

THE CREED OF CHRISTENDOM



W. R. GREG

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DR. W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN

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THE
CREED OF CHRISTENDOM:

ITS FOUNDATIONS CONTRASTED WITH ITS
SUPERSTRUCTURE

BY
WILLIAM RATHBONE GREG

“The Prayer of Ajax was for Light.”

*With a Preface by W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN, Author of
“Morality as a Religion,” “Ethical Interpretations,” etc.*

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

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1905

“ I should, perhaps, be a happier, at all events a more useful, man, if my mind were otherwise constituted. But so it is : and even with regard to Christianity itself, like certain plants, I creep towards the light, even though it draw me away from the more nourishing warmth. Yea, I should do so, even if the light made its way through a rent in the wall of the Temple.”—COLERIDGE.

“ Perplex'd in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out ;
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

“ He fought his doubts and gather'd strength ;
He would not make his judgment blind ;
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them : thus he came at length

“ To find a stronger faith his own ;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

“ But in the darkness and the cloud.”

—TENNYSON.

“ No inquirer can fix a direct and clear-sighted gaze towards Truth who is casting side glances all the while on the prospects of his soul.”—MARTINEAU.

“ What hope of answer or redress ?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.”

—TENNYSON.

PREFACE

A FEW explanatory words may be deemed necessary to a new and revised edition of a work which aroused so much interest, and earned the generous approval of all competent to offer an unbiassed opinion, when it appeared over half a century ago. The *Creed of Christendom*, in spite of the damaging character of its analysis of the historic documents and of the *ethos* of popular Christianity; in spite, too, of the comparatively expensive price at which it was issued, has passed through nine editions—no mean tribute to its excellence. Its success was not due to the novelty of the method or the arguments of its author: as he himself candidly admits, it is the work of a man with the ordinary education of an English gentleman, deeply interested in the religious problem, and perplexed by the difficulties besetting the traditional Belief. Nothing he advances was new to the serious student of Religion, even in the fifties; his masters are, in the main, such well-known Continental authorities as De Wette and Baur; but he presents the results of their labours with a freshness and a force; in a spirit at once so manly and modest, so sincere, high-minded and devout, as to compel the attention of unprejudiced, truth-loving men. In the half-century that has elapsed the critical positions, both as regards the Old and the New Testament, have been very notably advanced, but the author has nothing to disavow. No conclusion of his has been invalidated by subsequent inquiry; the progress of research has but confirmed his judgment where it has not enlarged its scope and extended his criticisms beyond his original purview. It has, therefore, been thought advisable to allow the text to stand as he left it in his ninth edition, and merely to add an occasional note, within parentheses, indicating the main advances in Critical Knowledge tending to modify his conclusions on such matters as the date of the Gospels and some of the Epistles. Space, however, has made it necessary to compress the ample material of his two volumes, and even to omit some entire chapters, such as that on the modern refinements of the doctrine of inspiration; on miracles; on the limits of reliance to be placed on Apostolic authority, and the

problem of the Future Life, which, it may be mentioned, he confesses his inability to solve. Mr. Greg is interesting and suggestive as usual in handling these subjects, but their omission does not, it is believed, impair the general effectiveness of his argument. Nothing vitally necessary to it is sacrificed, and more than enough is retained to substantiate his main conclusion, that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are inadequate to the controversial burden, placed on them by the Reformers, of guaranteeing the credibility of the incomprehensible tenets of orthodoxy.

The increased interest now generally felt in Biblical studies in England, coupled with the growing consciousness of the unsettled and thoroughly unsatisfactory condition of the religious problem, seems to promise a still wider popularity for so admirably lucid, temperate, and reverent a statement of the case against the popular Creed. Such a book should prove for many a valuable introduction to the rational study of Religion, and notably contribute to the cause of genuine reformation by the exposure of the untenable nature of the traditional teaching. The path of enlightenment is most effectually barred by the common assumption of the inerrancy of the Scripture record in all matters of belief and conduct. This work is designedly re-published as a compendious refutation of the claims of Religion built on authority, Biblical or ecclesiastical; as an incentive to the study of the religious question, and an encouragement to the cultivation of habits of thought and self-reliance in matters of belief. The moral of the book is that a man should learn to think for himself. "He," says Zschokke, "who does not like living in the *furnished lodgings of tradition* must build his own house, his own system of thought and faith, for himself."

W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN.

January, 1905.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE TO THE PRESENT EDITION	3
AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION	7
INTRODUCTION TO THIRD EDITION	13
CHAPTER I.	
INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES	35
CHAPTER II.	
AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY OF THE PENTATEUCH AND THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON GENERALLY	46
CHAPTER III.	
THE PROPHECIES	53
CHAPTER IV.	
THEISM OF THE JEWS IMPURE AND PROGRESSIVE	60
CHAPTER V.	
ORIGIN OF THE GOSPELS	64
CHAPTER VI.	
FIDELITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY—NATURE AND LIMITS	71
CHAPTER VII.	
FIDELITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY CONTINUED—MATTHEW	80
CHAPTER VIII.	
SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED—MARK AND LUKE	87
CHAPTER IX.	
SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED—GOSPEL OF JOHN	91

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
RESULTS OF THE FOREGOING CRITICISM	97
CHAPTER XI.	
RESURRECTION OF JESUS.	103
CHAPTER XII.	
IS CHRISTIANITY A REVEALED RELIGION?	112
CHAPTER XIII.	
CHRISTIAN ECLECTICISM	119

PREFACE

THIS work was commenced in the year 1845, and was finished in 1848. Thus much it is necessary to state, that I may not be supposed to have borrowed without acknowledgment from works which have preceded mine in order of publication.

It is now given to the world after long hesitation, with much diffidence, and with some misgiving. For some time I was in doubt as to the propriety of publishing a work which, if it might correct and elevate the views of some, might also unsettle and destroy the faith of many. But three considerations have finally decided me.

First. I reflected that, if I were right in believing that I had discerned some fragments or gleams of truth which had been missed by others, I should be acting a criminal and selfish part if I allowed personal considerations to withhold me from promulgating them; that I was not entitled to take upon myself the privilege of judging what amount of new light the world could bear, nor what would be the effect of that light upon individual minds; that sound views are formed and established by the contribution, generation after generation, of widows' mites; that, if my small quota were of any value, it would spread and fructify, and, if worthless, would come to naught.

