to trust to the progress of science and the ultimate triumph of truth, and sees no reason why he should make any effort towards shortening the period of transition. In his contempt for the efforts of the "lowly born" and indigent secularists, he forgets that the greatest changes in the world's history have been brought about from the smallest beginnings by these very "lower orders" he affects to despise.

In our own times, was it not working men who first set in motion a revolution that will eventually reform Russia? Perhaps the commonest attitude of "the man in the street," whatever his manner of belief may be, is one of good-natured indifference —an acquiescence in things as they are. Absence of the critical spirit or of anxious-mindedness, or of both, renders it easy for him to take things as he finds them, much after the manner of his primeval ancestors. His mind will not occupy itself with aught but the present. Naturally, too, he feels very strongly that what appears to make others happy should not be disturbed. In all this he makes various questionable assumptions, which I am considering in subsequent chapters of this book.

It is unnecessary to refer to the opinions of the militant agnostic, as this type could never be accused of deceiving the Church. However, it maybe noted that Mr. Blatchford says, in the *Clarion* of February 3rd, 1905: "So far as I am concerned, I attacked religion because I believe it to be untrue, and because it seems to me to bar the way to liberty and happiness. The attack upon religion is a part of a task I have set myself." There are statesmen and other persons of influence who are as incredulous as Mr. Blatchford regarding the truth of Christianity; but they do not, apparently, hold that Christianity bars the way to liberty and happiness (I give them credit for being ruled by the highest motives), and so the Church has their support. It is a weird arrangement between Unbelief and Belief, which cannot possibly last much longer; meanwhile, it tends to confuse and delay the

answer to that gravest of questions: "Is Christianity true?"

Leaving the sceptic, let us examine another extremely common type—the man who is under the impression that he is a Christian, without either being particularly devout or having inquired at all deeply into the grounds of his faith. He is ignorant of the causes for doubt, because he has not had, or has not cared to afford, any time for such matters. I do not refer so much to the masses, who obviously have very little leisure, but to the more leisured and influential classes. Such a man's scientific education, if he ever had any, was broken off early in life. A large proportion of those all-important years of his boyhood were devoted probably to an unwilling study of the "humanities." His faith is decidedly vague, and according to his own peculiar interpretation, an adjustment between his heavenly aspirations and his earthly inclinations. It has never been thought out, and is not the result of a thorough study of its tenets. He was born and bred a Christian, and all the nicest people he knows are Christians, or he thinks they are. He is, all unconsciously, a social chameleon taking his colour from the conditions in the midst of which he happens to live. He, too, like his heterodox brother, sneers at organised Freethought in this country, because it owes its inception and conduct chiefly to poor and lowly men, forgetting that it was from such a source that the mighty creed of Christendom itself arose. He forgets that the first Christian apostles were mostly working men. If he has heard or read anything of a sceptical nature, he has never stopped to inquire

any further into it. He has no idea that the central features of the Bible have been attacked by men of the greatest learning and integrity, with the result that even the defenders of the faith ask for a reverent agnosticism as to the historical circumstances out of which, in the first instance, belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ arose.[8] Not knowing that the essentials are called in question, he sees no reason to trouble himself about mere details. It is enough for him that he feels sure that there must be some object in our existence, and that there must be a First Cause. It never occurs to him to consider whether his and the Christian conception of God can be reconciled. For him the truth of the Christian dogma is proved sufficiently by the unsatisfying nature of materialism. Has he not been taught that he must have faith, and that faith is a feeling of trust divinely implanted, and not needing to be fed on evidences? Is not Christianity the civilising agent of the world, and the origin of all morality and all good works? Does not scepticism lead to atheism? If thought only leads to disbelief in God, he for one is not going to think.

In addition to the now fast dwindling band of sincere and thoughtful Christians there are, of course, many professing religionists who do think a little, a very little, on religious subjects; but the bulk of the male element are absolutely indifferent to the question of religion at all. The average subaltern is as good a sample of the latter type as any other. Speak to him about religion, and he is unutterably bored. A certain amount of

[8] See pp. 63–4.

church-going forms part of his ordinary round of duties. This is the sum-total of his "religious experiences." For the rest, religion, or any question as to its truth in this or that particular, is, so far as he is concerned, a matter of supreme indifference.

People are usually (though less so now perhaps than formerly) so careful to keep their thoughts about religion to themselves that it is no wonder the Church is ignorant of the extent to which heterodoxy is rife. The colossal hypocrisy which speaks of "the reserve of Englishmen about their religion" needs exposure. Why should there be this dislike to talk upon religion—a religion which, if true, should make all worldly affairs sink into infinitesimal insignificance? Is it from a spirit of reverence, or is it not rather because the interpretations of God's alleged revelation differ so widely that people neither wish to "give themselves away" by stating their own interpretations, nor to hear the distasteful interpretations of others? If they were perfectly straightforward, they would run the danger both of hurting the feelings and falling in the estimation of their friends.

Sometimes there is a dread of appearing ridiculous, sometimes a dislike of appearing to cant. Yet surely, if we believe what we profess, there is nothing to be ashamed of, and we ought openly to testify to our faith. I can speak from personal experience when I say that the believing heathen of India, whether Hindoos, Mussulmans, or Parsees, have no qualms on this score. They see no necessity for "reserve" in the profession of their faith. They testify to it openly at all times and in all places.

It forms, as it ought, an integral part of their every-day life.

This so-called "reserve" is also occasioned by the inability to live up to the ethical ideals demanded by our creed. Men wish neither to be hypocrites nor to be thought hypocrites. It is an inherent fault in Christian ethics that certain portions are not practicable. They are too much dominated by a belief in the near approach of the end of the world. "If we mechanically applied, as rules of conduct, Christ's ideals of temper, we are certain, from common sense, that universal pauperism, lawlessness, and national extinction would follow."[9] Then, again, there is too much of the presumption that all men have an equal chance in the battle against temptations, and too little acknowledgment of the part played by heredity and environment; and thus the root of the evil is overlooked. Also, if we have a strong "conviction of sin," which, according to our spiritual advisers, is essential, and if we cannot hope to shake off the burden of sin by our own unaided endeavours, our moral fibre is liable to be weakened, and we may cease to cultivate the all-important qualities of self-reliance and self-respect. Emerson's advice is far healthier: "The less we have to do with our sins the better."

Whatever the many causes of this "proud reserve" may be, one of the consequences is that we remain in ignorance of our neighbour's beliefs. If people discussed religious matters among themselves, they would make some surprising discoveries. The

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[9] Quoted from *What it is to be a Christian*, a pamphlet written by the Ven. J. M. Wilson, D.D.

agnostic would find that "believers" are not the hypocrites he sometimes puts them down to be, for he would learn, to his surprise, that they are supremely ignorant of much that he assumed they would be sure to know. The believer would find that there are many more agnostics than he had ever dreamt there were, and he would also learn that their reason for abandoning belief was of a very different nature from what he had supposed.

When agnostics read the lessons in church, as they frequently do, and when, with their aid and the aid of others in various stages of heterodoxy, congregations in church and chapel on Sunday only amount to twenty-two per cent.[10] of the population, and these chiefly women,[11] what must not be the sum-total of agnosticism, heterodoxy, and indifference among *men* in this most Christian of nations? The extent of unavowed or unconscious scepticism far exceeds that which is openly avowed or consciously felt. Laxity in keeping the Sabbath is now notoriously on the increase. Nothing can be more sensible than that people who have slaved for six days in the atmosphere

[10] Eighteen per cent. was the figure given by Bishop Ingram, speaking of "Londoners," in his speech at the annual meeting of the Bishop of London's Fund in 1904; but, according to the strict results of the census, the figure for London is twenty-two or twenty-three per cent. of the total population.

[11] As Mr. Fielding remarks in his book, *The Hearts of Men* (pp. 217–8): "To one coming to Europe after years in the East and visiting churches, nothing is more striking than the enormous preponderance of women there. It is immaterial whether the church be in England or France, whether it be Anglican or Roman Catholic or Dissenter. The result is always the same—women outnumber the men as two to one, as three to one, sometimes as ten to one."

of the office, etc., should go off for their "week end's" golf, etc.; but for the clergy to attribute the consequent falling-off in church attendance solely to the extra facilities of travel tempting people to carelessness about religion is to adopt the method of the proverbial ostrich in the desert at the approach of a dreaded enemy. Unbelief and the advance of rationalism are really at the bottom of this new development; for all the carelessness, all the temptations in the world, would not persuade sane people to throw away their claims to eternal happiness by neglecting to worship their God—a God that *demands* this worship. How little do the clergy really know, or attempt to know, of the beliefs of the cultured portion of their congregations! As I write these words I receive, curiously enough, a letter which shows how unusual it is for the pastor to question his flock. The writer of the letter, a lady, says: "Isn't Mr. X (the rector of a certain country parish) a *gauche* man? Mr. Z (an influential parishioner) didn't go to Holy Communion, and so Mr. X asked him if he had been confirmed. Since then Mr. Z goes elsewhere to church." Now, personally, I admire X's courage. What he did would not be done by the ordinary run of parsons. If they did that sort of thing, they would soon become exceedingly unpopular in the neighbourhood, and lose most of their fashionable and opulent congregation. But they would begin to learn the true state of affairs. They would learn, for instance, that some of the most regular and respectable of the male portion of their congregations were agnostic or heterodox, and that their attendance at divine

worship was merely to set a good example to the "lower orders," or to please their women-folk, or for some cause or other utterly unconnected with any desire to worship or any belief in the efficacy of so doing. There is doubtless a great deal to be said in favour of a spirit of toleration which inculcates non-interference with a man's belief; but it all helps to hide the true state of affairs, and is surely overdone when it encourages men to attend a service where they are acting a part and making solemn declarations untruthfully.

There is one more type of person I should include among the many strange buttresses of the Church—namely, the person who refuses point blank to be enlightened. The Churches have been lulled into a sense of security by many causes, but chief among them, perhaps, there stands out the fact that people not only will not take the trouble to inquire into the grounds of their faith, but consider that it would be positively wicked to do any such thing. To such I can only repeat the words of the Rev. J. W. Diggle, now Bishop of Carlisle. "There are," he says, "perhaps, few things, and certainly nothing of similar moment, about which men give themselves so little trouble, and take such little pains, as the ascertainment, by strict examination, of the foundations and the evidences of their religion. Hence so many religious persons are like children who have not learned things accurately. They are fearful of being questioned, and are out of temper in an examination." However, as an excuse for this timidity—for it is often nothing else—it must be conceded that

a deep study of the evidences does, more often than not, end in agnosticism. This gives rise to the serious question: "If it is God who assists us to remain staunch to our creed, why does He so often forsake us, just when we are trying to lead more thoughtful lives and, consequently, study more deeply the faith we profess?" On the one hand, we find that modern agnosticism is not the result of carelessness, but of thoughtfulness. On the other hand, we observe that the Church numbers among some of its firmest adherents not only those who are ignorant through circumstances over which they have no control, or through thoughtlessness, but also those who remain ignorant through fear to inquire.

§ 3. Christianity and Science not Reconciled

Has the Church, then, been deceived in her impression that a reconciliation has taken place between Christianity and Science? Most certainly. I grant that to some extent there exists a patched-up peace. The modern apologist no longer adopts the unwise course of maintaining every strange phenomenon to be miraculous as long as it is unexplained, whereby each advance of physical science used necessarily to be hostile to theology. He even goes further, and says that the Resurrection and all the miracles may be only the manifestation of some law which is as yet beyond the analysis of our short experience. But, as I shall show later on, the new interpretations tone down hostility in one respect only to raise fresh and greater difficulties in another.

The manner in which misunderstandings occur on the subject of a reconciliation is well seen when we look into one of the Church's most popular arguments in its favour—the appeal to the pronouncement by Lord Kelvin in support of a Creative Power. Lord Kelvin assured the world that modern biologists were "coming to the belief in the existence of a vital principle."[12] That this pronouncement raised a perfect storm of protest in the world

[12] As a matter of fact, no distinguished leader among modern biologists has come to any such conclusion. People are apt to forget that, while Lord Kelvin is undoubtedly one of the most distinguished living physicists, he is not himself a biologist.

of science is wholly ignored by the world of religion. Suppose, however, that the consensus of opinion had been otherwise, what conclusion could we draw? We simply obtain an argument for some form of Theism. The probability of the existence of a Creative Power would not in itself prove the truth of the Christian dogmas, although it would be a very necessary link in the chain of evidence. It is extremely doubtful whether any scientist or philosopher really holds the doctrine of a personal God, certainly not of the anthropomorphic God of Christianity. Let us take Sir Oliver Lodge, for example. He is continually being held up to us by the Church as an instance of a man of science who finds himself able to believe in the supernatural; but does the Church claim him as one of her fold? In the *Hibbert Journal* for April, 1904, he makes out a strong case for the entire re-interpretation of the Christian doctrine, in which, among other dogmas, the Atonement and Virgin-birth are completely surrendered. He has never yet professed belief in a personal God, and seems to question His omnipotence.[13] Again, in a paper which he contributed lately to a book of essays entitled *Ideals of Science*, he owns that science is a long way from actively supporting religion. In spite of this, no name is, or used to be, more frequently quoted than his, in support of the Church's contention that a reconciliation has taken place.

The admissions of Sir Oliver Lodge are, in a certain sense, all the more important because he undoubtedly is one of the

[13] See *Nature*, April 23rd, 1903; also Appendix to this work.

few men of science who still retain a strong belief in a spiritual world. In the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1905, he informs us that he is opposed to a materialistic monism, such as Haeckel's, and that "the progress of thought has left him [Haeckel], as well as his great English exemplar, Herbert Spencer, somewhat high and dry, belated and stranded by the tide of opinion which has now begun to flow in another direction."[14] This is the sort of statement which is eagerly seized upon by the Church; but it neither witnesses to the truth of Christianity, nor does it voice the opinion of the scientific world. It is the opinion of a scientist who believes that he has had "communication with spirits."[15] Professor Ray Lankester, one of our leading biologists in England, indignantly refutes Sir Oliver's strictures on Professor Haeckel.[16]

Now, it is, of course, quite true that there are schools of thought opposed to Haeckel's. There is, for instance, the school which considers that science has no business to concern herself with theology; and there are the metaphysicians. But the point

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[14] This assertion is severely criticised by Mr. Joseph McCabe in the *Hibbert* for July, 1905. Mr. McCabe holds that "Sir Oliver Lodge's own conception of life may, with a far greater show of reason, be described as a modified survival of an older doctrine" (p. 746).

[15] Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the distinguished naturalist and evolutionist, is another scientist with spiritist convictions, and his concern for supernatural religion led him to step outside his own domain and make that remarkable attack upon current scientific opinions in astronomical matters which met with such unanimous condemnation (see the *Fortnightly Review* for March and September, 1903).

[16] In the *Times*, October, 1904.

I wish to make clear is that all these schools are heterodox. They do not accept the Christian dogmas. It is so easy for false impressions on such matters to get about, and, I regret to add, this does not occur altogether by chance. When Haeckel, one of our greatest living biologists, was caught tripping in his knowledge of theology by a professor of that subject, the Church explained to the laity that the great Dr. Loofs had shown that Haeckel had forfeited his claim to consideration as a reliable man of science; and, on this basis, his *Riddle of the Universe* was held up to obloquy and derision. The Church, however, did not mention at the same time that Haeckel had expressly said that he was not skilled in theology, and that it was only in his own branch of knowledge that he spoke with authority. Nor did the Church mention that their champion, the learned theologian, Dr. Loofs, himself discredits the notion of the Virgin-birth, and that the chief bone of contention between the two professors was simply the question of the parentage of Jesus.

It is just because science and religion *are* in conflict that the religious naturally wish to discredit science. They will, if they are sufficiently ignorant, go so far as Lady Blount,[17] and hold that the earth is flat and without motion. But such persons should note that in the Church itself there are a few—the few best qualified to form an opinion—who accept all the main facts of science, and do not think, or pretend that they think, that there

[17] At Exeter Hall, in March, 1905, Lady Blount developed her "flat-earth" theory, and accused Newton of want of logic.

has been any reconciliation. The Rev. P. N. Waggett is one of these. He is an apologist of unusual scientific competence, and his new handbook for the clergy, *Religion and Science*, simply bristles with problems which he confesses have yet to be solved. However, he does not allow himself to be disturbed. Conclusions adverse to theology are to be resisted. In other words, we must possess our souls in patience until we can see a way out of our difficulties. He remarks: "There are conclusions which are to be dissolved, and conclusions which are to be avoided; but there are also conclusions which have to be resisted, held at bay —'held up,' I think some adventurous Western people call it— until we can see our way to destroy them. Such a resistance is not irrational." He personally prefers "the positive or scientific treatment and pursuit of religion," and he goes on to say that "this positive pursuit of the facts of the spirit must be maintained in spite of difficulties. It must be maintained in spite of outstanding discrepancies with science." To my mind, the position here taken up by Mr. Waggett is the only possible one for a convinced Christian who has a real knowledge of science. He avoids the snares into which so many of his fellow clerics have fallen. For he does not jump at the conclusion that every "gap" in our knowledge of life's mysteries is a proof of the supernatural. Nor does he attempt to show, as many other apologists are wont to do, that there is no direct connection between science and religion. He does not try to escape the criticism of metaphysical conclusions which a scientific habit of thought engenders. But,

while his position may appear at first sight a tenable one, whether it be so or not depends entirely upon the correctness of the assumption on which his argument is really based—the true witness of the heart, as against the false witness of the reason. It is interesting to compare Mr. Waggett's position with that of another of the progressives. The Rev. John Kelman writes in *Ideals of Science and Faith*[18]: "So far as we have gone, the history of the past, viewed by the light in which the newer conceptions of the Bible have placed it, shows that, at the present moment in the progress of thought, science and religion are not in the least degree at strife. They need no reconciliation." Suppose the Rev. J. Kelman to be right and the Rev. P. N. Waggett to be wrong, what then? It is the *newer* conceptions of the Bible which make it possible for Mr. Kelman to speak of a reconciliation—the very conceptions which the orthodox cannot and will not accept. The orthodox believer is told that religion and science are reconciled; but he is not told by what means. Thus the orthodox, who would never think of accepting the "terribly heterodox" ideas of the advanced school, are all the time accepting a result which could only be arrived at by the help of those self-same ideas. In fact, it was the very necessity for a reconciliation which originated their invention.

[18] A book, edited by the Rev. J. E. Hand (George Allen), which gives, perhaps, the best that can be said by able and fair-minded men, writing in the light of the latest knowledge and criticism, in favour of a reconciliation between religion and science. The book contains essays by various authors—Sir O. Lodge, Professors Thomson, Geddes, and Muirhead, the Rev. P. N. Waggett, the Rev. John Kelman, and others.

So much is said about "scientific doubt" in these days that it is well to remember that doubts as to the truth of the Christian belief are not caused alone by purely scientific difficulties of faith. Carlyle refused to accept Darwin's theories. His temperament was strongly inclined to a stern Puritanical piety, and his whole nature was antipathetic to science. Yet he did not think it possible that "educated honest men could profess much longer to believe in historical Christianity." Renan, a profound scholar in Oriental languages, shows, in his famous work, *The Life of Jesus*, that, while keenly appreciative of all that was beautiful in the life and teaching of Jesus, he was forced, by his study of the Scriptures[19] in the original, to the conclusion that the miraculous part of the narrative had no historical foundation. Leo Tolstoi, the helper of the helpless, whose voice is ever raised in the cause of universal love and peace, vainly sought an answer to religious doubts, and finally renounced Christian dogmas, building up a religion of his own. Numerous instances could be given showing that well-known and pious-minded thinkers have rejected Christianity on grounds other than scientific. And this diversity in the reasons for negation further tends to strengthen those suspicions regarding our faith which it is now the apologist's task to dispel.

A significant circumstance is the far more tolerant attitude

[19] Dr. W. Barry, in his *Ernest Renan*, is content to attribute the change mainly to Renan's study of Kant. But such a theory is inconsistent with Renan's own statement in his *Reminiscences*, where he expressly declares that questions of history, not metaphysics, shook his faith.

of the better-informed clergy towards the unbeliever. There still remain persons of the Dr. Torrey and the Rev. J. Morgan Gibbon[20] type, ready to vilify the agnostic; but their number is rapidly on the decrease. The clergy, as a whole, are more tolerant now than many of the pious laity. Why is this? Is it not because they are beginning to appreciate the perplexities of faith, and to learn that agnostics as a body can be, and are, good men? Under certain conditions they themselves have severe wrestlings with the dictates of reason, and it is only by prayer[21] and occupying their minds in their work that they are able to dispel dark doubts. They will tell you that a faith such as theirs, and such as they hope you will attain after emergence from doubt, is a real faith, with which the faith of the ordinary person, accepting everything on trust, is not to be compared.

It is all very well to talk glibly, as so many do nowadays, of an age of tolerance. How can *man* be tolerant in matters concerning which *God* is alleged to have distinctly told us that He is not tolerant? It has often occurred to me that, were there such a person as the Devil, he must be much puzzled over the case of the high-minded agnostic, and more especially so if the latter conceived it his duty to propagate his views. In other words, if he were a militant agnostic—a Huxley or a Holyoake. For, on the one hand, if the Devil could persuade the agnostic to adopt religious conformity at the expense of self-respect, he would ruin

[20] Author of a vituperative libel on agnostics, called *Atheism and Faith*.

[21] The psychical aspect of the belief of such persons is discussed in Chap. VI., § 5.

the agnostic's character, and so drag one more soul into perdition; but he would at the same time be rendering the whole Christian community a service by saving them from the dangerous advice of the agnostic. On the other hand, if Satan aided the agnostic in the line of conduct which he was at present conscientiously pursuing, the soul of the latter would slip from Satan's grasp (for I presume there can be no punishment for honesty); but, as Anti-Christ, Satan would reap a grand harvest from the seeds of unbelief sown by the agnostic. And the purer and more unselfish the life of the agnostic, the more the latter would influence people to share his opinions. How does God view this perplexing situation? We are told from the pulpit nowadays, by the broader-minded parson, not only that agnostics may be good men, but that they "exhibit the very temper which Christ blesses."[22] This curious truce between Believer and Unbeliever, each still holding fast to his belief or unbelief, only serves to demonstrate with added force that there is not, and cannot be, a reconciliation between Faith and Knowledge.

[22] Canon Scott Holland, in a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on the first Sunday after Epiphany, 1905. See also Appendix.

§ 4. The Genesis and Character of the New Outburst

It is imperative that the Churches should appreciate the real character of the new outburst of scepticism. The controversy with rationalism has entered upon another phase—a phase far more dangerous to the security of Christendom. As was inevitable, the suspicions regarding the faith have filtered down to classes that are not content to be duped because, forsooth, it is said to be for their good. They have none of the reasons of the upper-class agnostic for "lying low." The enlightenment of the working man has been accelerated during the past year or so by the issue of cheap reprints from the books of our great scientists and thinkers, and by a direct attack upon religion by the well-known editor of the *Clarion*, Robert Blatchford. That the Churches are already partly alive to the new danger is evinced by their present anxious attitude towards the spread of knowledge likely to be damaging to the Faith. It was one of the subjects discussed at the Canterbury Diocesan Conference in June, 1904, and will, doubtless, be earnestly discussed at the next Church Congress, together with the whole question of the rapid increase in unbelief. While, however, the Church inveighs against the "reprints," she gives out, also, that "Christianity is always strengthened by being attacked." This is hardly consistent. For why not, then, allow the process of strengthening to continue

by these means? Certainly, *if* Christianity be true, the Church ought to be strengthened. How could it be otherwise? It might compel her to discard some of her dogmas; but that would only be if they were false, and, in such case, she is better without them. Nothing but good should arise from a thorough examination of her tenets. She would be enabled to find out where her weakness lies, and thus to emerge from the ordeal stronger than ever.

Those who wish, as I do, to learn the whole truth concerning Christianity, hope that she will no longer postpone a complete and unbiassed investigation of the whole of the anti-Christian arguments. Doubtless we shall get our wish in time; but meanwhile we deplore the delay, for reasons I have more particularly set forth in the concluding chapter of this book. If the honest truth be that she is not confident of the security of her position, are we to understand that the cause of Untruth is thought to be more likely to prosper than the cause of Truth?

Of the two conflicting views regarding the effect of anti-Christian attacks—the pessimistic and the optimistic—it is the former which appears to me the more likely to be correct. For consider what would occur should attacks of far greater severity be delivered—a contingency by no means impossible in the near future. Suppose the "rational" propagandists, instead of being hampered by the want of funds and influential support, were to become endowed with a fraction of the wealth of the Church, and were thus in a position to popularise their views by spending money in extensive advertisement of every description,

by subsidising platform orators who would propound rationalism and non-theological ethics in every town and village, by relieving distress, and so on, would the Christian Faith be strengthened? Has it not already suffered since the sixpenny reprints began to bring knowledge within the reach of the people—the people who have, many of them, little or nothing to fear from an expression of their agnosticism? If militant rationalists were sufficiently possessed of this world's goods to start an adequate fund for the lucrative employment of clergymen who find they can no longer subscribe to the articles of the Christian Faith, and who would leave the Church if they could do so without having to face absolute ruin, would not the secessions increase in direct proportion to the increase of the fund and the consequent means of support?[23] If those men of note who are even now agnostics at heart were to proclaim the fact and assist in propagandism, would not the flock follow the bell-wethers?

Whether hastened or not by the action of the propagandist, the masses, in these days of universal education, are bound to hear sooner or later of these grave doubts. The questioners of the Faith are no longer only the philosophers, scientists, and those who join hands with the Churches in prescribing a dietary of fairy tales for the preservation of the moral health of the

[23] The Secretary of the Rationalist Press Association has received several private letters from clergymen expressing their desire to leave the Church if they could find some employment. They usually have large families dependent upon them for support.

masses. Many of the working class[24] are far more thoughtful and intelligent regarding questions of science as it affects religion than is generally supposed. Hitherto they have been under two very considerable disadvantages—the costliness of the books and the want of leisure to read them. The leisure disability still holds good, though less so now that temperance is on the increase; but the books are to-day offered at popular prices, and are also finding their way into public libraries. The Church can, perhaps, depend for some time to come upon the non-interference and even active support of the upper classes, however sceptical they may be; but it is the proletariat which she will in future have to deal with more and more. She is in a dilemma; her hand is forced. She realises that discussion will cause the unsettlement of minds hitherto unclouded by doubt, and yet matters have reached a stage when silence is impossible. It is doubtful whether she has yet fully realised the gravity of the task before her. I have explained how she seems to have been deceived as to the real meaning of the apparent suspension of hostilities during the past few years. She has also to learn how impossible it will be for the ordinary mind to accept the unconvincing and contradictory expositions of the Faith which are now offered to us under the title of Christian apologetics.

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[24] I omit all mention of the trading or domestic classes who often depend directly for their support on strict religionists. The way in which "their bread is buttered" is bound to enter considerably into their calculations, and also they have often even less leisure for the study of modern thought than a steady (temperate) working man.

§ 5. Apologetics "Found Wanting."

The time, then, has arrived when the pastor can no longer ignore or gloze over the thoughts that are stirring the minds of the intelligent portion of his flock. The cheap literature problem cannot be solved by applying disparaging adjectives, such as "shallow," to writings emanating from the pens of Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, S. Laing, Matthew Arnold, Sir Leslie Stephen, Renan, Haeckel, etc., easy though it be to excite prejudice by the use of a condemnatory adjective. Books that are still costly will some day be available at popular prices, and increase the perplexities of the people. I refer to books of the type of Lecky's *Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England*, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Forlong's *Short Studies of the Science of Comparative Religions*, Doane's *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions*, J. M. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology* and *Pagan Christs*, Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (Vol. I., Part I., giving the Data of Sociology), Metchnikoff's *The Nature of Man*, Haeckel's *The Evolution of Man*,[25] etc. Will not the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, with a title so innocent, and with an editor and many of its contributors in Holy Orders, soon find its way into our public libraries and be a thorn in the side of the orthodox? Think how a book such as Nunquam's (Robert Blatchford) *God and My Neighbour* must

[25] A cheap edition has since been published by the R. P. A.

already have been read by and have affected the convictions of thousands of the working class. And the grave doubts of a hard-headed artisan are not in the least likely to be dispelled by *Anti-Nunquam*,[26] or any of the literature so far published as a panacea "in relief of doubt."[27] Indeed, some apologetic works are enough in themselves to create mistrust, though the reader had not read a single anti-Christian work! The extraordinary divergence in the views of the authors, to say nothing of the transparency of some of their arguments, prevents all chance of apologetics convincing any but those already determined to be convinced. The writer in one stage of thought absolutely contradicts a writer in another stage. Compare Goulburn and Pusey in their awful assertions of everlasting punishment with Allin's *Universalism Asserted* and *Larger Hope* leaflets, or the views of a Wace regarding Evolution with the views of a Waggett. If we confine ourselves to making comparisons only between the advanced thinkers themselves, compare the opinions of Dr. Gore, Bishop of Birmingham (late of Worcester), with those of Canons Henson and Cheyne. The deplorable state of religious apologetics is becoming notorious, and articles bearing on the subject are now appearing from time to time in our leading magazines.[28]

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[26] *Anti-Nunquam*, by Dr. Warschauer, with prefatory note by J. Estlin Carpenter, is considered by many Churchmen to be an admirable refutation of *God and My Neighbour*. I have seldom read anything less likely to convince. Sentence after sentence is open to the gravest exception.

[27] See Appendix.

[28] *E.g.*, in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, see the article on "The Present

In defending the Faith the advanced school of the Church now frankly admit the difficulties of the old belief, and ask us to accept their new interpretations of Christianity. The older school of theologians, the school who can bring themselves neither to assert the truth of evolution nor to give a decided opinion on the verbal inspiration of the Bible, are unwillingly, very unwillingly, beginning to follow in their wake. The views of the two schools being in conflict on many vital points, it is impossible that they can ever be brought into agreement. Yet, unless concerted measures are soon taken, confusion will be worse confounded. To add to the perplexity of the situation, there are also the various views of the Nonconformists to be taken into account. Then there are the Scottish Churches, having on the one side the law-supported minority, standing for an infallible Bible and all the doctrines of John Calvin; and, on the other, the majority standing for a form of Christianity which is really Calvinism with a somewhat unequally-applied veneer of Higher Criticism. Finally there is the Irish Roman Catholic Church still sunk in the gross superstitions of the Dark Ages.

The advanced school represent the section which is in close touch with modern thought, so that their new interpretations of the Faith constitute the one and only hope of arresting the advance of agnosticism. On the other hand, the justice of the

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Position of Religious Apologetics," appearing in the issue for October, 1903; or on "Freethought in the Church of England" in the issues for September and December, 1904. The answers in the same journal are most unsatisfactory, and only serve to show how very little, apparently, can be said in reply.

objections to these new interpretations is borne out by the circumstance that many of the older school would no more think of accepting them than they would of giving up their belief; rather than accept them they prefer to deny the facts of science. Both sides do violence to their reason—the enlightened in using the subtleties of their intellect for interpretations which appear transparently false alike to the orthodox and to the unbeliever; the obscurantist in denying established facts. Consider for a moment what all this means. It means that the modern sceptic has the support of the strictly orthodox when he refutes the only explanations as yet offered to dispel his doubts. It means that the validity of the agnostic's objections to these new-fangled interpretations is fully borne out by the common sense of Christians themselves, and that a denial of the facts of science and of the results of Biblical research is the only way we can escape from unbelief. If a puzzled truth-seeker tried to take a middle course, he would have to believe that black and white were the same colour, and his belief would degenerate into an exceedingly unedifying grey. There is a large proportion of this "grey" belief just now.

I cannot too strongly reiterate that this complete divergence in the interpretation of a revelation alleged to have been vouchsafed by God cannot but give rise to the most intense suspicion. The very word "apologetics" is self-condemnatory. How is it that the claims of Christianity require all this vindication? Heresies and schisms and the need for apologetics form the constant

note of Christian history from first to last. True there was a lull in the questionings of the Faith; but that was during the Dark Ages, when the priests adopted the policy of keeping the world in ignorance, and of destroying all the evidences against Christianity that they could lay their hands upon. If the events said to have happened really happened, and if God wished the world to know of them, why all this mystery, why the need for all these apologetics concerning them? Which of the conflicting explanations are we to take as correct?