Secondly. Much observation of the conversation and controversy of the religious world had wrought the conviction that the evil resulting from the received notions as to Scriptural authority has been immensely under-estimated. I was compelled to see that there is scarcely a low and dishonouring conception of God current among men, scarcely a narrow and malignant passion of

the human heart, scarcely a moral obliquity, scarcely a political error or misdeed, which Biblical texts are not, and may not be, without any violence to their obvious signification, adduced to countenance and justify. On the other hand, I was compelled to see how many clear, honest, and aspiring minds have been hampered and baffled in their struggles after truth and light, how many tender, pure, and loving hearts have been hardened, perverted, and forced to a denial of their nobler nature and their better instincts, by the ruthless influence of some passages of Scripture which seemed in the clearest language to condemn the good and to denounce the true. No work contributed more than Mr. Newman's *Phases of Faith* to force upon me the conviction that little progress can be hoped for, either for religious science or charitable feeling, till the question of Biblical authority shall have been placed upon a sounder footing, and viewed in a very different light.

Thirdly. I called to mind the probability that there were many other minds like my own pursuing the same inquiries, and groping towards the same light; and that to all such the knowledge that they have fellow-labourers where they least expected it must be a cheering and sustaining influence.

It was also clear to me that this work must be performed by laymen. Clergymen of all denominations are, from the very nature of their position, incapacitated from pursuing this subject with a perfect freedom from all ulterior considerations. They are restrained and shackled at once by their previous confession of Faith, and by the

consequences to them of possible conclusions. It remained, therefore, to see what could be done by an unfettered layman, endowed with no learning, but bringing to the investigation the ordinary education of an English gentleman, and a logical faculty exercised in other walks.

The three conclusions which I have chiefly endeavoured to make clear are these: that the tenet of the Inspiration of the Scriptures is baseless and untenable under any form or modification which leaves to it a dogmatic value; that the Gospels are not textually faithful records of the sayings and actions of Jesus, but, occasionally at least, ascribe to Him words which He never uttered and deeds which He never did; and that the Apostles only partially comprehended, and imperfectly transmitted, the teaching of their Great Master. The establishment of these points is the contribution to the progress of religious science which I have attempted to render.

I trust it will not be supposed that I regard this work in any other light than as a *pioneering* one. A treatise on religion that is chiefly negative and critical can never be other than incomplete, partial, and preparatory. But the clearing of the ground is a necessary preliminary to the growing of the seed; the removal of superincumbent rubbish is indispensable to the discovery and extraction of the buried and intermingled ore; and the liberation of the mind from forestalling misconceptions, misleading prejudices, and hampering and distracting fears must precede its setting forth, with any chance of success, in the pursuit of Truth.

Nor, I earnestly hope, will the book be regarded as antagonistic to the Faith of Christ. It is with a strong conviction that popular Christianity is not the religion of Jesus that I have resolved to publish my views. What Jesus really did and taught, and whether his doctrines were perfect or superhuman, are questions which afford ample matter for an independent work.

There is probably no position more safe and certain than that our religious views

must, of necessity, be *essentially* imperfect and incorrect; that at best they can only form a remote approximation to the truth, while the amount of error they contain *must* be large and varying, and *may* be almost unlimited. And this must be alike, though not equally, the case, whether these views are taught us by reason or by revelation—that is, whether we arrive at them by the diligent and honest use of those faculties with which God has endowed us, or by listening to those prophets whom he may have ordained to teach us. The difference cannot be more than this: that in the latter case our views will contain that fragment, or that human disguise, of positive truth which God knows our minds are alone capable of receiving, or which he sees to be fitted for their guidance; while in the former case they will contain that form or fragment of the same positive truth which he framed our minds with the capability of achieving. In the one case they will contain as much truth as we can take in, in the other as much as we can discover; but in both cases this truth must necessarily not only be greatly limited, but greatly alloyed, to bring it within the competence of finite human intelligences. Being finite, we *can* form no correct or adequate idea of the Infinite; being material, we *can* form no clear conception of the Spiritual. The question of a Revelation can in no way affect this conclusion, since even the omnipotence of God cannot infuse infinite conceptions into finite minds—cannot, without an entire change of the conditions of our being, pour a just and full knowledge of his nature into the bounded capacity of a mortal's soul. Human intelligence could not grasp it; human language could not express it.

“The consciousness of the individual [says Fichte] reveals itself alone; his knowledge cannot pass beyond the limits of his own being. His conceptions of other things and other beings are *only his conceptions*; they are not those things or beings themselves. The living principle of a living Universe must be infinite, while all our ideas and conceptions are finite, and

applicable only to finite beings. The Deity is thus not an object of knowledge, but of faith, not to be approached by the understanding, but by the moral sense; not to be conceived, but to be felt. All attempts to embrace the infinite in the conception of the finite are, and must be, only accommodations to the frailty of man.....

“Atheism is a charge which the common understanding has repeatedly brought against the finer speculations of philosophy, when, in endeavouring to solve the riddle of existence, they have approached, albeit with reverence and humility, the source from which all existence proceeds. Shrouded from human comprehension in an obscurity from which chastened imagination is awed back, and thought retreats in conscious weakness, the Divine nature is surely a theme on which man is little entitled to dogmatise. Accordingly, it is here that the philosophic intellect becomes most painfully aware of its own insufficiency.....But the common understanding has no such humility; its God is an Incarnate Divinity; imperfection imposes its own limitations on the Illimitable, and clothes the inconceivable Spirit of the Universe in sensuous and intelligible forms derived from finite nature!”

This conviction once gained, the whole rational basis for intolerance is cut away. We are all of us, though not equally, mistaken, and the cherished dogmas of each of us are not, as we had fondly supposed, the pure truth of God, but simply our own special form of error—the fragmentary and refracted ray of light which has fallen on our own minds.¹

But are we, therefore, to relax in our pursuit of truth, or to acquiesce contentedly in error? By no means. The obligation still lies upon us as much as ever to press forward in the search; for, though absolute truth is unattainable, yet the amount of error in our views is capable of progressive

and perpetual diminution, and it is not to be supposed that all errors are equally innocuous. To rest satisfied with a lower degree of truth than our faculties are capable of attaining, to acquiesce in errors which we might eliminate, to lie down consciously and contentedly in unworthy conceptions of the Nature and Providence of God, is treason alike to him and to our own soul. It is true that all our ideas concerning the Eternal Spirit must, considered objectively, be erroneous, and that no revelation can make them otherwise; all, therefore, that we require, or can obtain, is such an image or idea of him as shall satisfy our souls and meet our needs, as shall (we may say) be to us subjectively true. But this conception, in order to become to us such satisfying and subjective truth, must, of course, be the highest and noblest that our minds are capable of forming;² every man's conception of God must consequently vary with his mental cultivation and mental powers. If he content himself with any lower image than his intellect can grasp, he contents himself with that which is *false to him*, as well as false in fact—one which, being lower than he could reach, he must *ipso facto* feel to be false. The peasant's idea of God—true to him—would be false to me, because I should feel it to be unworthy and inadequate. If the nineteenth century after Christ adopts the conceptions of the nineteenth century before him, if cultivated and chastened Christians adopt the conceptions of the ignorant, narrow, and vindictive Israelite, they are guilty of *thinking worse of God*, of taking a lower, meaner, more limited view of his nature, than the faculties he has bestowed are capable of inspiring; and, as the highest view we are capable of forming must necessarily be the nearest to the truth, they are wilfully acquiescing in a lie—they are guilty of what Bacon calls “the apotheosis of error,” stereotyping and canonising one particular stage of the blunders through which thought passes on its way to truth.