The late Bishop of Durham, Dr. Westcott, in a passage in his book, *Lessons from Work*, says: "It would be easier if we might divest ourselves of the divine prerogative of reason. It would be easier, but would that be the life which Christ came down from heaven to show us and place within our reach?" It is not for me to quarrel with so emphatic a pronouncement in favour of using our reason; but such advice cannot be reconciled with the teaching of Christ or of our own Church—that we should receive God's word as "babes." Remember those strange words attributed to Him: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes." From this one would gather that it was God's pleasure to hide Himself from the wise, and therefore that the increase of agnosticism alongside the spread of knowledge was all part of the Divine plan. The Roman Catholic Church is more consistent. She obeys the alleged teaching of Christ in this respect to the letter. The truth is that when Jesus spoke these

words, if He ever did speak them, the vast majority of mankind were "babes." His disciples were "babes"; His enemies the more enlightened. He did not foresee the advance of knowledge and the spread of education. Nor did the Church anticipate this increase in "wisdom," or rather, I should say, she employed every possible means to hinder it. If God's revelation may be understood by babes, it must be very simple. How, then, do we find it requiring all this explanation—explanation which no ordinary adult can understand? Who could call modern theology simple? Can we say that of our philosopher-Premier's books, *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt* and *The Foundations of Belief*? Is it not because the Church recognises that the masses will never understand all these subtle explanations and pleas for a re-statement of Christianity that she is in no hurry to impart the new ideas from the pulpit? Even the more intellectual truthseeker is constantly recommended to trust less to his reason, and "to come to Christ as a little child."

The objections of the more conservative to the new interpretations of Christianity are well expressed in the solemn words of a former Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, himself inveighed against, in his day, as somewhat of a freethinker. "Many," writes Dean Mansell, "who would shrink with horror from the idea of rejecting Christ altogether, will yet speak and act as if they were at liberty to set up for themselves an eclectic Christianity, separating the essential from the superfluous portions of Christ's teaching, deciding for themselves how much

is permanent and necessary for all men, and how much is temporary and designed only for a particular age and people. Yet if Christ is indeed God manifest in the Flesh, it is surely not less impious to attempt to improve His teaching than to reject it altogether. Nay, in one respect it is more so, for it is to acknowledge a doctrine as the revelation of God, and, at the same time, to proclaim that it is inferior to the wisdom of man."

The Athanasian Creed controversy furnishes some striking examples of both conservative and latitudinarian opinions. Dr. Pusey is related to have said: "If the Athanasian Creed is touched, I see nothing to do but to give up my canonry." Yet we find the present Primate, Dr. Randall Davidson, replying to a deputation of clergymen who desired to be relieved from the obligation of reciting this Creed: "I am in complete sympathy with the object you have at heart." Presumably he is in agreement with Dr. Barnes, Hulsean professor of divinity, who, when lecturing lately at Cambridge on the Athanasian Creed, declared that there was "no authority in Scripture for its minatory clauses." The well-meant attempt of the Dean of Westminster to smooth down the asperities of the Creed by *singing* instead of saying it, is typical of those pitiful attempts to tide over difficulties which are now so much in evidence. "We make," says one of the old school, "unsuitable persons partakers of the Divine service of the Church, and then it is proposed to alter the Divine service to suit them. Let honest Unbelievers or Half-Believers absent themselves from the Assembly of the Faithful, and let the

Faithful worship faithfully." Yet, if this line of conduct were put into practice, if the modern Origens were anathematised and only those laymen admitted to Divine service who held all the articles of the Christian faith without mental reservations of any kind, every single advanced theologian would be degraded from his office, and the present twenty-two per cent. who are church and chapel-goers would be reduced to—what shall we say? Well, the churches having cultured congregations would be almost empty. The modern spirit of toleration, admirable as it is in many ways, assists in preventing the discovery of the real truth of the matter. The Church is grossly deceiving herself if she really thinks that the apparent adherence of the majority of the well-to-do classes indicates that burning suspicions of the Christian dogmas have been quenched by Christian apologetics.

§ 6. More Things which Confuse the Issue

In the early part of this chapter I have alluded to the real causes for the apparent acquiescence of the majority in the claims of the Christian religion. Among these causes there is a somewhat complex one requiring, special notice, for it tends to confuse the main issue, more perhaps than any other. The Church is now appearing in an altogether novel role. Until quite recently her concern was only for the spiritual welfare of man, and she expected to gain her purpose by supernatural rather than by natural means. This plan, after many centuries of trial, has proved a terrible failure. It has not contributed either to man's spiritual or material improvement. Now, in England, she is emulating the thorough-paced humanitarian in her devotion to the betterment of humanity by natural means. Never before has there been that interest in the material condition of the people which is now evinced by such institutions as the Church Temperance Society and Homes for Inebriates, the Church Army, the Church Lads Brigade, the Church Rescue Societies, Homes for Waifs and Strays, etc. The Church, too, is now concerning herself with the better housing of the poor, the improvement of our jail system, and other rational methods for raising the social condition of the people and creating an environment likely to improve the moral atmosphere. All such measures, in fact, as have long ago been advocated by

rationalists and social reformers are now taken up vigorously by the Churches. "Better late than never," you will say. Quite so; but that is not the point. Far be it from me to decry these excellent results of "modern thought"; still, the fact remains that the issue is thereby confused, and will continue to be thus confused for some time to come. People will only look at what the Churches, in Protestant countries at least, are now doing, and see in it another proof of Christianity's power for good. They will not trouble their heads to consider why it should have taken nearly 2,000 years before the Christian Church recognised such an essential portion of her duties towards her poorer neighbours.[29]

Nor is it only this increase of zeal for "raising humanity out of the gutter" which has confused the issue. Numerous are the ways in which Christianity obtains a prestige sometimes partly deserved, sometimes wholly undeserved. Good works belong to the former class. The Churches of all denominations have always occupied the position of grand almoners, and, in that they have carried out that trust conscientiously, they have fully earned the confidence of the rich and the gratitude of the poor. But people are liable to forget that the huge donations given during their lifetime, and left in their wills by charitably disposed persons, are given usually from true humanitarian principles, and that kind hearts are to be found all over the world, quite apart from belief

[29] Although the Church has ever been charitable, she has made no effort to *cure* poverty. She is, she must be, the ally of those to whom she chiefly owes her power and prestige. Jeremy Taylor is not the only eminent divine who has systematically courted the favour of the influential and rich.

or unbelief. These gifts to the needy are not, let it be said to the credit of mankind, a mere soul-insurance, like the donations given, and often extorted, in the Roman Catholic and Greek Churches, for "Masses," "Indulgences," etc. All this charitable work, for which the Church is the agent employed, is usually put down entirely to the credit of the Church and Christianity. It does not seem to be realised that the "Golden Rule" is far older than Christianity, and is practised in other than Christian countries; and that the Church, in being entrusted very largely with the dispensation of charity, obtains credit for a service for which she is after all well paid, and which any properly selected body of laymen would perform quite as well, and possibly with more discrimination.

If all the good and none of the bad works performed in Christendom are to be attributed to the working of the Christian faith, the same argument must hold good of the Hindu or Buddhist faith, when the people are Hindoos or Buddhists. The code of ethics attached to a religion does, of course, make a difference; but it neither proves that the belief is correct, nor that it is impossible to have the ethics without the belief. Confucianism is an *agnostic* ethical system which the *educated classes of Japan have adopted for centuries*, and its splendid results are just now much in evidence. Only a few days ago I received a letter from an agnostic supporter of Christianity who said: "Look at the good that Christianity does, look at its endless charitable organisations"; and he asked, "Could the

Clarion people do anything of this kind?" It never occurred to him, and it never occurs to many of his way of thinking, that the "*Clarion* people" have very slender funds at present; and the charitable work that they do, though proportionately large, is not likely to come to his notice unless he takes the trouble to inquire. The vast majority of English people are professing Christians, and if any charitable work is to be done agnostics give their support to it, although the agents for it are Christians. However, I have not received a brief from the "Clarionettes." My object is to show how the issue becomes confused, and, if my agnostic friend is correct in considering Christianity false and yet indispensable, the future is indeed full of alarms. What will happen, for instance, when the knowledge of this falsehood becomes common property? I am fully aware that my friend voices the opinion of many fairly thoughtful Englishmen; but this is because they are in the habit of hearing every useful advance in civilisation accredited to Christianity:—hospitals, though they existed long before Christianity, and only fell out of use after its introduction—the raised status of women, though it was on the introduction of Christianity that the status was lowered—abolition of slavery, though among the most strenuous advocates for the abolition were such well-known freethinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Stuart Mill, and Moncure Conway, while the whole of Tory England shouted its approval when General Lee drew his sword on behalf of the rights of "Old Virginia," and while Gladstone, in his first Newark address, 1832, owned

that slavery was justified by the Bible—efforts for superseding the horrors and clumsiness of war, though freethinkers to a man are supporters of the movement, while Bishops from the pulpit offer up prayers for peace and in the same breath expatiate on the ennobling effects of war upon the race, and while the head of a mighty theocratic-autocratic Christian Government calls the nations to a peace conference, and then takes the first opportunity to prosecute the most unnecessary and bloody war the world has ever known.

It is erroneous assertions such as these which tend, perhaps, more than anything else, to confuse the simple question before us—the truth of Christianity. They are therefore discussed at greater length in a separate chapter devoted to popular fallacies. Meanwhile, in the present chapter I hope I have succeeded in giving some insight into the true nature of the present situation.

MIRACLES
Chapter II.
THE EXTRAORDINARY STATE OF APOLOGETICS WITH REGARD TO MIRACLES

§ 1. Preliminary Remarks

In this and the following chapters I hope to show how matters stand with reference to the more important points at issue between the Christian apologist and the Rationalist. The truth or otherwise of the Bible miracles being of supreme importance, I begin with an examination of the position of apologetics with regard to them.

THE VIEW OF SCIENCE

Professor Huxley once made the following remark: "The miracles of the Church are child's play to the miracles I see in nature." This has been hailed by the apologist as a satisfactory admission that science concedes the possibility of miracles. It is

continually being quoted in apologetic works and from the pulpit, and is apparently considered as a conclusive piece of evidence that science has nothing to say against miracles. But, Professor Huxley went on to explain: "On the strength of an undeniable improbability, however, we not only have a right to demand, but are morally bound to require, strong evidence in favour of a miracle before we even take it into serious consideration. But when, instead of such evidence, nothing is produced but stories originating nobody knows how or when, among persons who could firmly believe in devils which enter pigs, I confess that my feeling is one of astonishment that anyone should expect a reasonable man to take such testimony seriously."[30] We never hear of this from the pulpit! Possibly Professor Huxley would not have been thus misrepresented—or shall we say misunderstood?—if he had spoken of the *wonders* of nature, and had not used a word popularly understood to signify that break in nature's laws which it has yet to be proved has ever occurred, or can ever occur. The wonders of nature take place in accordance with natural laws; miracles do not.

WHY HAVE MIRACLES CEASED?

An obvious objection to miracles is the one often propounded by an inquiring child, "Why do we no longer have miracles?"

[30] Essay on "Possibilities and Impossibilities," appearing in the *Agnostic Annual* for 1892.

The rationalist's reply, of course, is that, so soon as nature's laws were better understood, trustworthy evidence was demanded and miracles ceased. Paley tries to parry the question by saying: "To expect, concerning a miracle, that it should succeed upon repetition is to expect that which would make it cease to be a miracle; which is contrary to its nature as such, and would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was wrought."[31] But, as Cotter Morison remarks:[32] "Assuming that a miracle reveals the presence of a supernatural power, why should its repetition destroy its miraculous character? Above all, why should it destroy its use? If miracles are intended to convert the stiff-necked and hard-of-heart, what more likely way of bringing them to submission than the repetition of miracles? And, according to Scripture, this was precisely the way in which Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was humbled. He resisted the miracles wrought by Moses and Aaron with stubbornness all through the first nine plagues; but the universal slaying of the first-born broke even his spirit.... It may suit Paley to say that repetition of miracles would destroy their use; but he must be a luke-warm theologian who does not at times wish from the depth of his heart that an authentic miracle could be produced. Yet it is at this momentous crisis in the religious affairs of the world, when the enemy is carrying one position after another, and has all but penetrated to the citadel of belief, that no miracles occur, that no miracles are claimed,

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[31] Paley's *Evidences—Preparatory Considerations*.

[32] In his book, *The Service of Man*.

except, indeed, of the compromising species made at Lourdes.... When no one doubted the possibility of the frequency of miracles they abounded, we are told—that is, when, by reason of their number and the ready credit accorded to them, their effect was the least startling, then they were lavished on a believing world. Now, when they are denied and insulted as the figments of a barbarous age; when the faith they might support is in such jeopardy as it never was before; when a tithe of the wonders wasted in the deserts of Sinai and the 'parts beyond Jordan' would shake the nations with astonishment and surprise—when, in short, the least expenditure of miracle would produce the maximum of result, then miracles mysteriously cease. This fact, which is beyond contest, has borne fruit, and will yet bear more."

Some pious Christians, feeling the force of arguments such as these, contend that Christ's promises to believers do indeed apply to all time; that supernatural manifestations have not ceased; and that, when there is no exercise of the supernatural in the visible Church of Christendom, it is owing to lack of faith. "Can you give me," asks Father Ignatius,[33] "one single text in Holy Scripture to prove that miracles and visions are to cease with the apostles? When we hear, in all directions, of the supernatural being manifested, we need not wonder, for we are living in a day which demands supernatural manifestations more than any other epoch in the Christian Church."

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[33] In his notable oration upon the apparitions of Llanthony.

BELIEF IN MIRACLES ESSENTIAL

The old argument in support of miracles and inspiration was clearly vitiated by its circular nature, for it was to the effect that miracles were true because asserted to be so in the Bible, which was the inspired word of God, and that the Bible was inspired because the miracles proved it to be so. This argument is gradually being dropped, and I have only alluded to it to show how much importance used to be, and, for the matter of that, still is, attached to miracles, as proving the truth of the Bible. Butler, Paley, Mansel, Mozley, Farrar, Westcott, Liddon, and a host of other authorities, could not conceive that revelation could be made in any other way than by miracles, and felt that without them Christianity would be proved false and overthrown. Such also appears to be the opinion of the majority of our living dignitaries. On the other hand, the minority, which we may take to be represented by the able writers in *Contentio Veritatis* and elsewhere, maintain that "the time is past when Christianity could be presented as a revelation attested by miracles.... We must accept Christianity, not on the ground of the miracles, but in spite of them.... There has been no special intervention of the Divine Will contrary to the natural order of things." That is, by ruling miracles to be out of court, the new school are able to reconcile the facts of science with the Christian faith. "Our belief in Jesus Christ must be based upon moral

conviction; not upon physical wonder."[34] The old school, on the other hand, consider Christianity to be untrue without miracles. "The miraculous element," they say, "cannot be weeded out of the Gospel narratives without altogether impugning the historical value of these documents."[35] They are able to maintain this position, and yet remain believers, by disallowing the facts of science. It is an extraordinary state of affairs, and who can wonder that many of the laity who know of these things are meanwhile fast lapsing into agnosticism? As a matter of fact, no bishop, no clerk in Holy Orders, can honestly retain his preferment unless he believes in miracles. He would have to follow the example of the late Sir Leslie Stephen, and resign.

[34] See p. 132 of *An Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures*, by the Right Rev. W. Boyd Carpenter, Bishop of Ripon.

[35] See p. 222 of *Some Elements of Religion*, Liddon.

§ 2. Miracle Apologetics

The question arises, "How, then, do the majority of our spiritual guides regard the accounts of miracles in the Bible?" Broadly speaking, miracles are divided by them into three classes —(1) mythical, but containing spiritual truths; (2) explicable naturally; (3) historical and vital. Should their views be of a very advanced type, all the miracles will be relegated to the first two classes. If advanced, but not quite so much advanced, the fundamental miracles of the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension will be taken into the third class; the miracles deemed to be not indispensable, or not serving a useful purpose, being explained away. Continuing to descend the scale of enlightenment, more and more miracles will find their way into the third class, until no miracles alleged to have been performed by Christ himself will be discredited—except, perhaps, those that appear particularly incredible or useless, such as sending devils into swine, turning water into wine, or withering a fig tree. Regarding the miracles alleged to have been performed by the Apostles we hear very little. Concerning the Old Testament miracles, however, opinions are freely expressed, and range between those of the Broad Church, who consider the miracles all belong to the first two classes, and those of the strictly orthodox, who maintain all the miraculous events to be facts, on the principle that, whether the whale swallowed Jonah or

Jonah swallowed the whale, they must be true because they are related in the Holy Scriptures—the Scriptures that were accepted as historical by their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. People who are the children of Christian parents have been brought up from childhood to a literal acceptance of the miracles, and now they are not only asked to give up the convictions so sedulously implanted while their minds were most receptive, but to choose between the conflicting views of the expounders of God's word.