² Religious truth is therefore necessarily progressive, because our powers are progressive—a position fatal to positive dogma.

¹ “Our little systems have their day;
They have their day, and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”
—*In Memoriam*.

Now, to think (or speak) ill of God is to incur the guilt of blasphemy. It is surprising that this view of the matter should so rarely have struck the orthodox; but they are so intently occupied with the peril on one side that they have become blind or careless to the, at least, equal peril that lies on the other. If, as they deem, erroneous belief be dangerous and criminal, it must be so whether it err on the side of deficiency or of excess. They are sensitively and morbidly alive to the peril and the sin of not believing everything which Revelation has announced, yet they are utterly blind to what should be regarded as the deeper peril and the darker guilt of believing that Revelation has announced doctrines dishonouring to the pure majesty of God. If it be wrong and dangerous to doubt what God has told us of Himself, it must surely be equally so, or more so, to believe, on inadequate evidence, or on no evidence at all, that He ever taught doctrines so derogatory to His attributes as many which orthodox theology ascribes to Him. To believe that he is cruel, short-sighted, capricious, and unjust is an affront, an indignity, which (on the orthodox supposition that God takes judicial cognisance of such errors) must be immeasurably more guilty and more perilous than to believe that the Jews were mistaken in imagining that He spoke through Moses, or the Christians in imagining he spoke through Paul. He is affirmed to be a jealous God, an angry God, a capricious God, punishing the innocent for the sins of the guilty, punishing with infinite and endless torture men whom He had created weak, finite, and ephemeral—nay, whom He had fore-ordained to sin—a God who came down from heaven, walked among men, feasted at their tables, endured their insults, died by their hands. Is there no peril in all this, no sin in believing all these unworthy puerilities of a Creator who has given us Reason and Nature to teach us better things? Yet countless Christians accept them all with hasty and trembling dismay as if afraid that God will punish them for being slow to believe evil of Him.

We have seen that the highest views of religion which we can attain here must, from the imperfection of our faculties, be necessarily inaccurate and impure; but we may go further than this. It is more than probable that religion, in order to obtain currency and influence with the great mass of mankind, must be alloyed with an amount of error which places it far below the standard attainable by human capacities. A pure religion—by which we mean one as pure as the loftiest and most cultivated earthly reason can discern—would probably not be comprehended by, or effective over, the less-educated portion of mankind. What is truth to the philosopher would not be truth, nor have the effect of truth, to the peasant. The religion of the many must necessarily be more incorrect than that of the refined and reflective few, not so much in its essence as in its forms, not so much in the spiritual idea which lies latent at the bottom of it as in the symbols and dogmas in which that idea is embodied. In many points true religion would not be comprehensible by the ignorant, nor consolatory to them, nor guiding and supporting for them. Nay, *true religion would not be true to them*—that is, the effect it would produce on their mind *would not be the right one*, would not be the same it would produce on the mind of one fitted to receive it and competent to grasp it. To undisciplined minds, as to children, it is probable that coarser images and broader views are necessary to excite and sustain the efforts of virtue. The belief in an *immediate* heaven of sensible delight and glory will enable an uneducated man to dare the stake in the cause of faith or freedom; the idea of Heaven as a distant scene of slow, patient, and perpetual progress in intellectual and spiritual being would be inadequate to fire his imagination or to steel his nerves. Again, to be grasped by, and suitable to, such minds, the views presented them of God must be anthropomorphic, not spiritual, and in proportion as they are so they are false; the views of His government must be special, not universal, and in proportion as they are so they will

be false. The sanctions which a faith derives from being announced from Heaven amid clouds and thunder, and attested by physical prodigies, are of a nature to attract and impress the rudest and most ignorant minds, perhaps in proportion to their rudeness and their ignorance. The sanctions derived from accordance with the breathings of Nature and the dictates of the soul are appreciable in their full strength by the trained and nurtured intelligence alone.¹

The rapid spread and general reception of any religion may unquestionably be accepted as proof that it contains some vital truth; it may be regarded also as an equally certain proof that it contains a large admixture of error—of error, that is, cognisable and detectable by the higher human minds of the age. A perfectly pure faith would find too little preparation for it in the common mind and heart to admit of prompt reception. The Christian religion would hardly have spread as rapidly as it did had it remained as pure as it came from the lips of Jesus. It owes its success probably at least as much to the corruptions which speedily encrusted it, and to the errors which were early incorporated with it, as to the ingredient of pure and sublime truth which it contained. Its progress among the Jews was owing to the doctrine of the Messiahship, which they erroneously believed to be fulfilled in Jesus. Its rapid progress among the Pagans was greatly attributable to its metaphysical accretions and its heathen corruptions. Had it retained its original purity and simplicity, had it been kept free from all extraneous admixtures, a system of noble Theism and lofty morality, as Christ de-

¹ All who have come much into contact with the minds of children or of the uneducated classes are fully aware how unfitted to their mental condition are the more wide, catholic, and comprehensive views of religion, which yet we hold to be the true ones, and how essential it is to them to have a well-defined, positive, somewhat dogmatic, and, above all, a divinely-attested and *authoritative* creed, deriving its sanctions from without. Such are best dealt with by rather narrow, decided, and undoubting minds.

livered it, where would it now have been? Would it have reached our times as a substantive religion? Would truth have floated down to us without borrowing the wings of error? These are interesting, though purely speculative, questions.