Let us consider some examples of the latest interpretations, and see if they appeal to our hearts and minds. "In John v. (the authenticity of the passage is of no moment to this argument) we read that the stirring of the waters and the consequent healing virtue was attributed to the presence of an angel. The modern would speak of the pool as a medicinal spring. The fact is the same. The mode of description is different. The ancient knew little of what are called natural causes."[36] The explanation is sensible enough; but, while incidentally showing that the Evangelists were just as credulous and ignorant as other people of their times, it is a dangerous concession. For directly a natural explanation of this kind is allowed in one case, it must also be allowed as possible in another, and thus the fundamental miracles might be shorn of all that renders them of any value for substantiating our faith. Regarding the particular explanation under consideration, one may be permitted to ask, How is it the water has lost its medicinal qualities? Also, How is it the ancient's

[36] See p. 51 of *An Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures*.

belief is still foisted on the credulous modern? When visiting the traditional Pool of Bethesda, now in the custody of the Greek Church, I saw documents exposed in the gateway giving the words from the fifth chapter of St. John in fifty-six different languages!

The healing miracles performed by Jesus are now frequently attributed to the use of the same power as that by which faith-cures are effected at the present time—a power upon which the science of psychology is shedding a new light, and which mental therapeutics will one day place at the disposal of the human race. Apart from this disappointing alteration in the character of the "mighty works" which were supposed to betoken the divinity of Christ, is there not something abhorrent in the thought that *He should take advantage of a secret knowledge of the powers of nature, in order to impose upon the credulity of the age in which He lived, and thus secure the worship of His disciples*? At least, if we are Christians, let us assume that Christ, as man, *believed* He was using supernatural powers, and that His disciples, if they had faith enough, could remove mountains, just as He undoubtedly *believed*, according to such an eminent authority as Dr. Sanday, that He really was casting out devils when He cured "the epileptic," etc. It is certainly difficult to understand this ignorance of the Son of God; but, when apologists attempt to extricate Christian dogmas from the quagmire of doubt by such methods, they only succeed in causing them to disappear into it beyond all hope of recovery.

As I have alluded to the subject of Christ's belief in "devil-possession," I should mention here that there are still many cultured ecclesiastics, especially among those who still believe that there is such a personage as the Devil, who argue that there was such a malady as devil-possession in those days. Some even hold that it still exists. On the other hand, the Rev. David Smith, in his book, *The Days of His Flesh*, which professes to bring the Gospels "up to date," holds that Jesus, "*after his wont*, fell in with the delusion," and that in the case in which the Gadarene swine play so important a part, He, "like a wise physician, humanised the madman's fancy, and feigned acquiescence in his lunatic craze." Exorcism, it may be remarked, has been practised, in all times, wherever a belief has existed in literal demoniacal possession. In the Latin and Greek Churches it is used in the baptism of both adults and infants, in the consecration of water, salt, oil, etc., and in specific cases of individuals supposed to be possessed by evil spirits. Exorcism in baptism is still retained also in some Lutheran Churches. In Jerusalem, at the present time, there are three dissenting sects, whose ministers practise the exorcism of spirits.

Opinions differ widely as to whether certain miracles actually occurred, or whether they admit of a natural explanation. Take the miracle of "the Feeding of the Five Thousand." The school, of which the Bishop of Birmingham, late of Worcester, and the learned Dr. Sanday are the mouthpieces, consider that, "whatever may have actually occurred, a nineteenth-century observer would

have given, if he had been present, a different account from that which has come down to us." On the other hand, the Bishop of London believes this miracle to have occurred "because of the very humble, unimaginative [?], and truthful men who reported it."[37] Could any two views be more diametrically opposite?

Obviously, as has already been pointed out, destructive admissions concerning any one of the miracles tend to invalidate the truth of all the rest; and, therefore, we find that apologists of a less advanced stamp are still inclined to the view that the miracles connected with the life of Christ are miracles pure and simple. Godet, in his *Defence of the Christian Faith*, explains that "It will become easy to understand why the prodigies which signalised the advent of Jesus Christ upon earth do not occur in our day.... The appearance of the perfectly Holy Man was so trenchant a break in the life of humanity up to that moment that from the shock it produced there resulted consequences which have not repeated themselves at any other period.... One condition was requisite—viz., that there should exist a Man fit to be associated with the exercise of the Creative Omnipotence." Many doubters may be prepared to admit the necessity of miracles as explained by the learned Professor; but they contend that, up to the present time, there is no instance of a miracle having been *proved*, not even the alleged sinlessness of Jesus Christ, and they ask why, if God graciously furnished proofs to one generation, He did not, in His infinite wisdom, ordain that these proofs should be

[37] Extract from a sermon preached in St. Paul's, Finsbury, on November 23rd, 1904.

established for all time, beyond all possibility of cavil?

Passing on to the miracles of the Old Testament, we often find that those who still maintain that only the first chapters of the Bible are legendary will adopt a variation of the second class of interpretation—they will say that the events were of an ordinary character, but occurred in answer to prayer. Joshua is for them an historical character. However, Joshua x. 12–14 must not be taken literally, but allowance should be made for poetical licence. Joshua, it is explained, never really committed himself to the extent of commanding the sun and the moon to stand still, but only "besought God that the black clouds of the storm driving up the pass from the sea might not be allowed to blot out the sun and bring night prematurely before his victory was complete."[38] This prayer, be it remembered, was for the sake of a work of butchery which God was supposed to have sanctioned! Besides, as the sun is said to have obeyed Joshua, and, further, it is said that "there was no day like that before it or after it," at least we are to infer that something very unusual happened at Joshua's request. The explanation we meet with in what are considered by some to be the "best" apologetics is that the language used is purely figurative, just as one might say, "I hope the sun won't set too soon," or "We never had such a day."

Similarly there is the north-east wind theory as a possible

[38] This explanation has been given by the Rev. Samuel Cox, and it is quoted with approval by the Bishop of London on p. 63 of his little work, *Old Testament Difficulties* (S.P.C.K.).

explanation of what might have happened, if the "crossing of the Red Sea" ever took place, and if Moses be not as mythical as the rod with which he divided the waters.

Perhaps the most unsatisfactory explanation of all is that regarding the rainbow. It is agreed, there being no other alternative, that "it is not meant that the rainbow appeared for the first time to Noah [another purely legendary character] after the Flood [although this is certainly what the Bible leads one to suppose], but that it was adopted then as a visible sign of God's covenant, as water is adopted for a somewhat similar covenant in the New Testament."[39] It is now known for a fact that, if there are any historical data for the story, the Flood could only have been local; but let that pass. Has the rainbow-covenant prevented millions of people perishing since then in many a mighty flood? Looking at God's promise as a token of His pity for suffering humanity, are not deaths occurring every moment, accompanied by agony so prolonged and supreme that, compared with them, a death by drowning would be a happy release? If Jews and Christians still really believe in this story, how is it that the rainbow attracts not the slightest devout attention? I have never yet heard this beautiful spectacle alluded to with any particular reverence. The reason is obvious. We know that the bow consists of all the prismatic colours produced in the atmosphere by the refraction and reflection of the sun's light from the rain drops, and no one regards the Bible story seriously. Yet our divines try to

[39] See p. 41 of *Old Testament Difficulties*.

save the credit of the Bible by interpretations which are obviously "catching at straws." Such methods are as harmful as they are pitiful.

In all these examples the explanations offered to us seem to come to this—the phenomena were purely natural from start to finish, only they occurred opportunely and were afterwards poetically embellished; or they contain a spiritual meaning. Perhaps the most extraordinary argument ever brought forward concerning the "sun standing still" is that urged by the learned Bishop Westcott in his *Gospel of the Resurrection*. He says (pp. 38–9): "It would be positively immoral for us now to pray that the tides or the sun should not rise on a particular day; but, as long as the idea of the physical law which ruled them was unformed or indistinct, the prayer would have been reasonable, and (may we not suppose?) the fulfilment also." It is difficult to believe that these can really be the words of one of the Church's greatest scholars. To what extent will not bias influence the brain to use its powers perversely? It is far-fetched arguments of this kind that increase rather than dispel doubt in the normal mind, and especially when they are brought forward in all seriousness by the very pillars of the Church. We are sometimes asked to banish our doubts and "craving for intellectualism," as it is called, and "to come to Christ as little children and in Him to find rest." Certainly it is only by letting our minds sink to the level of a little child's, or, what is the same thing, to the level of a primeval man's, that we could bring ourselves to accept such

childish nonsense. A child asks for the moon, but does not know the physical impossibility of obtaining his desire. His prayer is therefore reasonable, and (may we not suppose?) the fulfilment also. This unconscious trifling with the truth—for in reality it is nothing else—reminds me of a passage in Dr. Smith's orthodox, but somewhat out of date, *Dictionary of the Bible*, where an attempt is made to reconcile the Mosaic narrative of Creation with the discoveries of modern science. It runs as follows: "The very act of creation must have been the introducing of laws; but, *when the work was finished, those laws may have suffered some modification*."[40]

We have seen that, while one section of apologists contend that belief in the miraculous is essential, other advocates of Christianity try to get rid of all difficulties by suggesting that such words as "miracles" and "supernatural" ought not to be used. In a paper on "The Effect of Science upon Christianity," which he has contributed to the *Christian Commonwealth*, the Rev. R. F. Horton, M.A., D.D., affirms that "the word 'supernatural' is ill-chosen," and he adds that "it is unknown in the New Testament, and introduces ideas which are alien to those of Christ." The word "miracles,"[41] he holds, is equally unfortunate, and represents a notion which is not contained in the New Testament terms "signs" and "mighty works." If this be not word-

[40] Article "Genesis."

[41] *Miraculum* means merely a wonderful thing. It is certainly a proper translation of σημεῖα (signs) and τέρατα (wonders), as used by New Testament writers.

spinning, then what is? Does it matter whether we call the raising of Lazarus a "miracle" or a "sign"? Is the miraculous feeding of the multitudes rendered more credible if we call it a natural instead of a supernatural occurrence? Is not the whole point of the sign lost, too, if it be no longer supernatural—if it becomes a sort of juggling feat? Dr. Horton leaves us in no doubt as to the object of his play upon words. He aims at disposing of the difficulties connected with Christian miracles by affirming that everything in nature is miraculous. He observes: "There is no miracle in the New Testament so amazing as the fact that from protoplasm has developed the spiritual life of the saint." He is voicing one of the latest pleas of the "advanced" apologists—a plea which is transparently vain and futile. Development from protoplasm, like all the other wonders of the universe, takes place in accordance with natural laws more or less perfectly understood; and these things have no sort of connection with the "signs" and "mighty works" of the New Testament. Miracles are rejected not because they are amazing, but because they are contradictory to experience and at variance with the laws of nature. So far the scientist considers the "reign of law" to be an established scientific fact, and he is naturally loth to conclude, without the strongest evidence, that, after all, he has been deceived. Much less would he come to such a conclusion when there is not even a particle of trustworthy evidence. There is the significant circumstance, too, that the laws now discovered were unknown at the time of the alleged performance of miracles, and

that the belief in miracles, and in the supposed continuance of miracles, varies in inverse proportion to knowledge.

§ 3. The Fundamental Miracles

The above samples of apologetics fairly represent the various ways in which miracles are now explained. Even if the reasoning were sound, it would hardly serve to strengthen the arguments for those miracles which cannot and must not be explained away—the miracles on which are based the central doctrines of the Christian Faith. Christianity stands or falls according as the Resurrection and Ascension are facts or not. The Rationalist's criticisms have been presented in many articles and books, but perhaps nowhere more clearly and forcibly than in the well-known work, *Supernatural Religion*; and it is worthy of note that these criticisms have been further strengthened by the latest "Higher Criticism," as set forth in the articles on the Resurrection and Ascension narratives in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. I have specially referred to *Supernatural Religion*, because this book created a considerable stir in theological circles when it first appeared, some years ago, and also because its arguments are popularly supposed to have been completely demolished by Bishop Lightfoot in his *Essays on the Work Called "Supernatural Religion*." But—and here is a good instance of the ease with which the laity can be deceived—if anyone will take the trouble only to glance at these two works, he will find, to his astonishment, that the whole of the overwhelmingly important portion of the book under review, such as the chapters on

miracles, on the Resurrection, on the Incarnation, and on the Ascension, has received no attention! Besides, there is *A Reply to Dr. Lightfoot's Essays*[42] which completely demolishes the Bishop's arguments.

THE RESURRECTION

Advanced modern criticism shows that the Resurrection can no longer be regarded as a historical fact, the evidence being unreliable. This is the sober opinion of professors of theology formed on the results of the most careful research, and with no preconceived opinion as to its scientific impossibility. What have the apologists to say to this? While the obvious discrepancies and deficiencies in the accounts of the Resurrection are left practically unexplained, the old argument from the "empty tomb"[43] is being discarded as worthless by the best scholars. Again, the new science of psychology robs "the appearances," supposing that they ever occurred, of any meaning that could be construed into a proof of the Resurrection. Only one argument of any account is left, and on this the apologist chiefly pins his faith, more than on anything else. A certain contemporary of Christ wrote some letters in which he shows a firm belief in the Resurrection: his name was Paul. The evidence of this one man is considered sufficient to substantiate a miracle, which is contrary

[42] By the author of *Supernatural Religion*. (Longmans, Green, and Co.; 1889.)

[43] See *Encyclopædia Biblica*, article "Gospels," paragraph 138 (*e*).

to all human experience, and upon the truth of which depend the Christian Faith and our hope of immortality! Moreover, St. Paul was not present himself on any of the occasions of the alleged appearances; and, except with regard to his own particular "religious experience," his evidence is therefore hearsay. The statement that Jesus was seen by 500 brethren at once is of little value, and St. Paul omits to mention what steps he took to ascertain the accuracy of his information—who the individuals were, what the various impressions made upon them were, etc. The appearance to 500 brethren is not mentioned in any of the Gospels. That St. Paul heard such a report does not prove that the report was true, or, if true, that the 500 had clear and unmistakable evidence of Christ's presence.

There are critics who could not accept the evidence of St. Paul, for the simple reason that they conclude that we possess no Epistles of St. Paul; that the writings which bear his name are pseudepigrapha, containing seemingly historical data from the life and labours of the Apostle borrowed from *Acts of Paul*—a work containing, so far as is known to us, both truth and fiction.[44] Less advanced criticism lays down the broad thesis that all the Pauline epistles are real letters written by him, but that "Paul, who reckoned the future of this present world not by millennia or centuries, but by a few short years, had not the faintest surmise

[44] See article "Paul" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. Four of the Pauline Epistles are, however, pretty generally accepted. Five are hotly disputed; Professor Loofs, for example, rejects them.

of the part his letters were destined to play in the providential ordering of the world."[45]

Accepting the genuineness of the Epistles, and therefore of the passage in 1 Cor. xv. 3–8, let us pause and think over the chief features of the argument. In the first place, it seems to me that the fact of St. Paul having been a contemporary of the Messiah really only adds to our perplexities. When there were so many who were eye-witnesses of His life, why should God single out one who was not thus favoured as His chief witness for all posterity? He was living at the same time and in the same country as Christ, and yet never knew Him. Surely it stands to reason that an eye-witness is of more value than a mere visionary who wrote letters revealing a remarkable ignorance of the greater part of the narrative of the Gospels, and indeed of the whole body of teachings there ascribed to Jesus. That St. Paul would believe in the Resurrection before he took up the Christian cause goes without saying; but that he believed everything he heard from the followers of Christ, and everything he thought he heard when in a trance, does not, I fear, amount to much in the way of evidence—and especially so when we know that this was an age when the resurrection of any great prophet was taken to be a normal event. How often, I wonder, in the world's history have not the disciples of great teachers attributed miraculous powers to their beloved master, even when with them alive, and still further magnified these powers after his death? How often

[45] See article "Epistolary Literature" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

has it not occurred that these same stories have been further exaggerated in the course of their transmission to succeeding generations? Nothing is more conceivable than that the Bible story may spuriously embellish the real life of Jesus as much as the mythical accounts of Buddha, for instance, spuriously embellish the real life of Prince Siddârtha. Of all old-world legends, the death and resurrection of a virgin-born or in some way divinely-born Saviour was the most widespread. Saul, the Pharisee, would have been imbued with this prevalent notion, and so could never get away from the thought that some kind of propitiation had to be made for the sins of men. Time after time a terrible suspicion must have crossed his mind—what if he were committing a heinous crime in persecuting the Christians? What if, after all, the Crucified One were the real Saviour of mankind? Doubts such as these may well have deeply agitated him. The living figure so often described to him by the Christians must have stood out before him. On his own testimony, as well as that of the *Acts*, he was prone to visions and other ecstatic conditions (2 Cor. xii. 1–4; 1 Cor. xiv. 18; Acts ix. 12, xvi. 9, xxii. 17, xxvii. 23). What more natural than that after his "religious experience" near Damascus he should be convinced that he had been specially favoured by an interview with the Saviour?

So many "spiritual experiences" of a like nature are on record that it is difficult to know which is the best to select for comparison. Professor Huxley, in his essay on "The Value of Witness to the Miraculous," takes the cases of Eginhard (born

about A.D. 770), who wrote *The History of the Translation of the Blessed Martyrs of Christ, S.S. Marcellinus and Petrus*; and George Fox, who, about the year 1647, heard voices and saw visions which assured him that "there is a living God who made all things." Perhaps the case of Emanuel Swedenborg[46] may be worth a moment's consideration. He was the son of a bishop, and was carefully educated. Endowed with unusual intellectual powers and an iron constitution, he acquired vast stores of learning. From early childhood he evinced a serious turn of mind, combined with a remarkable tendency to indulge in religious speculations. Eventually he received an extraordinary "call" in the shape of a vision. This converted the scientific inquirer into a supernatural prophet. He was now the mouthpiece of God. "The Lord Himself hath called me, who was graciously pleased to manifest Himself to me, His unworthy servant, in a personal experience in the year 1745." "I have never," he says in his work on *True Christian Religion*, "received anything appertaining to the doctrines of that Church from any angel, but from the Lord alone, while I was reading the Word." Swedenborg was a man who won the respect, confidence, and love of all who came in contact with him. He had a peculiarly abstract metaphysical character of mind, and was firmly convinced that he had "conversed with spirits" and "seen the Lord." So was

[46] Swedenborgians (the New Jerusalem Church) are to be found scattered throughout almost every part of Christendom. In England, principally in Lancashire and Yorkshire, there are seventy-five societies with 6,063 registered members.

Martin Luther perfectly convinced that he had seen the Devil when he threw his ink-pot at him. So was the peasant girl of Lourdes convinced that she had seen the Virgin Mary. So is Evan Roberts convinced that he has seen his Saviour. So have many good Christians from time to time been convinced that they have seen Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, and angels. Father Ignatius, the Evangelist monk, may be, as I have heard him called, an emotional wreck; but he is also a most earnest Christian, and he is quite sure that he has seen the Virgin Mary.[47] John Wesley, whose followers throughout the world to-day number 30,000,000, was also a visionary. Thousands and thousands of heathens as well as Christians have had visions of their saviours; but such experiences could scarcely be brought forward seriously as a proof of the existence of the divinities believed to have been seen, or of their ascension after a life upon earth. Visual and auditory hallucinations are now the subject of a searching inquiry by the Society for Psychical Research, and, willing as some of its members are to explain metapsychical phenomena by the simple theory of the spiritists, the growing opinion is that these apparitions and voices are purely hallucinatory and due to causes which are not extra-human.

As Mr. Lowes Dickinson pertinently remarks when speaking of "Conversions" in his article on Revelations, in the *Independent Review*: "The important question is whether the belief of the

[47] Eight persons in all testify to the apparition of the Virgin Mary in the Abbot's meadow at Llanthony on September 15th, 1880.

recipient in the evidential value of the experience is justified; and I think that a little consideration will show that it is not so, for it is noticeable that the truth supposed to be revealed in the moment of conversion is commonly, if not invariably, the *reflection of the doctrine or theory with which the subject, whether or no he has accepted it, has hitherto been most familiar. I have never heard, for example, of a case in which a Mohammedan or a Hindoo, without having ever heard of Christianity, has had a revelation of Christian truth*. Conversion, in fact, it would seem, is not the communication of a *new* truth; it is the presentation of ideas already familiar in such a way that they are accompanied by an irresistible certainty that they are true.... A religious revelation cannot be distinguished from what would be admitted to be the hallucinations of disease. A man may be convinced, with equal assurance, that he is a poached egg or a saint; that he has a mission to assassinate the king or redeem the world; that he is eternally damned or eternally saved; that he has had a vision of the Virgin Mary or a vision of Nirvana."

Another argument for considering the Resurrection as an historical fact is that brought forward by the Rev. D. S. Margoliouth. The learned Professor argues in the *Expositor* that the Gospel narrative is located within historic times. So are the narratives of King Arthur (the Celtic Messiah), or William Tell, or Robin Hood; but historians are silent about all these narratives, sacred and profane alike. There was probably a real Arthur, however different from the hero of the trouvères, and

a real Robin Hood, however now enlarged and disguised by the accretion of legend. Similarly there was a real Jesus Christ; but the marvellous event of His resurrection is *unrecorded by any of the celebrated historians of the period*.

The final argument is that "the Resurrection is, so to speak, of a piece with the whole character and the claims of Christ.... Even had we no Testament at all, we should be obliged to postulate something very much like either the Resurrection or the belief in the Resurrection in order to account for Christianity." No one disputes, I should think, this necessity for the Resurrection, if we are to remain Christians; but it is of the fact of the Resurrection that unfortunate doubters wish to be assured. The Bishop of Ripon argues that the miraculous accessories connected with the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ find a place only in the group of *secondary* witnesses, and adds significantly: "Our belief in Jesus Christ must be based upon moral conviction, not upon physical wonder." The meaning of this, in plain English, is clear enough, and I leave it for the honest-minded reader to decide whether this is a satisfactory foundation for the Christian dogmas. Is this what he was taught, or what his children are now being taught? Will it suffice? Can he remain a Christian? Will his children, when they grow up and begin to think for themselves, remain Christians? The Dean of Westminster writes to the Archbishop of Canterbury: "Students of natural science find themselves left with St. Luke as the strongest historical evidence within the New Testament." Now, the author of St. Luke is

also the author of the *Acts*, and his propensity for miraculous decoration is by no means reassuring. Besides, he was not an eye-witness. Then, too, we have Canon Henson, in the *Hibbert Journal* for April, 1904, informing us that "Any candid Christian reading through the accounts of the New Testament evidences … cannot escape the inference that the evidence for the quasi-historical statements of the Creed is of a highly complicated, dubious, and even contradictory character." He then asks us: "Is an honest belief in the Resurrection really inconsistent with a reverent agnosticism as to the historical circumstances out of which in the first instance that belief arose?" The reply of an ordinary candid layman is, I think, sufficiently obvious. Similarly, Abbé Loisy, the champion of advanced theology in the Roman Catholic Church, considers the Resurrection to be a spiritual fact only, and not a fact of the historical order. "La Résurrection n'est pas proprement un fait d'ordre historique." The powerful article in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* also leads us to the same conclusion.

Those who believe in the fact of the Resurrection, and have not Canon Henson's reverent agnosticism concerning the event, must believe also in all the facts related in connection with it, including the account of Jesus having eaten and having been touched, and of his bodily ascent up into the clouds. If any one portion of the story be considered incredible or untrustworthy, the whole collapses. It may be useful, therefore, to put to ourselves some questions concerning any one of the many marvellous accessories

of the Resurrection. How few of us have ever had our belief tested by searching questions such as a cultured heathen would put if we tried to convert him? For instance, what would you reply if you were asked by an intelligent native of India, China, or Japan: "Who were the saints of whom Matthew speaks as having risen from their graves? To whom did they appear? And how was it that their graves were opened as Jesus died, while their bodies did not come out till after His Resurrection? What also became of them afterwards?" To this the only candid reply possible would be: "I am unable to give you any information on this subject. Their not appearing till after Jesus rose from death would seem to have been introduced so as not to give them the precedence over Him in the exercise of the privilege of resurrection. He is said to be 'the first that should rise from the dead' (Acts xxvi. 23), 'the first fruits of them that slept' (1 Cor. xv. 20), 'the first-born from the dead' (Col. i. 18)." This, however, would hardly satisfy your questioner, who would reply: "Your inability to give me this information excites my suspicions, and your further statements seem to me to be very clumsy. To mark and enhance the death of the Messiah, nature is said to be convulsed, and graves thrown open; but the exit of the saints who were to come out of them is restrained till He should first have made His egress from the tomb three days later. And, after all, He had no such precedence in resurrection, for several persons are said to have been raised from the dead by the prophets of old and by Himself; two passed into heaven without ever being

in their graves, and one of them—namely, Elias—appeared to Him with Moses in risen life at the time of His transfiguration. May I ask, Are the disturbances of nature which are said to have occurred at the crucifixion—namely, the preternatural darkness for three hours and the earthquake—mentioned by historians of the time?" You would have to confess, "They are not." Thus you would fail to convert your heathen interlocutor, whose final fling at you would be: "That seems to demonstrate that nothing of the kind could really have occurred. Moreover, had there been such phenomena, the other evangelists would not have failed to support their position with these divine manifestations."

THE ASCENSION

If apologetics dealing with the Resurrection are unconvincing, still more so are those regarding the Ascension. There is little or no attempt to explain the meagreness of the Gospel narratives, how all mention of it is omitted in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; and one vague sentence is all we are given in St. Mark and St. Luke—sentences which, according to the Higher Critics, were never penned by these persons. In "The Acts" the "St. Luke" writer furnishes the detail that "a cloud received him out of their sight," and that, "as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have

seen Him go into heaven." In these days "ascending up" has no meaning for us. Candidly, if the writer had had our astronomical knowledge, would these words ever have been written? Certainly they would not. Then is the Ascension a fact or is it not? How is it possible that St. Matthew and St. John could have remained silent regarding such an event if they had really witnessed it? Or granting, in the case of the writer of "St. John," that he was not St. John the Apostle, though he distinctly says he was, it is still astounding that he should have omitted to record such important evidence of Christ's divinity, if it was an accepted fact at the time he wrote.

Archdeacon Wilson, in a paper read at the Diocesan Conference at Manchester, October 22nd, 1903, asks: "What do we mean in our Creed when we say: 'He came down from heaven'? We explain away 'down,' we explain away 'heaven' in the sense in which the word was originally used. What do we mean by 'descended into Hell'? by 'Sitteth on the right hand of God'? … Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned, and do not admit of final intellectual definitions. We can only avert the rejection of theology by recognising its limitations." Is it possible for the bulk of humanity, I ask, to possess the requisite spiritual discernment? Is it not far more likely that, with the spread of education, they will finally reject theology?

The Rev. David Smith, in his book, *The Days of His Flesh*,[48] dismisses the Ascension with the words: "When Jesus parted

[48] Hodder & Stoughton, 1906.

from the eleven on Olivet, He did not forsake the earth and migrate to a distant Heaven. He ceased to manifest Himself; but He is here at this hour no otherwise than during those forty days." One can but wonder how Ascension Day is kept in Mr. Smith's church, and how he brings himself to repeat the Apostles' Creed.

Leaving aside the thoroughly unreliable nature of the Bible accounts of the Ascension, consider how easy it is for the superstitious, through optical illusions or subjective visions (or whatever name it may please the neologist to give to these "experiences"), to be honestly convinced of the occurrence of a supernatural event, and to take care that it should lose nothing of its marvellous character in the telling. Only the other day the good people of Sudja saw a mighty iris-coloured cross appear over the cathedral during divine service, and regarded the phenomenon as a sign of heaven's resolve to bestow victory upon Christian Russia. This "miracle" was witnessed by all the notabilities of the city, who forwarded a description to General Kuropatkin in a document duly attested with their signatures. For the stupendous and absurdly impossible miracle of the Ascension we have not even got a satisfactory description, much less an attested document. Is it not time that we should ask ourselves the plain question, Do we really believe that an extraordinary levitation occurred, and that Jesus Christ was seen to be rising in the air until some passing clouds concealed Him from view? If we do not so believe, why do we say we do when we repeat the Creed? Why do we pretend we do when we sit in church and

listen to the account of the Ascension, and perhaps to a sermon on it? Why do we allow our friends to think that we do so believe? Why is Ascension Day one of our Holy Days? And, finally, why do we teach, or allow others to teach, our children what we know to be untrue? Surely these are serious questions to ask ourselves.

THE INCARNATION

There remains the miracle of the Virgin-birth. That this is under dispute among Christian theologians is notorious, and the controversy has but served to show with ever-increasing clearness how untrustworthy is the evidence for this miracle. Christian Biblical experts inform us that it belongs to the latest strata of the New Testament tradition, and that no trace of the story can be found before 120 A.D. In other words, that it is an obvious interpolation in St. Matthew and St. Luke. Adolf Harnack, the learned Professor of Church History in the University of Berlin, is looked upon, even by the orthodox, as one of our greatest living Biblical scholars, and we learn from him that we must disregard the history of Jesus' birth given in these two Gospels; for not only is it untrustworthy, but "the evangelists themselves never refer to it, nor make Jesus Himself refer to His antecedents. On the contrary, they tell us that Jesus' mother and His brethren were completely surprised at His coming forward, and did not know what to make of it. Paul, too, is silent; so that we can be sure that

the oldest tradition knew nothing of any stories of Jesus' birth."[49]

"Moral fitness" appears to be the only argument that we can fall back upon, and this is now the apologists' last stronghold. If they belong to the Church of England, they should remember that it was this identical line of reasoning that gave rise to the "pious opinion" that the Mother of Christ had herself been miraculously preserved from all taint of original sin from the first moment of her conception in the womb of her mother. As Bernard of Clairvaux vigorously argued (in 1140 A.D.): "On the same principle you would be obliged to hold that the conception of her ancestors, in an ascending line, was also a holy one, since otherwise she would not have descended from them worthily." Yet, in spite of the absurdity, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was formally defined, as a dogma binding on the acceptance of all the faithful, by the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8th, 1854). Certainly there is a moral fitness in the Virgin-birth of the Son of God, and it is also fit that His mother should have been immaculately conceived; and those who hold to the one doctrine may well hold to the other.

Some apologists appear almost in despair of a continuance of belief in this dogma. The learned Dr. Sanday says we ought to regard the Virgin-birth "as one of those hidden mysteries which, whether or not God wills that we should believe them now, He has, at all events, willed that men should believe in times past." Is not this tantamount to giving up belief in the Virgin-birth?

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[49] See p. 31 of *What is Christianity?* (Williams & Norgate, 1904).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Because God once willed that men should have all kinds of absurd superstitions, and now wills that they should acknowledge their absurdity, are we, as Dr. Sanday appears to recommend, to keep up the pretence of believing in them on the ground that they are hidden mysteries? Surely not; but, speaking of mysteries, there is one which ought to be cleared, or at least receive a much fuller investigation than it has yet received at the hands of the Church. I refer to the fact that, ages before the Christian era, certain miracles were believed to have taken place, and that these were of *precisely the same nature as those recorded in the Bible*. For instance, numerous saviours were believed to have been born of virgins, to have died for the sins of mankind, to have risen again from the dead, and to have ascended into heaven. Thus not only are the Bible miracles scientifically impossible; not only are they unsupported by anything approaching adequate evidence; not only do the specious explanations of apologists serve but to confirm our scepticism concerning them; but we find that they are not even original—that they form part of ancient superstitions. That these fresh grounds for suspecting the truth of Christianity are of the gravest character will be shown in the chapter on Comparative Mythology.

BIBLE CRITICISM
Chapter III.
THE DESTRUCTIVE CHARACTER OF MODERN BIBLE CRITICISM

§ 1. Clashing Views on Bible Criticism

Such, then, is an outline of the state of apologetics on the subject of Miracles in general, and of those connected with the central doctrines of the Church in particular. Nothing could be more unsatisfactory, nothing more calculated to arouse suspicion of the Faith; and now, if we turn our attention to the "Higher Criticism," and to the apologetics it has called forth, we shall find these suspicions still further strengthened. On the one hand a considerable proportion of these criticisms are accepted by the more enlightened divines, and, on the other hand, those who refuse to accept any of them urge that they undermine Christianity.

The Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Wace, is one of the latter class. Speaking at a men's service (at St. Mary Bredin's Church, Canterbury, on December 4th, 1904), he justly twits the critics for describing a considerable part of the Bible, and particularly

the early part, as "not historical," when "what they mean is that it is not true." No subtle theories are required to support Dr. Wace's belief in Christianity, for even the first chapter of Genesis is, in his opinion, a "substantially accurate" account of "that which happened on earth before there were any men upon it," and "is the best proof that the Bible proceeded from God." He remains among the dwindling number of those who, in these days of Christian storm and stress, still cling to the old ideas about the Bible. His reasons for doing so are apparently similar to those given by "Roger" in a little pamphlet entitled *Roger's Reasons* (by John Urquhart), where it is sought to reconcile the Bible and Science at the expense of accuracy, logic, and common sense. For the obscurantist, belief is made easy, and the apologies for the Faith can be comparatively straightforward. For the "enlightened" the conditions are reversed.