One word in conclusion. Let it not be supposed that the conclusions sought to be established in this book have been arrived at eagerly, or without pain and reluctance. The pursuit of truth is easy to a man who has no human sympathies, whose vision is impaired by no fond partialities, whose heart is torn by no divided allegiance. To him the renunciation of error presents few difficulties; for the moment it is recognised as error its charm ceases. But the case is very different with the searcher whose affections are strong, whose associations are quick, whose hold upon the past is clinging and tenacious. He may love truth with an earnest and paramount devotion, but he loves much else also. He loves errors which were once the cherished convictions of his soul. He loves dogmas which were once full of strength and beauty to his thoughts, though now perceived to be baseless or fallacious. He loves the church where he worshipped in his happy childhood, where his friends and his family worship still, where his grey-haired parents await the resurrection of the just, but where *he* can worship and await no more. He loves the simple old creed which was the creed of his earlier and brighter days, which is the creed of his wife and children still, but which inquiry has compelled him to abandon. The past and the familiar have chains and talismans which hold him back in his career, till every fresh step forward becomes an effort and an agony, every fresh error discovered is a fresh bond snapped asunder, every new glimpse of light is like a fresh flood of pain poured in upon the soul. To such a man the pursuit of truth is a daily martyrdom—how hard and bitter let the martyr tell. Shame to those who make it doubly so; honour to those who encounter it saddened, weeping, trembling, but unflinching still.

To this martyrdom, however, we believe there is an end; for this unswerving integrity there is a rich and sure reward. Those who flinch from inquiry because they dread the possible conclusion; who turn aside from the path as soon as they catch a glimpse of an unwelcome goal; who hold their dearest hopes only on the tenure of a closed eye and a repudiating mind—will, sooner or later, have to encounter that inevitable hour when doubt will not be silenced, and inquiry can no longer be put by; when the spectres of old misgivings which have been rudely repulsed, and of questionings which have been sent empty away, will return “to

haunt, to startle, to waylay”; and will then find their faith crumbling away at the moment of greatest need, not because it is false, but because they, half-wilfully, half-fearfully, grounded it on false foundations. But the man whose faith in God and futurity has survived an inquiry pursued with that “single eye” to which alone light is promised has attained a serenity of soul possible only to the fearless and the just. For him the progress of science is fraught with no dark possibilities of ruin; no dreaded discoveries lie in wait for him round the corner; since he is indebted for his short and simple creed, not to sheltering darkness, but to conquered light.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION

THIS book was originally published nearly a quarter of a century ago. Its sale, since then, though by no means large, has been singularly continuous and regular—the number of copies taken by the public having scarcely varied from year to year; and the second edition was disposed of somewhat more rapidly than the first. It is, therefore, fair to conclude that the work met a permanent want felt by many of my countrymen which no other writings at the time accessible to them could furnish, and at least temporarily filled a gap in our literature which, so far as I am aware, has not since been otherwise supplied. During the period that has elapsed since its publication, moreover, I have received many gratifying and even touching testimonies both from friends and strangers as to the assistance which it rendered them and the comfort which it suggested to them, when their minds were perplexed and agitated by the doubts and the questions which had disturbed my own. Under these circumstances I have acceded without demur to the wish of my publisher to issue a new and revised edition.

I have re-perused every chapter with great care, but I have added little and altered less. Here and there I have modified a phrase where I thought I had expressed myself too confidently or too harshly, or where I appeared to have fallen into incorrectness or exaggeration; but the changes introduced have been few and slight. On the whole, I thought it wisest and fairest to leave the text as it originally stood, bearing distinct marks of the date at which it was written, when the topics discussed were comparatively new to English readers, and

when the several authors who have since handled them, and thrown so much light upon them, had not yet put their views before the world. But I have re-considered every point with caution, and I am sure with candour; I have read with attention and respect, and with a real desire to profit, the various criticisms and replies which the book on its first publication called forth; and I am bound to say that I see no reason to believe that I was in error as to any essential point. The progress made in Biblical criticism and historical science during the last five-and-twenty years has furnished abundant confirmation, but I think refutation in no single instance. It is in no spirit of elation or self-applause that I say this—even if with some unfeigned surprise; for I know better than most with how little learning the book was written, and how much learning—to say nothing of genius and insight—has since been brought to bear on the subject. Strauss's great work had, indeed, been published and translated into English before my work appeared; but Bishop Colenso's *Inquiry into the Pentateuch*, *Ecce Homo*, Renan's *Vie de Jésus* and his Apostolic volumes, *The Jesus of History*, by Sir H. D. Hanson, Chief Justice of South Australia—a work well worth perusal, as having in some degree a special standpoint of its own, and showing the impression made by the evidence adducible on a trained legal mind—and Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, are all of much later date.

* * * * *

It was remarked by a friendly critic of my first edition that, in approaching the question of the resurrection of Christ from

the side of the Gospels instead of from that of the Epistles, I had thrown away the main strength of the case. The criticism is just, and in deference to it I have since reconsidered the subject from the point of view suggested. The Epistles were of prior date to the Gospels;¹ the earliest statement, therefore, that we possess of the fact of the resurrection, as well as the only one whose author we know for certain, is that contained in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians xv. 3-8. Leaving out of view the Gospels, then, the evidence of the great foundation doctrine of the Christian creed consists in these two indisputable points—that all the Apostles and disciples believed it, had no doubt about it, held it with a conviction so absolute that it inspired them with zeal and courage to live as missionaries, and to die as martyrs; and that Paul, five-and-twenty years after the event, wrote of it thus: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,² and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at

¹ The date of the Gospels is at best conjectural. No authority, however, we believe, would place even the earliest of them before A.D. 60 or 65, many much later. Now, the Epistle to the Corinthians was written almost certainly about A.D. 57, and the other Pauline writings between 52 and 68. (*See Conybeare and Howson.*)

[This note reflects the judgment of the author's time. For a compendious statement of the latest views on the date of the Gospels, and of the Epistles bearing the name of Paul, see the *Encyclopædia Biblica* under "Gospels" and "Paul," and the several epistles. See also Mr. Whittaker's *Origins of Christianity* (Watts)].

² Our readers will not fail to notice the shadow of doubt which the expression "according to the Scriptures" throws over even this direct testimony. "According to the Scriptures" simply means, whenever it occurs, "in supposed fulfilment of the erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament Psalms and Prophecies then current." Paul, moreover, it should be observed, here merely speaks at second-hand, and declares *what he had been told* by others, "that which I also received."

once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the Apostles. And, last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due season."