An example of the advanced views of a Church of England divine, and of the objections to these views of a strictly orthodox Churchman, may prove instructive. Reviewing the Bishop of Winchester's book, *On Holy Scripture and Criticism*, the *Church Times* (of February 10th, 1905) pertinently observes: "Attacks upon the Gospel narratives of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, made with such persistence from within the Church, are ugly developments which were not anticipated in 1890. Yet, strange to say, there is no recognition of the new situation in the Bishop of Winchester's book."

This silence regarding points especially requiring explanation

is, I fear, a common feature in religious apologetics. Look again at the reviewer's next remark: "The Bishop forgets that the truth of the message is intimately connected with the authenticity of the record, and a critical theory which assails the one assails the other." Here, then, we have an elementary truth frankly recognised; and, in plain English, it means that, if the Bishop's criticisms be true, Christianity is untrue. Entering into more detail, the writer goes on to say: "For example, the Bible record of the Fall and the truth of our Lord's 'atoning death on the Cross' are closely connected with each other. Modern criticism discards the former as a myth, and indications abound on every side that the denial of the Fall leads to a denial of the Atonement. It is not too much to say that the new method of interpreting the Bible has helped to overthrow belief in Christ as a Divine Redeemer. His redemptive work and mediatorial office have been thrust into the background."

The situation could not be put more lucidly. There is no hair-splitting or glozing here. The reviewer characterises this silence on crucial points as "grave omissions," and he might have added that such omissions are calculated to arouse suspicions of the Faith. He continues: "Again the Bishop says:—

> Think of the use made of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Apostles in the Acts, or by St. Paul in his Epistles. It is ever the spiritual and moral lesson.

It is by no means 'ever' the spiritual and moral lesson only. Both in the Book of the Acts and St. Paul's Epistles the historical

and predictive portions of the Jewish Scriptures are constantly appealed to, and used as the basis of argument. The suggestion that the Apostles attached little importance to the latter is far from being borne out by the evidence. One of the chief things in which they differ from writers of the modern school is their use of Old Testament history and prediction. Compare the place which prophecy occupies in the Epistle to the Romans with the place it holds in the Bishop of Winchester's book, where no more than sixteen lines in 187 pages are allotted to it.

"Each of the Synoptic Gospels describes the scene at the Transfiguration, when Moses and Elias talked with our Lord in the sight of three of His disciples. St. Luke mentions that they talked about His approaching death. In the face of that narrative, those who say that our Lord knew no more of Moses than any Jew of the period are bound to explain how they reconcile the statement with the Evangelists' account of the Transfiguration. No Jewish scribe of the first century a.d. could pretend to have seen or conversed with either Elijah or Moses. Bishop Ryle says of our Lord:—

> In His incidental references to Moses, He adopts the language of the Scribes.... He never displayed knowledge of facts which could not be possessed by those of his own time.... To His intellectual powers in His humanity there seem to have been assigned the natural barriers of the time in which he lived.

"The Bishop does not perceive apparently that these

arguments cut both ways, so that they tell against our Lord's claim to foreknow the future quite as much as against His knowledge of the past. And we are entitled to ask how they can possibly be made to agree with the express testimony of the Evangelists that Moses and Elijah were seen in Christ's company, and 'spake of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.'"

I have quoted these apposite remarks at length because they will come with more force from the mouth of an orthodox believer than from anyone in doubt like myself. One cannot help wondering what the Bishop could have to urge in reply; for the ground is cut from under him by his own acceptance of so much of modern criticism. As he is a high dignitary of the Church, it is all the more puzzling. Referring to the remarks concerning Moses, it may be mentioned that, according to the critics, Moses is not a historical personage.[50] Whether the Bishop accepts this or not it is difficult to say; but apparently he does, from his desire to explain that, "in His references to Moses," Christ "adopts the language of the Scribes."

Dr. Driver's new book on *Genesis* has also called forth some adverse criticisms from the less advanced. For example, Dr. Lock, the Warden of Keble, enumerates several considerations in support of the general trustworthiness of the patriarchal narratives, and observes that the fact of inspiration, once admitted on the higher level of a moral and spiritual tone, may "well carry its influence over into details of fact, and

[50] See, for instance, art. "Moses," *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

turn the balance when otherwise uncertain." Personally, I very much doubt whether the general public, once informed of the truth, will ever be induced to look at facts through Dr. Lock's spiritual spectacles. Dr. Driver, it should be added, informs us that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were presumably monotheists, though their monotheism is rudimentary, and the terms in which they express themselves "suggest much riper spiritual capacities and experiences," being, "in some cases, *borrowed evidently from the phraseology of a much later age*." Can we depend upon such narrators to furnish us with true history? Commenting on Dr. Driver's "impossible interpretations" of the words, "it shall bruise thy head," and of "the story of the Fall," his reviewer in the *Church Times* asks: "Was it, or was it not, a promise made by God? This is the plain question which Dr. Driver's readers are forced to ask." Sceptical truthseekers, also, are asking the same question. When will they receive a "straight" answer?

§ 2. A Summary of the Results of Bible Criticism

The general public know little or nothing of the results of Bible criticism. Why should they? Not only do they deem it a dull subject, but those who attend church are being informed from the pulpit that "the Gospels have been battered by years of criticism, but have come out of it stronger than ever."[51] It is easy enough to make statements of this kind, and, doubtless, they serve temporarily to quiet the fears of a congregation who know very little of the subject, and are only too glad to believe what they are told so authoritatively; but, unfortunately, such statements are, to put it mildly, misleading. The ordinary man is wofully ignorant of the "Higher Criticism." His ideas of Bible difficulties are mostly confined to common sense. He knows, perhaps, that scoffers of the London parks freethinking type gibe at Holy Writ, and he may himself have made fun of some passages that appear absurd; but here his knowledge of Bible criticism ceases. He is not aware that the critics are a body of the most erudite experts in theology, whose only motive for offering their opinion is to give to the world the result of their

[51] Quoted from a sermon by the Bishop of London in Fulham parish, Christmas Day, 1904. Compare this with Dr. Kirkpatrick's remark, p. 2 of his book, *The Divine Library of the Old Testament*: "It is true that the critical investigation of the Bible raises not a few questions of grave difficulty."

arduous research—the motives, in fact, of a Bruno, a Darwin, or a Pasteur.

In view of this widespread ignorance, I propose to enumerate briefly a few of the results of modern criticism, and, in giving these results, I shall omit those arising from a study of comparative mythology and of evolution, as I have devoted separate chapters to that purpose.

A work has been issued lately which sums up the conclusions of Bible criticism—higher,[52] lower or textual, and historical. It is called the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. Its four massive volumes set forth the new views, and support them by a mass of learning which deserves our serious consideration.[53] Space permits of my giving only a few notes of its conclusions, and but meagre details of the wealth of evidence in support of them.

The Creation Story a Myth.—The story of the Creation as given in Genesis originated in a stock of primitive myths common to the Semitic races. Its coincidences with the Babylonian myth are so numerous that it is impossible to doubt the existence of a real historical connection between them. Many indications show that not till after the Exile in the sixth century B.C. did the story take its present shape.

The Patriarchs Unhistorical Figures.—Then, again, all the

[52] "The adjective 'higher' (the sense of which is often misunderstood) has reference simply to the higher and more difficult class of problems, with which, as opposed to textual criticism, the 'higher' criticism has to deal" (see Preface to *The Higher Criticism*, being three papers by S. R. Driver, D.D., and A. F. Kirkpatrick, D.D.).

[53] See Appendix.

stories of the Patriarchs are legendary; they may contain some truth, though how much will probably never be known; to suppose them entirely true is to throw historical criticism altogether overboard. Dr. Peters is the Episcopal rector of a large parish in New York, who has done good service in the past, both as Professor of Biblical Literature in the Episcopal Seminary at Philadelphia and as the first leader of the expedition to Babylonia sent out in 1888 by the University of Pennsylvania. He has lately written a book called *The Early Hebrew Story: Its Historical Background*. Canon Cheyne, reviewing this book in the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1905, remarks: "It will be granted that Dr. Peters's view of the origination of the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and, to some extent, of Joseph, in myths, legends, and traditions of sanctuaries, is a sound one."

Book of Genesis Legendary.—The book of Genesis is a composite narrative based on older records long since lost. It appears to have been compiled in the seventh century b.c., and to have been added to again later. The story of the Deluge is a Hebrew version of the Babylonian epic.

Book of Exodus Legendary.—The book of Exodus, too, is another composite legend which has long been mistaken for history. Sober history gives no warrant for supposing that the signs and wonders wrought by Moses ever occurred, that the first-born of Egypt were ever slain, or that Pharaoh was ever drowned in the Red Sea.

Moses a Legendary Character.—The historical character of

Moses has not been established, and it is doubtful whether the name is that of an individual or that of a clan. The alleged origin of the Ten Commandments is purely legendary; it is probable that they were framed not earlier than the time of Amos. It is admitted even by conservative critics that the original worship of the Israelites was not of an ethical character.

One of the first suspicions that ever crossed my mind was with regard to the sudden and complete disappearance of the "two tables of testimony, tables of stone written with the finger of God."[54] Later on, when I knew of the Moabite stone[55] and the Rosetta stone,[56] and especially when I learnt that there were inscriptions on bricks and cylinders of a far earlier date than that ascribed to the giving of the Ten Commandments, the old perplexity returned with added force. I remember, too, the same feeling of dissatisfaction and suspicion as I gazed on the clearly-cut Pali inscriptions in the Buddhist caves near Poona, and thought of those lost tables said to have been inscribed by the finger of God. I once put the question to a well-read clerical friend of mine: "How can these tables, written by the finger of God or by His direct inspiration, have been lost? How is it

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[54] Exodus xxxi. 18 and xxxii. 16. Or, to be precise, these having been broken and their fragments considered of no value at the time, the duplicates carefully prepared and inscribed to the dictation of God Himself (Exodus xxxix.).

[55] Believed to date from about 853 B.C. The inscription records the victories of King Mesha over the Israelites.

[56] Erected in honour of Ptolemy Epiphanes, 106 B.C. Famous as having furnished the first key for the interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

that they have simply disappeared without a word of explanatory comment in the Bible? It is inconceivably strange. What a witness would they not have been to the truth of the Old Testament account, and to the Divine authority for the Commandments!" His reply was: "It would never have done for these stones to have been preserved, for they would have become objects of worship." Granted that they might have become objects of adoration, which is worse—to worship faked relics such as the water in which Joseph of Arimathea washed the blood-stained body of Jesus, portions of wood from the true Cross, bits from the crown of thorns, and thousands of odd pieces of bone from the anatomy of the Saints; or to venerate stones that would at least have had the merit of being genuine? Why are we left without any reliable evidences of God's miraculous revelation of Himself to men, while we have abundant evidence for occurrences of trifling importance to mankind that happened thousands of years before the alleged revelation? Hammurabi (a Babylonian monarch who flourished two thousand years or more before the Christian era) inscribed a very excellent, if somewhat drastic, code of laws upon a pillar of black diorite, and we have now got the stone and read the inscriptions; but the stone inscribed *by God* is lost!

The Book of Deuteronomy.—Evidence of every kind concurs to prove that in its original form it was a product of the seventh, not of the fifteenth, century B.C. In its present form, Deuteronomy is a composite and considerably modified version of the older work. Originally it may have consisted merely of

the long speech attributed to Moses, and this may have been the book which was "found" in the temple in the reign of Josiah, the rest of the work being added shortly afterwards.

As it is difficult to believe that such a work would have remained in the temple undiscovered for eight hundred years, is it not reasonable to conclude that the book was placed there by men who thought the time ripe for religious reforms—in fact, that a "pious fraud" was perpetrated?

The Psalms a Composite Book.—The fond delusion that all the Psalms were written by David (though why we should be anxious to ascribe what is really of much ethical value to a person confessedly immoral I never could understand) has been entirely dispelled. It is doubtful whether David wrote any of the Psalms.

Poetry and Prophetic Literature.—The book of Job is not a literary unity, nor was it written with any particular purpose; it is not a manufacture, but a growth.

Jonah is a Jewish *midrash*, or tradition, like the histories of Tobit and Susanna, and was certainly written after the Exile. Even orthodox clergymen now admit (in private) that the Jonah story is a fairy tale.

The great book of Isaiah is the work of several authors.

The book of Daniel was once assumed to be the most definitely prophetical of the Old Testament writings—a notion which is seriously discounted by the discovery that it was beyond question written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, *after* or *during* the happening of the events which were supposed to be

foretold, and nearly 500 years after the time of its supposed author. It is questionable whether such a person as Daniel ever existed; but it is certain that his adventure in the den of lions, and that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the fiery furnace, are as fabulous as any in the collection of Æsop.

"As a rule," says Canon Cheyne, "the prophets directly connect the final restoration with the removal of the sins of their own age, and with the accomplishment of such a work of judgment as lies within their own horizon; to Isaiah the last troubles are those of the Assyrian invasion; to Jeremiah the restoration follows on the exile to Babylon; Daniel connects the future glory with the overthrow of the Greek monarchy."[57]

Referring to non-Christian parallels to the belief in a Messiah, Canon Cheyne draws special attention to a Babylonian parallel, and concludes that "it is historically very conceivable that a Babylonian belief may be the real parent both of this and of all other Messianic beliefs within the sphere of Babylonian influence."[58]

The manner in which these so-called prophets can be looked upon as foretelling is explained elsewhere[59] as follows: "The prophets in the Old Testament, being inspired to interpret human needs, became unconscious prophets of the Christ.... It is quite

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[57] *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Messiah," p. 3058, par. 2.

[58] *Ibid*, p. 3063, par 10.

[59] In *Studies in the Character of Christ*, by Rev. C. H. Robinson, Hon. Canon of Ripon and Editorial Secretary to the S.P.G.

true that prophecy explained in this way is no longer available for the truth of Christianity to the same extent that it once was—at any rate, for the convincing of unbelievers."

New Testament Chronology.—We do not know exactly when or where[60] Jesus was born, when He died, or how long He ministered. As to the birth of Jesus, the only account which claims to give indications of date rests on a series of mistakes. No census was possible under Herod, and none took place under "Cyrenius" until A.D. 7. The only results which have a high degree of probability are the date A.D. 30 for the death of Jesus, and the period of about one year—conservative opinion estimates it to be three years—for the length of His public ministry.

The Virgin Birth.—The Gospels themselves afford the amplest justification for a criticism of their narratives. Jesus Himself made no appeal to His supposed miraculous birth. The only two verses in the first chapter of St. Luke which clearly express the idea of a supernatural birth so disturb the connection that we are impelled to regard them as an interpolation. It is Joseph, and not Mary, whose descent is traced from the son of Jesse. The genealogy of Joseph, given in the first Gospel, is prior in date to the story of the Virgin Birth, and could have been drawn up only while he was regarded as the real father of Jesus. Also St. Paul's statement that Jesus was born of the seed of David according to the flesh cannot be reconciled with the account of

[60] *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Nativity," par. 10, 11, 12.

his having been born of a virgin. There is no recorded adoration of the Virgin by St. Paul, or, for the matter of that, by any of the Apostles or disciples.

Apologists point out that among the Jews, generally, the notion of supernatural birth did not attach to their conception of the Messiah. This is true; but in the school of thought of which Philo was head there were traditions that every child of promise was born of a virgin. Now Philo, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, was a contemporary of Christ, and the influence of his school is not disputed. Speaking of him in the article on Alexandria in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, Dr. Smith says: "It is impossible not to feel the important office which the mystic philosophy, of which Philo is the representative, fulfilled in preparing for the apprehension of the highest Christian truth." In the next chapter we shall see that this "mystic philosophy" sprang from a heathen source, and that for the whole birth and childhood story of St. Matthew, in its every detail, it is possible to trace a pagan substratum.

Jesus.—Professor A. B. Bruce,[61] writer of the article on "Jesus," points out that, while the Gospels may be regarded as, in the main, a trustworthy tradition, they are unreliable in many of their details. Those details turn out to be the all-important ones, for he goes on to show that: The Temptation is a symbolic representation of a spiritual experience; the story of

[61] The late Rev. A. B. Bruce, D.D., Professor of Apologetics and New Testament Exegesis, Free Church College, Glasgow.

the Crucifixion is not pure truth, but truth mixed with doubtful legend; the night trial, the mocking, the incident of Barabbas, the two thieves, and the preternatural concomitants of the death are picturesque accessories of doubtful authenticity; Christ's conceptions of Messiahship were greatly influenced by the later Isaiah; while His spiritual intuitions are pure truth valid for all ages, His language concerning the Father shows limitation of vision; His acts of healing are considered to be real, though it does not follow that they were miraculous. Referring to the strange statement that Jesus declined to expound His parables to the people, lest they should be converted, we are assured that "it is not credible that Jesus would either cherish or avow such an inhuman intention, though it is possible that in His disappointment He may have expressed Himself in such a way as to be misunderstood."

This is all very well; but, if this be granted, we are naturally anxious to know in how many more matters Jesus may not have been misunderstood. What is the use of a revelation which can be misunderstood in this way? What can be the motive of the Omnipotent Revealer in allowing Himself to be misunderstood? Were not His hearers who misunderstood Him His own selected expositors?

We even find suspicion thrown on the supposed early belief in the divinity of Jesus. For the writer points out that, while in the Gospel of St. Luke Jesus is called "the Lord" about a dozen times, the earlier Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark refer to Him

simply as "Jesus"—"a fact which seems to indicate the gradual evolution of the belief in His divinity."

The conclusions of Professor Schmiedel, D.D., of Zürich, one of the writers of the article on the Gospels, are still more destructive. He admits[62] that his criticisms "may have sometimes raised a doubt whether any credible elements were to be found in the Gospels at all," and that there are only nine passages which "might be called the foundation-pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus." He admits also "the meagreness of the historical testimony regarding Jesus," as well "in canonical writings outside of the Gospels" as "in profane writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny."

The Resurrection.—The all-important subject of the "Resurrection" is treated by Professor Schmiedel, who tells us that the Gospel accounts "exhibit contradictions of the most glaring kind." The actuality of the Resurrection depends for its establishment upon these very narratives, and in such a case unimpeachable witnesses are naturally demanded. Such witnesses do not exist. The reality of the appearances has ever been in dispute. The account of the watch at the sepulchre and the sealing of the tomb is now given up as unhistorical even by those who accept the story as a whole. "The statements as to the empty tomb are to be rejected."[63] The silence of St. Paul

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[62] See *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Gospels," par. 139.

[63] See *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Gospels," par. 138, where the reasons for this conclusion are explained. See also par. 108.

with regard to these details is unaccountable, if the story of the Resurrection be true. For him nothing less than the truth of Christianity rested on the actuality of the Resurrection of Jesus. During his visit to Jerusalem he had had opportunities of acquiring knowledge relating to it, and it may naturally be assumed that, when endeavouring to prove to the Corinthians the truth of the Resurrection, he would state fully and clearly all that he knew about it. It is admitted on all hands that the appearance recorded by him was in the nature of a vision—a purely subjective experience. And it is well known that St. Paul uses the same Greek word to describe both the appearance to himself and the appearances to the original disciples, thereby implying the possibility that the latter also were of a visionary or subjective character. An apologetic tendency is perceptible in the Gospel account, and this may help to explain the rise of unhistorical elements. It is probable that, in the absence of knowledge, conjectures were freely made, and many questions asked, the replies to which were afterwards assumed to be facts.

The Gospels.—The article on the Gospels by Dr. E. A. Abbott[64] and Professor Schmiedel is crowded with damaging criticism. The view hitherto current that the four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and appeared thirty or forty years after the death of Jesus, can, it is stated, no longer be maintained. The four Gospels were compiled from earlier

[64] Author of various theological works, Hulsean Lecturer, Cambridge, 1876; Select Preacher, Oxford, 1877.

materials which have perished, and the dates when they first appeared in their present form are given as follows:—Mark, certainly after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70[65]; Matthew, about 119 A.D.; Luke, between 100 and 110; and John, between 132 and 140. But, even if we accept more conservative opinions which place the earliest Gospel about 65 A.D., that would not, of course, make any material difference, nor affect the conclusions of criticism as to their *contents*. Some of their statements of fact are quite erroneous, and the data are often in direct contradiction to one another. The evangelists made it clear that they wrote with a "lack of concern for historical precision." The imperfection of the Gospel accounts is everywhere manifest. Even if His ministry lasted only a few months, He must have said a thousandfold more, and repeated His sayings with many variations. The text must not be taken as a trustworthy guide to His original meaning. It merely shows us what the evangelists or their predecessors believed him to mean. The situations in which the words of Jesus are said to have been spoken cannot be implicitly accepted.

Both St. Matthew and St. Mark seem to have read into the utterances of Jesus details borrowed from subsequent facts or controversies. The historical value of the third Gospel is lowered by evidence of the writer's errors and misunderstandings. It has

[65] The interpolation in the last chapter of St. Mark goes back far into the second century. It is important to bear in mind that none of the dates given by Dr. Harnack and other authorities applies to the Gospels exactly as we now have them. Accounts of miracles have been added subsequently!

been widely assumed that it was written by the physician Luke, and that Luke was a companion of Paul. This view of its Pauline character, however, can now be maintained only in a very limited sense. It is clear that the third Gospel and the Acts are by the same author, but that author was not Luke. In the fourth Gospel we find more ambiguities than in all the other three together. The story of the raising of Lazarus cannot be considered historical. The common-sense view of the Synoptic omission of the raising of Lazarus is that earlier authors omitted the tradition because they did not accept it, and probably had never heard of it. "Is, then, the record of the raising of Lazarus a fiction?" asks Dr. Abbott. "Not a fiction, for it is a development. But it is non-historical, like the history of the Creation in Genesis, and like the records of the other miracles in the fourth Gospel, all of which are poetic developments."[66]

Lastly, we are plainly warned that "it is vain to look to the Church fathers for trustworthy information on the subject of the origin of the Gospels."[67] This is an exceedingly grave admission when we remember that these same untrustworthy fathers of the Church did the work of sifting the wheat from the chaff—settling what was and what was not canonical.

It need hardly be said that these general conclusions, which are supported by evidence that has satisfied numerous Christian scholars, entirely do away with the idea that the Gospels are

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[66] *Enc. Bib.*, art. "Lazarus."

[67] *Ibid*, art. "Gospels," par. 147.

credible and trustworthy narratives.

The Acts of the Apostles.—The sections of this book in which the narrative is written in the first person plural (says Professor Schmiedel) can be implicitly accepted; but it is equally certain that they are not by the same hand as the rest of the book. Apart from the "we" sections, no statement merits immediate acceptance on the mere ground of its presence in the book. The speeches are constructed by the author in accordance with his own conceptions. This book does not come from a companion of St. Paul; its date may be set down as between A.D. 105 and 130.

The Epistles of St. Paul.—The genuineness of the Pauline Epistles does not appear to be so clear as was once universally supposed. Advanced criticism, Professor van Manen[68] tells us, in his elaborate article on "Paul," has learned to recognise that none of these Epistles is by him, not even the four generally regarded as unassailable. Van Manen's position, however, is exceptional. In the article on "Epistolary Literature" the Epistle to Philemon and the Epistles to the Philippians, Thessalonians, Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians, and even the Epistle to the Romans, are recognised as real letters written by St. Paul. The genuineness of four of the Epistles is, in any case, generally accepted. As these include the first Epistle to the Corinthians, this conclusion is of the greatest importance. The Bishop of London is "content to rest his case, for not being intellectually ashamed of the documentary

[68] W. C. van Manen, D.D., Professor of Old-Christian Literature and New Testament Exegesis, Leyden.

evidence, on the four undisputed Epistles of St. Paul."[69]

The Apocalypse.—Criticism has clearly shown that the Book of Revelation can no longer be regarded as a literary unit, but is an admixture of Jewish with Christian ideas and speculations. Ancient testimony, that of Papias in particular, assumed the Presbyter John, and not the Apostle, to be its author.

This completes a summary of conclusions, arrived at by eminent Christian scholars of the more advanced school. Though they, or the majority of them, would be the last to make any such admission, the net result amounts practically to a surrender of the Christian dogmas.

[69] Spoken in an address to the St. Paul's Lecture Society, at the opening of a new session in 1904.

§ 3. By Whom the "Higher Criticism" is Accepted

These criticisms are, I repeat, the work not of anti-Christians, but of Christians, who have devoted themselves to Biblical research, and who are among the greatest living experts in that sphere of knowledge. Canon Cheyne, one of the two editors of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, has now written a volume on *Bible Problems and the New Material for their Solution*, in which he appeals to Churchmen and scholars and all who are interested in Bible criticism for thoroughness of investigation. There can be no doubt that there is a crying need for this thorough investigation, which at present is being shirked. While the main results arrived at by the Higher Criticism are, it is true, largely accepted by enlightened divines, the usual policy so far has been not to disseminate such knowledge. On this I shall have more to say in the concluding chapter of this book.

Dr. Harnack in Germany, and M. Loisy in France, may be cited as types of liberal theologians who proclaim their acceptance of the Higher Criticism. They both detach Christianity from mere narrative, and seek to appreciate it as a spiritual reality, which appeals to the imagination, the emotions, and the soul. Dr. Harnack is the Professor of Church History in the University of Berlin, and member of the Royal Prussian Academy, and a book called *What is Christianity?* is an English

translation of sixteen lectures delivered by him in the University of Berlin, 1899–1900. In this book the effort to prove that the Gospels though unhistorical are yet historical, that Christianity though untrue is yet true, is strongly in evidence to any impartial reader. Take his remark on the "Miraculous Element" in Lecture II.; we find the same kind of specious argument on which I have already animadverted in the chapter on Miracles. He says: "Miracles, it is true, do not happen; but of the marvellous and the inexplicable there is no lack—that the earth in its course stood still, that a she-ass spoke, that a *storm was quieted by a word*,[70] we do not believe, and we shall never again believe; but that the lame walked, the blind saw, and the deaf heard, will not be so summarily dismissed as an illusion." Why? Because, after all, these may have been accomplished by the operation of a natural law with which we are as yet unacquainted! "Although the order of Nature be inviolable, we are not yet by any means acquainted with all the forces working in it and acting reciprocally with other forces. Our acquaintance even with the forces inherent in matter, and with the field of their action, is incomplete; while of psychic forces we know very much less." He gives the whole situation away, however, by making *excuses for the Evangelists*, such as "*we know that the Gospels come from a time in which the marvellous may be said to have been something of almost daily occurrence*," and "*we now know that eminent persons have not to wait until they have been long dead, or even for several years, to*

[70] The italics in these quotations from Dr. Harnack are mine.

have miracles reported of them; they are reported at once, often the very next day." Again, speaking of the first three Gospels, he says: "These Gospels are not, it is true, historical works any more than the fourth; *they were not written with the simple object of giving the facts as they were; they were books composed for the work of evangelisation*." Such reasoning serves only to confirm one's suspicions. Here is the unedifying spectacle of an erudite scholar using his intellectual powers to make out a case for a Faith built upon foundations which he has himself destroyed. We do not wish to be told that there is a substratum of truth in the Gospel narratives. The ordinary man feels strongly that the whole should be true if it be God's Word. That this is, and always will be, the common-sense view of mankind is proved by the fact that it is held by the vast majority of the strictly orthodox, as well as by every Agnostic and every cultured heathen.

M. Loisy writes in much the same strain as Dr. Harnack, and finds adherents in both English and Roman Catholic Churches, as may be seen from the correspondence in the *Church Times* during April, 1904.

In the *Hibbert Journal* (January, 1905) an Oxfordshire rector, the Rev. C. J. Shebbeare, presents the same aspect of liberal theology by means of various illustrations. He remarks: "It is evident that the lesson taught by our new teachers must have an important bearing upon popular religious conceptions and upon religious practice. *Its chief effect will be to deliver us from the error of identifying religion with belief in the supernatural*

—an error of which it is not difficult to see the pernicious consequences" (italics are mine). This is all very well for those who can divest the Christian religion of its supernatural element, and yet remain honest believers. To my mind, this is simply non-Christian Theism, and the Theistic Church, Swallow Street, is the place where such persons should perform their devotions.

I crave the reader's patience while I give one more example of advanced apologetics. The Rev. Arthur Moorhouse, M.A., B.D., Tutor in Old Testament Languages and Literature at Didsbury College, offers, in a lecture[71] delivered at Manchester on "The Inspiration of the Old Testament," "an unhesitating and emphatic denial" to the statement that there is any "untruth in the Old Testament." Yet he tells us that "the early chapters of Genesis are not historical in our modern and scientific sense," and asks us to remember that, "in the nature of things, it could not be history, for it deals with facts which are, of necessity, prehistoric"! Such pitiful shifts and evasions seem to many of us wholly unworthy of earnest men. "Our fathers," says Mr. Moorhouse, "may have thought that this was history miraculously dictated, but the Bible does not say so." No, and the Bible does not say that it is speaking the truth, but "our fathers" were simple-minded enough to forget that such a guarantee was necessary on the part of a book which they, like Mr. Moorhouse, believed to be the inspired Word of God.

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[71] Fully reported in the *Methodist Times*.

§ 4. Admissions by Orthodox Apologists

I cannot conclude this review of Bible criticism without an allusion to the opinions of those theologians who agree with the "Higher Critics" to an extent far exceeding anything the pious layman suspects. I shall omit, as being too advanced, the views of Dr. Driver, given in his "Genesis," or of Canon Henson, as expressed in the *Contemporary Review* and in his book, *The Value of the Bible and Other Sermons*, or of Archdeacon Wilson, shown in his various interesting books and pamphlets; and will confine myself to comparatively conservative theology. I select, as representative of this type, *The Divine Library of the Old Testament*, by Dr. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Master of Selwyn College, Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, and Canon of Ely Cathedral), and *The Study of the Gospels*, being a "Handbook for the Clergy," by Dr. J. Armitage Robinson (Dean of Westminster).

In the former, which is among the books selected by the Christian Evidence Society for their Examination in March, 1907, we read: "The lectures do not attempt to deal with many of the graver questions which are being raised as to the Old Testament." But it is just the more difficult questions, such as those examined with such destructive effect by the Higher Criticism, which specially require to be answered. Why are they neglected? The author goes on to confess that "the books were

constructed out of earlier narratives; some were formed by the union of previous collections of poetry or prophecies; some betray marks of a reviser's hand; and even books which bear the names of well-known authors in some cases contain matter which must be attributed to other writers." Also we find the following significant admissions. Referring to the important last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, he accepts Dr. Driver's criticisms, and says: "I do not see how we can resist the conclusion that these chapters were not written by Isaiah, but by an unknown prophet towards the close of the Babylonian Exile"; and he owns that "it will inevitably seem to many students of the Bible that, in assigning the prophecy to a date so near to the events which it foretells, we are detracting from its truly predictive character and diminishing its value." However, he considers that "Isaiah is great enough to share his glory with this disciple, in whom, being dead, he yet spoke; and, paradox as it may seem, the truly prophetic character of the work gains by being referred to the time of the Exile." By what process of reasoning he arrives at this astonishing conclusion it is exceedingly difficult to comprehend.

Further admissions by Dr. Kirkpatrick must be noticed more briefly. They are: "The first chapter of Genesis is not, as we now know, a scientifically exact account of Creation." "The account of the Fall is, it may be, an allegory rather than a history in the strict sense of the term." "The Deluge was not universal in the sense that the waters covered the whole surface of the entire globe." "The Psalms, like the Proverbs, have a

long literary history. They are poems by different authors, and David may be one of them." "Modern criticism claims, and claims with justice, that the Hexateuch, like so many of the other books, is composite in its origin, and has a long literary history." "That the Pentateuch was entirely written by Moses is merely a Jewish tradition, which passed into the Christian Church and was commonly accepted until modern times. [Yet how much hangs upon the trustworthiness of this same Jewish tradition, and how much else may not the Church have wrongfully accepted?] Some of the variations of the LXX.[72] from the Hebrew text are due, no doubt, to errors and interpolations and deliberate alterations; but after all allowance has been made for these, I do not see how any candid critic can resist the conclusion that many of them represent variations existing in the Hebrew text from which the translation was made." "It was probably at the very beginning of this period [from the Fall of Jerusalem to the end of the fifth century], towards the close of the first century a.d., that the final settlement of an authoritative text took place.... How came it that all the copies containing other readings have disappeared?… Copies differing from it [the standard text] would die out or be deliberately destroyed." "The oldest Hebrew MS. in existence of which the date is known was written in 916 A.D.—*i.e.*, separated by more than a thousand years from the latest of the works

[72] The Greek version, known as the Septuagint (LXX.), made in Egypt in the third and second centuries B.C. for the use of the numerous body of Greek-speaking Jews and proselytes in that country.

included in the Canon."