Now, if this were all, if we had no further testimony to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead than that it was believed by the whole original Christian Church, that the Apostles and personal followers of Christ, who must be supposed to have had the best means of knowing it, clung to the conviction enthusiastically, and witnessed to it by their preaching and their death; and that Paul, not a personal follower, but in constant communication with those who were, made the above assertions in a letter addressed to one of the principal Churches, and published while most of the eye-witnesses to whom he appeals were still alive to confirm or to contradict his statements; if the case rested on this only, and terminated here, every one, I think, would feel that our grounds for accepting the resurrection as an historical fact in its naked simplicity would be far stronger than they actually are. In truth, they would appear to be nearly unassailable and irresistible, except by those who can imagine some probable mode in which such a positive and vivifying conviction could have grown up without the actual occurrence having taken place to create it. Such explanation has been offered by many writers—by Strauss, by Renan, by Arnold, by Hanson, and others. I have considered them all, I think, dispassionately; and, ingenious as they are (especially the detailed one of M. Renan), I am bound to say they do not satisfy my mind—they do not convince me, I mean, that the belief arose as they suggest. They are very skilful, they are even probable enough; but they do not make me feel that the true solution of the mystery has been reached. Nor can I, with any confidence, offer one of my own, though I can *conceive* one more simple and inherently likely than those propounded.

But the real difficulty lies in the Gospel narratives. The evangelists contradict the

apostle. Nay, more; they show that the belief of the Christian Church was not simple, uniform, and self-consistent, as Paul's statement would lead us to suppose, but that it was singularly vague, various, and self-contradictory. Nay, worse still; they not only show in how many fluctuating shapes it existed, but they suggest how the belief may have formed itself by specifying a number of the circumstantial details around which it grew and solidified so rapidly. In the Epistles and the Acts we find simply the assertion of the fact, and evidence to the universal conviction. In the Gospels we read the several traditions accepted in the Christian community, thirty or more years after the event, as to the nature and surrounding context of that event. Now, here commences our serious embarrassment; and the embarrassment consists in this, that the new witnesses called—possibly very incompetent ones—make it impossible to arrive at any clear or definite conclusion as to the *what* or the *how*. That is to say, *we cannot frame any theory whatever as to the resurrection, which is not distinctly negatived by one or the other of the evangelical accounts*. If the occurrence were to rest only on the Gospel narratives, rational belief would be almost out of the question. If the belief in the early Church had been based upon these narratives (which it was not), that belief could carry with it only the faintest authority. Let us follow out this view a little in detail.

Some have imagined that the reappearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples was of the nature of those apparitions of departed friends as to the occurrence of which there exists such a mass of overwhelming testimony; and the related mode of his appearances and disappearances give some *primâ facie* colouring to the idea. He *vanished out of the sight* of the companions at Emmaus; *he ceased to be seen of them*. When the disciples were assembled at Jerusalem, *Jesus himself stood in the midst of them* (John adds in two passages, that *the doors were shut*.) “While he blessed them *he was parted from them*, and carried up into heaven.” In the Acts, *a cloud*

received him out of their sight. This view may be said, moreover, to be countenanced by the language of Paul himself, who classes the appearance of Jesus to himself, along with his appearances to others; yet *his*, we know, was an apparition (rather an *audition*, for he speaks of hearing him, not of seeing him). But, then, this theory is distinctly negatived by the assertions that Jesus assured the affrighted disciples (who had imagined him to be an apparition) that he was actually thus present *in flesh and bones*, his real old *self*, with hands and feet, and bodily organs, and able and desirous to eat. In fact, Jesus seems positively to have refused to be considered in the light of the supernatural being his startled followers would at once have made of him, and did make of him shortly after.

Others, again, adopt the supposition that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but merely swooned and revived naturally, or by the aid of Joseph of Arimathea, when taken down and laid in a temporary sepulchre. And this theory has many considerations in its favour, all of which are discussed by Strauss and Renan. It appears, though the several accounts do not tally very closely, that he was not more than *six* hours, or perhaps not more than *four*, upon the cross (how long in the grave we do not know—perhaps not an hour); and that, though so highly-wrought and delicate an organisation as that of Jesus must have been might well have succumbed to even that brief period of agony, yet that such speedy death from crucifixion was most unusual, and excited the surprise of Pilate. On this supposition, the subsequent appearances narrated in Luke and Matthew are simple and natural enough, nor need we trouble ourselves to speculate on his after-history and final disappearance from the scene; but, then, this theory neutralises entirely the religious value of the occurrence, besides being irreconcilable with the “non-recognition” feature of the narratives, to which I now proceed.

This feature is, in truth, the terrible embarrassment which the Gospel narratives present to those who hold the common

creed on the subject of the resurrection. Those narratives relate that many of the disciples who saw him after he rose from the dead did not recognise him. They relate this of three or four of his most remarkable appearances. Those who had lived with him for years, and who had parted from him on the Friday, did not know him again on the Sunday. If, then, he was so changed, so entirely not his former self, that they could not recognise him, *how could they know, or how can we know, that the person assumed to be Jesus was actually their risen Lord?* Does not this non-recognition almost irresistibly suggest the inferences, that the excited imaginations of his more susceptible disciples assumed some stranger to be Jesus, when they learned that his body had disappeared from the sepulchre, and that angels had affirmed that he was risen, and that those "whose eyes were holden," who "doubted," or "did not believe for joy and wonder," were the more prosaic and less impressible of the beholders? The difficulty is obviously tremendous: let us look at the particulars.

Matthew relates two appearances, in very general terms. Of the second he says, "but some doubted." Mark—the genuine Gospel of Mark, which, as we know, terminates with the 8th verse of the 16th chapter—says nothing of any appearances; but, in the spurious addition, repeats twice that those who asserted that they had seen him were disbelieved, and that Christ, when he appeared himself to the eleven, "upbraided them with their unbelief." Luke narrates two appearances, and incidentally mentions that "the eleven" reported a third "to Simon." With reference to the first, he says of the two disciples, Cleophas and a friend, who walked, talked, and ate with Jesus at Emmaus for several hours, "their eyes were holden that they should not know him." With reference to the second appearance ("to the eleven"), it is said, first, "that they were affrighted, thinking they had seen a spirit," and, shortly afterwards, that "they yet believed not for joy, and wondered." But

it is in the fourth Gospel that the non-recognition feature becomes most marked. Mary Magdalene, after Jesus had spoken to her and she had turned to look at him, still "supposed him to be the gardener." His most intimate disciples, when they saw him in Galilee, "knew not that it was Jesus," even though he spoke to them; and even John himself only *inferred* the presence of his master in consequence of the miraculous draught of fishes, and Peter only accepted the inference on John's authority. "Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, 'It is the Lord.' Now, when Simon Peter *heard that it was the Lord*, he girt on his fisher's coat and did cast himself into the sea."

One more difficulty—a very grave one—raised by the traditional accounts transmitted to us in the Gospels, must be indicated, but needs nothing beyond indication. These accounts all insist, in the strongest manner, upon the detailed demonstration that it was Jesus in bodily shape, in the same actual form, with the same hands and feet, and the same digestive organs and human needs, whom they had known three days before, and had seen nailed to the cross, who now again came among them and conversed with them. Jesus himself is made to assure them that he was not a spirit, but flesh and bones that could be handled. In this well-known presence, with these bodily organs and this earthly frame, he is said to have been seen to ascend into heaven. Can flesh and blood inherit the spiritual kingdom, or where was the body dropped, and when was the transmutation carried out?

But, now, instead of taking the Gospel narratives as they stand promiscuously and as a whole, let us discard those portions which are certainly or most probably un-genuine or spurious, and take into consideration only that residue which may be fairly assumed to embody the earliest traditions of the Christian community, and we shall find most of the difficulties we have just mentioned either vastly mitigated or quite dispersed. In fact—and I would draw particular attention to this conclusion—we who

show that the Gospels are rather traditional than strictly historical narratives, absolutely authoritative and correct, are the persons who do special service to the doctrine of the resurrection by removing obstacles to its credibility. The whole of the accounts in the fourth Gospel then fall away and cease to embarrass us at all. At most, they only serve to indicate how tradition had been at work, and grown between the first and the second century—at least one generation, possibly two. Mark, probably the earliest writer of all, never presented any embarrassment at all—unless, indeed, a negative one—for he says not a word of post-sepulchral appearances, and merely mentions the appearance of “a young man” at the tomb, who tells the disciples simply, and as a message, that Jesus is no longer there, but has gone before them into Galilee.¹ Matthew, again, deals in general terms, and gives an account almost identical with that of Paul, though even less full and particular.² Luke, alone, remains to trouble us; Luke, who probably wrote when apparitional accounts had begun to multiply and magnify; whose perplexing narrative about Emmaus is not even alluded to by any of the other evangelists, and must almost certainly have been unknown to them; and who directly contradicts Matthew as to the alleged command of Jesus that they should go into Galilee to meet him. Matthew says, “go into Galilee.” Luke says, “tarry in Jerusalem.” Looking, then, at the matter in this light, we may not unfairly accept Paul’s statement as embodying the whole of the recognised and authorised tradition of the early Church on the subject of the appearances of the crucified and risen Jesus. This assertion, and the general and absolute conviction of the apostolic community, remain as our warrant for believing

¹ The word he uses, moreover, is significant: he says, *ἠγέρθη*, “he is risen,” not *ἀναστὰσει*, he is risen from the dead.

² Moreover, it is the opinion of some very competent critics that the concluding portion of the last chapter of Matthew is not entitled to the same character of indisputable genuineness as the rest of the Gospel.

in the miraculous resurrection of our Lord. *Are they adequate?* This is practically the residual question calling for decision.

It is perhaps far less important than is commonly fancied. I have already (Chapter XIII.) given my reasons for holding that, except it be regarded as establishing, and *as needed to establish*, the authority of the teaching of Christ, his resurrection has no bearing—certainly no favourable or confirmatory bearing—on the question of *our* future life.

Just as the confident conviction of the earliest Christians, and the mighty influence that conviction exercised over their character and actions, constitute the chief evidence of the resurrection of Christ, so the existence of the Christian faith, its vast mark in history, and its establishment over the most powerful, progressive, and intellectual races of mankind, constitute the strongest testimony we possess to its value and its truth. This may, or may not, be sufficient to prove its divine origin and its absolute correctness, but it is the best we have, and is more cogent by far than any documentary evidence could be. Christianity, as it prevails over all Europe and America, constituting the cherished creed, and at least the professed and revered moral guide of probably two hundred millions of the foremost nations upon earth, is a marvellous fact which requires accounting for, a mighty effect indicating a cause or causes of corresponding efficacy. Whatever we may conclude as to its origin, that origin must, in one way or other, have been adequate to the subsequent growth. In some sense, in some form, the victory of the Christian religion must be due to some inherent energy, excellence, vitality, suitability to the wants and character of man. Mere circumstances could not explain this victory. We may safely go a step further, and say that this vital force, this inherent excellence, this appropriateness, must have been something strange, subtle, unexampled. Those who conclude it, in consequence, to have been a special divine revelation offer

what we must admit to be *primâ facie* the simplest and easiest solution.

But the argument, as just stated, must not be pushed too far. Three considerations serve to indicate with how much caution, with what a large survey of history, with what a wide grasp and deep analysis of the phenomena of mind in various times and among various races, the problem must be approached. Christianity is not the most widely spread of the religions of mankind. Buddhism is of earlier date, and counts more millions among its votaries. Islamism took its rise later, was diffused more rapidly, and rules over a larger area of the earth's surface. At one time it seemed as if Christianity would go down before its triumphant career. Some readers of history may even be disposed to argue that but for two men and two battles—possibly but for a special charge of cavalry, or it may be a sudden inspiration of the leading generals—it might have done so. The spread of Buddhism, the spread of Islamism, must have had an adequate cause, as well as the spread of Christianity.

Again, the enthroned position and commanding influence of our religion testify, with power which we make no pretence of resisting, to its truth and its surpassing excellences. So much no sceptic, we fancy, would wish, or would venture, to deny. But this testimony is borne to CHRISTIANITY, not any dogma of the creed carelessly called by that name; to *something* inherent and essential in the religion—not to any particular thing which this or that sect chooses to specify as its essence. It does not testify at all—at least, the orthodox are not entitled to assume that it does—to the divinity of our Lord, to his miraculous resurrection, to his atoning blood, to the Trinitarian mystery, or to any one of the scholastic problems into which the Athanasian Creed has endeavoured to condense the faith of Christendom; it may testify only, we believe it does, to that apocalypse and exemplification of the possibilities of holiness and loveliness latent in humanity, which was embodied in the unique life and character of Jesus.