Finally, the following crucial questions are offered (pp. 88–9) *and left unanswered*: "In what sense, it is asked, can this legislation, which is now said to be Mosaic in elemental germ and idea only, and to represent not the inspired deliverance of a supremely great individual, but the painful efforts of many generations of law-makers; these histories which have been compiled from primitive traditions, and chronicles, and annals, and what not; these books of prophecy which are not the authentic autographs of the prophets, but posthumous collections of such writings (if any) as they left behind them, eked out by the recollections of their disciples; these Proverbs and Psalms which have been handed down by tradition and altered and edited and re-edited; these histories which contain errors of date and fact, and have been, perhaps, 'idealised' by the reflection of the circumstances and ideas of the writer's own times upon a distant past; these seeming narratives which may be allegories; and these would-be prophecies which may be histories; in what sense can these be said to be *inspired*? The problems raised are grave." My own thoughts, and the thoughts of many like myself, are here candidly expressed. I have nothing to add, and can only echo this learned divine's solemn words—the problems raised are grave!

Turning now to the *Study of the Gospels*, we learn from Dr. Robinson as follows: There is no proof that St. Matthew is the author of the first Gospel. He is unable to fix the date himself, but quotes Dr. Harnack, who says "probably 70–75,"

and who also adds the important reservation, "except certain later additions." St. Mark's authorship, he thinks, is practically certain, and the year 65 is the probable date. "It is," he says, "exceedingly probable that St. Peter would not write or preach, even if he could speak at all, in any language but his mother tongue, the Aramaic of Galilee, a local dialect akin to Hebrew. When he wrote or preached to Greek-speaking people, he would use Mark or some other disciple as his interpreter." What, then, may I ask, had become of the "gifts at Pentecost"?

St. Luke is, according to Dr. Robinson, the fellow-traveller of St. Paul, and the date of his Gospel shortly after 70. Regarding St. John's, we are informed that Dr. Harnack fixes the date between 80 and 110, and thinks that it was written by another person of the same name—John the presbyter, or elder, of Ephesus. Dr. Robinson, however, in a chapter he devotes to the subject of the fourth Gospel, attempts to show its apostolic authorship.

Dr. Robinson admits that the authorship of all four Gospels is doubtful, but thinks that, regarding the second Gospel, we may accept the second-century tradition that it was written by St. Mark, and that St. Mark was the "interpreter" of St. Peter and wrote the Gospel in Rome from information derived from that Apostle. Very good; let us accept this conclusion. We have it, then, that *one* of the Gospels is from the mouth of an eye-witness. This eye-witness, however, was, after all, an eye-witness of only one year (or, according to conservative criticism, three years) of Christ's life; he was an illiterate person, and the information he

imparted after thirty or forty years had to be written down by another person in another language, and there is no telling how faithful or unfaithful the translation may have been. Besides, as Dr. Robinson points out in his chapters on "The Great Sermon" and "The Non-Marcan Document," there are very important omissions in St. Mark's Gospel. Referring to a supposed source for the information furnished by other evangelists, but omitted by St. Mark, he says: "You may gain some general idea of the scope of this document (the Non-Marcan[73]) by underlining in St. Luke's Gospel all those portions which are to be found in St. Matthew, but are not to be found in St. Mark."

Now, what are these omissions in St. Mark? Are they trivial? Let us judge for ourselves by taking a few selections. There is no mention whatever of the story of Christ's miraculous birth, nor of the other incidents of His childhood which are said to be in fulfilment of prophecy, and there is no mention of the great Sermon on the Mount. The story of the Resurrection is told in a few sentences, and the Ascension in one sentence. Unfortunately, too, these very sentences are admittedly interpolations, and St. Mark really ends at xvi. 8.[74] So there is no account of either

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[73] A Greek document which is supposed to have existed and then to have been entirely lost (imagine God's Word *lost*!), and to contain some of the matter related by St. Matthew and St. Luke, while omitted by St. Mark. *N.B.*—While the evangelist St. Mark is relegated to the position of a translator only, St. Matthew and St. Luke are taken by orthodox theologians to be mere copyists of St. Mark and a "lost" document!

[74] See art. "Gospels," in the *Enc. Bib.*, and Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*.

the Incarnation, Resurrection, or Ascension, and we are left with oral traditions, "lost" documents, and unknown copyists, as the only source from which to obtain any detailed information concerning the very groundwork of our Creed! Could anything be more unsatisfactory, more calculated to arouse suspicion of the "Christian Verities"—the Gospel truths? I am completely at a loss to understand how the Bishop of Gloucester[75] can say that the "Higher Criticism" has been a "gain to the Church," or the Bishop of London[76] that "the New Testament stands ten times as strong as it did fifty years ago." It would seem to be a case of "where ignorance is bliss," etc., or else of the wish being father to the thought.

There is much more that I should wish to call attention to, did space permit, but I have now, I think, given some insight into modern Bible criticism, and the extent to which it is accepted by Christians. It only remains, in conclusion, to ask for earnest thought on this new aspect of "the Word of God." In doing so the following additional considerations may be borne in mind.

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[75] In his address at the Church Congress held at Weymouth in 1905.

[76] In his address at the Church Congress held at Weymouth in 1905.

§ 5. Some Remaining Difficulties

WE MUST ACCEPT THE WHOLE OR REJECT THE WHOLE

The orthodox and traditional view of the Old Testament is preserved in the unrepealed "Blasphemy Act," 9 and 10, William III., cap. 32, which enacts that any person who shall deny the "Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament" to be of "divine authority" shall be incapable of holding any public office or employment, and shall, on a second conviction, also suffer imprisonment for a space of three years. The Vatican Council of 1870, "speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost," declared that the books of the Old and New Testament "have God for their author, and, as such, have been delivered to the Church." The Council, therefore, ordained that the man should be anathema who refused "to receive, for sacred and canonical, the books of the Holy Scripture in their integrity, with all their parts."

Dr. Bayley expressed the opinion of his day when he wrote[77]: "The Bible cannot be less than verbally inspired. Every word,

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[77] In his work, *Verbal Inspiration*. Quoted by Bishop Colenso in *The Pentateuch Examined*.

every syllable, every letter, is just what it would be had God spoken from heaven without any human intervention. Every scientific statement is infallibly correct; all its history and narratives of every kind are without any inaccuracy."

Listen, again, to the words of a well-known divine of our own Church, spoken but yesterday: "The whole of the teaching of the New Testament is based upon the supposition that God made a covenant with Abraham."[78] "You have our Lord Jesus Christ building His whole life on the Scriptures, and submitting to death in obedience to them."[79] This is the strictly orthodox opinion, and it is consistent with Christian doctrine. Yet, for obvious reasons, the Old Testament is now regarded as an incubus by an increasing number of earnest Christians.

In the New Testament there are many cruel sayings attributed to Jesus. Only the few are to be saved from the eternal torments of the damned (St. Matt. xiii. 10–13, xxii. 14, xxv. 41; St. Mark iv. 11–12, xvi. 16, etc.). Happily, owing to the rise of Rationalism and the consequent subjection of the Bible to criticism, the dogma of eternal torment is disputed on all sides, and the Athanasian Creed will soon no longer be forced upon us. The principle of the "chosen few" is so clearly Christ's teaching, and furnishes such a convenient explanation for the attitude of the

[78] The Dean of Canterbury, speaking on the Bishop of Winchester's paper at the Church Congress, 1903.

[79] The Dean of Canterbury, speaking in St. Mary Bredin's Church, Canterbury, December 4th, 1904.

many, that it is commonly adhered to; but liberal theologians no longer hold that "he that believeth not shall be damned," or that the punishment of the sinner is to be excruciating torture for all eternity. Unbelievers and sinners may all ultimately be saved, or at the worst their existence will end with this life. Good, very good; such views appeal to us as being more humane and rational; but are they compatible with the truth of the Bible? Mark the words of the late Bishop of Manchester: "The very foundation of our Faith, the very basis of our hopes, are taken from us when one line of that sacred volume, on which we base everything, is declared to be untruthful and untrustworthy." Thus it is that there are many who would still retain the inhuman doctrines ascribed to the Master. Fearful of losing the basis of their hopes, and unconscious, apparently, of their sublime egoism, they reason, and reason with logic: We must accept the whole or reject the whole.

SILENCE OF HISTORIANS

That the Bible should be open to criticism at all seems to me inconceivable if it really be *God's* gift to mankind. How could God, having determined after æons of time to make a definite revelation of Himself to His human creatures, permit the account of this revelation to be handed down in such a haphazard fashion that future generations cannot be sure that they possess a reliable record? This, too, when a trustworthy record was the more

essential on account of the miraculous nature of the narrative. As Professor Schmiedel remarks, the meagreness of the historical testimony regarding Jesus, whether in canonical writings outside of the Gospels or in profane writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, is most pronounced. Not a single passage can be produced from the writings of the great historians and philosophers who flourished between A.D. 40 and A.D. 140 which makes the slightest allusion to the astounding phenomena connected with the birth, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

It was at one time claimed that Josephus spoke of Jesus. That this has been given up by theologians may be verified by a reference to Canon Farrar's *Life of Christ*, vol. i., p. 63 (and p. 31 of the cheap edition), where we read that "The single passage in which he (Josephus) alludes to Him is interpolated, if not wholly spurious." There is also a disputed passage[80] in Tacitus, where he speaks of Christians having "their denomination from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator, Pontius Pilate." And that is all! Could anything be more disappointing than this must be to thoughtful Christians who wish to establish the historical accuracy of the miraculous story of God's life on earth? Eusebius (A.D. 315–340), the celebrated ecclesiastical historian, is apparently reduced to appealing to a Pagan oracle for a proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for he says to the heathen: "But

[80] See Appendix.

thou at least listen to thine own gods, to thy oracular deities themselves, who have borne witness, and ascribed to our Saviour (Jesus Christ) not imposture, but piety and wisdom, and ascent into heaven."

The silence of secular historians is accounted for, by certain divines, by falling back on a theory of hostility or contempt. Thus Dean Farrar thinks that Josephus's silence on the subject of Jesus and Christianity was as deliberate as it was dishonest (see his *Life of Christ*, vol. i., p. 63). Except that this offers a much-needed explanation, I am not cognisant of any reason for suspecting the famous *secular* historian, although, of course, the untrustworthiness of the *Christian* historians is notorious. Eusebius, for example, the gravest of the ecclesiastical historians, confesses, with commendable frankness: "We have decided to relate nothing concerning them [the early Christians] except the things in which we can vindicate the divine judgment."[81]

With regard to the prodigy of the darkness, etc., that occurred at the death of Jesus, Gibbon informs us as follows: "It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of

[81] See Bk. VIII., chap. ii., par. 2, on p. 324, vol. i. *Eusebius* (Oxford: Parker & Co.). His candour here is deserving of all praise; but his methods can hardly be termed scientific; while an impartial perusal of his *Vita Constantini*, a panegyric on the Emperor Constantine, should be enough to shake the confidence of all but the blindest of his admirers.

Nature—earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses—which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. But the one and the other has omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."[82] Any attempt to explain this away by supposing that the darkness of three hours was local only detracts from the magnitude of the miracle, which was intended, by its very magnitude, to be one of the proofs of the death of a God.

THOUGHTS ON "TRADITION" AS GOD'S METHOD FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF TRUTH TO POSTERITY

Have you ever, in the days of your early youth, played the game of "gossip"? It is an amusing game, and also points a moral. A number of persons put themselves in a long row, and the first will think of some little incident, which he will carefully whisper to his neighbour, who will then pass it on, and so on, and so on, till it reaches the last person, who will proceed to repeat out loud the story he has heard. The original story will then be divulged, and much amusement is caused by the differences that are found between the two stories. This illustration of what occurs in "gossip" came back to my mind with much misgiving when I first heard how the story of my Saviour's life on earth

[82] See p. 179, chap. xv., of Gibbon's *Rome* (Oddy, 1809).

was handed down for a long period "by tradition." Apparently, Christian theologians look quite complacently, and without any misgiving, upon this process for the transmission of the Christian verities; but, for myself, whether it were a century, or whether it were only a matter of thirty or forty years, before the final committal to writing, it was a heartrending discovery, and all my confidence in the truth of the Bible story was shaken. My dismay was not diminished when I learnt also that it was extremely doubtful whether the authors were eye-witnesses of the events, or especially inspired by God for their task; also, that there had been subsequent interpolations by equally unknown and uninspired writers, who, to speak plainly, were nothing more nor less than forgers, actuated, possibly, by pious motives. That the writers of the Gospels were vouchsafed any unusual facilities through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is discredited by the remarks of the apologists themselves. Thus, Dr. Robinson, in his book already referred to, alludes to St. Peter's illiteracy, St. Mark's poor literary attainments, and the limitations to which all the evangelists in ancient times were subjected.

We find ourselves asking the questions, "Did not God know that a time would come when we should discover that nature's laws were not of the fragile or elastic character which our forefathers had supposed? Did He not know that we should therefore require absolute proof before we could believe that they had been broken in a bygone and credulous age?" Instead of this, the only proofs afforded us are copies of documents concocted

from hearsay—we are not sure when or by whom—and from time to time fraudulently manipulated by interested though "pious" forgers. Did He, in His Omniscience, purposely allow events to take their course, and intend the story of His Son's life upon earth to be handed down to us by the same unsatisfactory process as that of many another ancient tradition now known to be historically worthless? If ever special interference with the course of nature were necessary, surely it would be here—a miracle to prove the miracle on which our hopes are staked. Or, if this be asking too much, if it be argued that it is no longer God's pleasure to break the laws which He has made, and that He now accomplishes His purposes by means of these laws only, how comes it that, for the safeguarding of this great truth, the most ordinary precautions have been neglected?

We are often asked to consider the yearnings of man as a proof that the thing yearned for is a reality. His yearnings, therefore, are not a negligible quantity. Do not, then, the yearnings of millions of Christians in the Roman Catholic and Greek Churches for miraculous proofs of God's residence once upon earth count for something? Are not all the "miraculous" relics and "wonder-working" ikons a proof that man feels that God's revelation ought to be assured to us by the continuance of miracles? In our own Church, Holman Hunt's painting of "The Light of the World" is being sent round our colonies, to strengthen people's belief in Jesus Christ. Why, oh why, have we not the real picture of our Saviour, bringing our God nearer to us, and enabling us to

focus our thoughts on Him? I once mentioned my feeling on this subject to a clergyman, a doctor of divinity, well versed in Church history. He replied by suggesting that there was a tradition which indicated that the true likeness of our Lord *had* been miraculously transmitted, and that from this the great Italian painters had caught their inspiration.[83] It seems hardly necessary to have recourse to the supernatural when there were natural sources available in the shape of representations of pagan gods. Thus Mercury, attired as a shepherd, with a lamb upon his shoulders, was no infrequent object in ancient art, and this has, in some cases, led to a difficulty in distinguishing between Mercury and Jesus Christ. Similarly we know that the pictures and sculptures wherein Isis is represented in the act of suckling her child Horus formed the foundation for the Christian figures and paintings of the Madonna and child.

THE ALLEGED SINLESSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

It may be urged that we have, what is of far more importance, the picture of His character. Have we? The absolute sinlessness of Christ is one of the chief proofs held out to us of His divinity. It is described as being in itself a miracle so great that it furnishes us with sufficient grounds for belief in other miracles. Many

[83] See Appendix.

pious and learned theists feel that the character of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels betrays imperfections. But let this pass. What do we know of His life? Let us assume that in the Gospel of St. Mark we are put in possession of the impressions of an eye-witness. St. Peter's personal knowledge of the *private* life of Jesus was confined to his recollections concerning a beloved Master during the period of His *public* ministry. And that ministry extended over one year, or at most three years. Have not the disciples of great teachers in the past invariably extolled the perfections of their masters? Have they ever dwelt upon their imperfections? Has not the picture handed down by tradition, and afterwards committed to writing, often been that of a perfect man? That the writers of the Gospels recognised the need for Christ to appear sinless, and adopted questionable methods for their purpose, is only too evident. Dr. Robinson explains[84] the disappearance from the other Gospels of St. Mark's references to "anger," "grief," "groaning," "vehemence," etc., as being "the result of a kind of reverence which belonged to a slightly later stage of reflection, when certain traits might even seem derogatory to the dignity of the sacred character." Comment is superfluous.

[84] In note A, pp. 42–3, of his book, *The Study of the Gospels*.

THE IGNORANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

There is another difficulty of belief in the divinity of Christ, which it is all the more essential to bring into prominence because it usually receives but scant notice from the pulpit. I refer to the "ignorance" of Jesus Christ. In a review of *Le Réalisme Chrétien et l'Idéalisme Grec*

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