And, thirdly, it must be admitted without recalcitration, though the admission carries with it some vague and startling alarm of danger, that Christianity, with all its unapproached truth and beauty, owes its rapid progress, and, in some vast degree, its wide and firm dominion, at least as distinctly, if not as much, to the errors which were early mingled with it as to the central and faultless ideas those errors overlaid. On one point, at least, all—even the thinking minds among the most orthodox—will agree: that the mightiest and most inspiring conviction among the earliest Christians, that which vivified their zeal, warmed their eloquence, made death easy, and fear impossible—that which, in fact, more than any other influence, *caused* their victories—was their unhesitating belief in the approaching end of the world and the speedy coming of their Lord in glory. That this was an entire delusion we now all acknowledge. Many of us go much further. Few will doubt that the doctrine of the Messiahship of Jesus aided most powerfully the triumph of his religion among the Jews, and that of his proper deity among the Gentiles (not to mention other scholastic and pagan accretions); and many now hold that these are as indisputable delusions as the other. In a word, truth has floated down to us upon the wings of error, treasured up and borne along in an ark built of perishable materials, and by human hands; some devotees, therefore, still cling to the ark and the error as sacred agencies worthy of all reverence and worship, confounding what they have done with what they are. But we do not read that Noah thought it incumbent upon him to continue out of gratitude living in the ark when the waters had subsided. On the contrary, as soon as there was dry firm ground for the sole of his feet, he came forth from his preserving prison-house, and gave thanks and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

“Are we yet Christians?” is the momentous question of the day, which is being asked everywhere in a variety of forms. It is the question asked, and answered in

the negative, in the last remarkable and unsatisfactory volume of Strauss. "Der alte und der neue Glaube." It is the question asked, but not answered, in a striking monograph so entitled, which appeared in a recent number of the *Fortnightly Review*.¹ It is the question which is forcing itself upon the minds of all students of the tone and temper of the times, who cannot fail to recognise, with anxious speculation as to the results, that a vast proportion of the higher and stronger intellect of the age in nearly all branches of science and thought, as well as large bodies, if not the mass, of the most energetic section of the working classes, is, day by day, more and more decidedly and avowedly shaking itself free from every form and variety of established creeds. It is the question, finally, which is implied, rather than openly asked, in the various uneasy and spasmodic, perhaps somewhat blind, attempts on the part of the clergy, in the shape of "Speaker's Commentaries," new churches, open-air preachings, Pan-Anglican Synods, and the like, to meet a danger which they perceive through the mist, but of which they have scarcely yet measured the full significance and bearing.

Are we, then, ceasing to be Christians? Is Christianity as a religion in very truth dying out from among us amid the conflicting or converging influences of this fermenting age? Most observers, seeing Christianity only in the popular shape, and the recognised formularies, feel that there can be little doubt about the matter. Strauss, accepting the "Apostles' Creed" as the received and correct representation of the Christian faith, is just as distinct in his reply:

"If, then, we are to seek no subterfuges, if we are not to halt between two opinions, if our yea is to be yea, and our nay, nay, if we are to speak as honourable and straightforward men, then we must recognise the fact that we are no longer Christians?"

I should give a different reply, but only because I attach to the principal word a

less conventional, but assuredly a more correct and etymological, signification. I entirely refuse to recognise the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or the Westminster Confession, or the Longer or Shorter Catechism, or the formularies of any Church, whether Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinistic, or United, as faithful embodiments or authoritative representations of Christianity. Rightly regarded, the very shape, character, purport, and title of these several documents negative their claims to be accepted as such. Christianity was not, in its origin, a series of sententious propositions, nor a code of laws, nor a system of doctrine, nor a "scheme" of salvation,² but

¹ The very phrase, "scheme of salvation," as applied to Christianity (like a somewhat analogous one often employed, "making our peace with God"), strikes us as offensive, and, when considered in relation to the details of the imagined scheme, almost monstrous. To those who have been brought up to this scheme from infancy of course it is not so (to such nothing would be); but as describing the impression made upon those who come to it later in life, and who look at it from the outside, the word is not too strong. A scheme is a "contrivance"—a contrivance for attaining an object, or getting out of a difficulty; and in the popular orthodox view the Christian dispensation is in plain words—and putting it in plain words will perhaps be found its best and sufficient refutation and dissolvent—a "contrivance" concocted between God and his Son, between the first and second persons of the Trinity (or, as we should say, between the Creator of all worlds and Jesus of Nazareth, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"), for enabling the human race to escape from a doom and a curse which certain scholastic theologians fancy (as an inference from particular texts of Scripture) to have been in some way incurred, either from the offences of each individual or from the offence of a remote ancestor. The "scheme" first assumes that the original sin of our first parents (to say nothing of our own) *cannot* be forgiven, nor the taint inherited by their innocent descendants wiped out, without the rigid exaction of a penalty ("damnation," eternal fire, and the like), altogether disproportioned to the offence—that the attributes of the Deity imply and involve this "cannot." Then, since this doom is too horrible and the doctrine laid down in the above assumption too repellent, alike in its basis and its consequences, to be endured or accepted, the "scheme" then imagines the only Son of God (one hour's pain of whom, as a partaker of the divine nature, is an equivalent to the eternal

² March, 1873.

the outcome and combination of a holy life, a noble death, a wonderfully pure and perfect character and nature, a teaching at once self-proving and sublime—the whole absolutely unique in their impressive loveliness. I cannot but remember—what is so strangely though so habitually forgotten by all Christian sects—that this life was lived, this death consummated, this character displayed, this devotion exemplified and inspired, this righteousness preached and embodied, *and this impression made*, years before any convert or disciple conceived the fatal idea of formalising it all into a “creed.” Nay, more, I cannot but remember that it was not till long after the elevating, spiritualising, restraining influence of the actual presence and the daily example of Jesus was withdrawn, that anything fairly to be called “dogma” began to grow up among that apostolic society, whose best leaders even, as is obvious from the Gospel narrative, stood on a moral and intellectual level so far below their Master’s.¹ I recognise

sufferings of all human beings) agreeing to bear this doom instead of the myriads of the offending race. An impossible debt is first invented, necessitating the invention of an inconceivable coin in which to pay it. A God is imagined bent on a design and entertaining sentiments which it seems simple blasphemy and contradiction to ascribe to the father in heaven, whom Jesus of Nazareth came to reveal to us—and then he is represented as abandoning that design in consideration of a sacrifice, in which it is impossible to recognise one gleam of appropriateness or of human equity. What looks very like a legal fiction, purely gratuitous, is got rid of by what looks very like a legal chicanery, purely fanciful. To use a terse simile of Macaulay, the scheme “resembles nothing so much as a forged bond, with a forged release endorsed on the back of it.” But the essential point to bear in mind is that not only do none of the genuine, authentic, indisputable words of Christ contain or countenance this “scheme,” but the entire tone and context of his teaching distinctly ignore it, and are at variance with its fundamental conceptions.

¹ “Is the Apostles’ Creed the original Christianity? we ask. Was it the mission of Jesus to draw up a confession and to give currency to a formulated doctrine, rather than to wake up fresh religious life and to lay down principles which must always hold good in matters of religion for every doctrinal system? Was *he*, who dropped

more and more—what I believe will be generally admitted now—that the articles of faith, the sententious dogmas, the “scheme” of salvation, which have usurped the name of “Christianity” and “the Christian religion,” originated almost wholly with Paul;² and that not only did they not form the substance of the teaching of Jesus, but that they are not to be found in, nor can obtain anything beyond the most casual, apparent, and questionable countenance from, his genuine and authentic words. And, finally, I remember and wish to recall to the reflection of my readers that this Paul, who thus transformed the pure, grand religion of his crucified Master, was distinguished by a character of intellect, subtle, metaphysical, and cultured, and therefore singularly discrepant, from that of Jesus; that, moreover, he never knew Jesus upon earth, had never come under his influence, or been sobered by his saintly spirit and his clear, practical conceptions; had never seen him in the flesh, nor heard

everything that was formal and therefore unessential in religion and morality, and preached the fulfilment of the moral element of the law and the prophets, and who, instead of laying down *rules* for the moral life of man, insisted upon *principles* and change of heart—was *he*, who, of all that Israel considered holy in the Scriptures, retained as essential no more than love to God and to one’s neighbour, and preached as the rule of life, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets’—was *he* a dogmatist, a propounder of articles? Was *he*, who made the true moral life of love as independent of Jewish doctrines as of the forms of the Jewish theocracy, who gave its tone to genuine humanity everywhere, even in the Samaritan and the heathen—nay, even placed the humane Samaritan above the orthodox priest and Levite—was *he*, who, without appealing to any ecclesiastical authority of tradition or of Scripture, found his witnesses in the common sense and in the conscience of mankind, and recognised the true prophet by the moral power he displayed—was *he* a dogmatist? Surely Christianity in its original form was not a confession nor a symbol; and to pass judgment on it as such is logically inadmissible.”—Dr. SCHOLTEN, *Theol. Review*, April, 1873.

² [Or rather with *Paulinism*, it not being possible to ascribe the elaborated dogmatism of the longer epistles to the Apostle himself. See note above.]

his voice save in trance, in noonday visions, and ecstatic desert communings.

It was the sincere and earnest, if somewhat ambitious, purpose of this book to disentangle and disencumber the religion taught and lived by Jesus from the misconceptions and accretions which have gathered round it, obscured it, overlaid it, often actually transmuted it, and which began to gather round it almost as soon as its founder had disappeared from the scene of his ministry. I shall have failed if I have not vindicated our right, and shown it to be our duty, to seek that pure original of devotional spirit and righteous life in the authentic words and deeds of Christ, and in these alone; and, in the prosecution of this search, to put aside respectfully but courageously, whenever we see warrant for it, whatever, whether in the Gospels or the Epistles, confuses, obscures, blots, or conflicts with this spirit and this life. I conceive that I have vindicated this right, and established this obligation by showing that even the immediate personal disciples of our Lord misconceived him; that the chief of the Apostles never was a companion or follower of Jesus in any sense, but claimed and gloried in what he declared to be a special, separate, and *post-mortem* revelation; and that even the Gospels contain some things certainly, and several things probably, which did not emanate from Christ.

I am disposed, therefore, to give an entirely opposite answer to Strauss's question to that which Strauss himself has given, and to believe that when we have really penetrated to the actual teaching of Christ, and fairly disinterred that religion of Jesus which preceded all creeds and schemes and formulas, and which we trust will survive them all, we shall find that, so far from this, the true essence of Christianity, being renounced or outgrown by the progressive intelligence of the age, its rescue, re-discovery, purification, and re-enthronement as a guide of life, a fountain of truth, an object of faith, a law written on the heart, will be recognised as the grandest and most beneficent achievement of that intelligence. It may well prove its slowest as its hardest

achievement, for it is proverbially more difficult to restore than to build up afresh. To renovate without destroying is of all functions that which requires the most delicate perceptions, the finest intuition, the most reverent and subtle penetration into the spirit of the original structure, as well as manipulation at once the most skilful and the most courageous. And the task imposed upon the thought and piety of the coming time is to perform this function on the faith and creed of centuries and nations—and to perform it amid the bewildering cries of interests and orders whom you will have rooted out of their comfortable and venerable nests; of age, which you will have disturbed in its most cherished prejudices; of affections, which you will have wounded in their tenderest points; of massive multitudes whom you will have disturbed in what they fancied were convictions and ideas; of worshippers whose idol only you will have overthrown, but who will cry out that you have desecrated and unshrined their God; of craftsmen of the Ephesian type, who "know that by this craft they have their wealth"; and of cynical and faithless statesmen whose unpaid policemen and detectives (the more efficient and more feared because unseen), and whose self-supporting penal settlement elsewhere (the more dreaded by malefactors because remotely placed, invisible, and undefined), you will be supposed to have abolished.

Another cognate question has been much discussed of late, and may be answered, we think, nearly in the same way. It is asked, not only, "Are we Christians?" but "Can a Christian life be lived out in modern days?" "Can we, and ought we to, regulate our personal and social life according to the precepts of Christ?" "Is Christianity, in very deed and as nakedly preached and ordinarily taught, applicable to modern society and extant civilisation?" "Is it possible, would it be permitted, can it be wise or right, to obey and act out the Christian rule of life in the British Isles and in 1873?"—No question can be more vital, none more urgent, none more

essential to our peace of conscience. None, we may add, is more sedulously and scandalously shirked. There is no courage and no sincerity or downrightness among us in this matter. We half say one thing and half believe another. We preach and profess what we do not think of practising; what we should be scouted and probably punished if we did practise; what in our hearts and our dim, fled-from thoughts we suspect it would be wrong to practise. Wherein lies the explanation of this demoralising and disreputable untruthfulness of spirit? Are the principles we profess mistaken? Is the rule of life we hold up as a guide erroneous, impracticable, or inapplicable to the altered conditions of the age; or is it our conduct that is cowardly, feeble, self-indulgent, and disloyal? Is it our standard that is wrong, or merely our actions that are culpable and rebellious? Is Christianity a code to be lived up to, or is it a delusion, a mockery, and a snare?

The specialities for the conduct of life prescribed by Christ's precepts and example, as gathered from the Gospels and the proceedings of his first disciples, which current civilisation does trammel and oppose, and which current thought does question and controvert, are five in number: non-resistance to violence, the duty of almsgiving, the impropriety of providence and forethought, the condemnation of riches, and the communism which was supposed to be inculcated, and which certainly was practised, by the earliest Christians. How far and under what modifications were these special precepts wise and sound at that time, and are they obligatory, permissible, or noxious now?

I. The precepts commanding non-resistance and submission to violence are too distinct and specific to allow us to pare them away to anything at all reconcilable with modern sentiments and practice, even by the most extreme use of the plea of oriental and hyperbolic language.¹ They

¹ "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,

go far beyond a prohibition of mere retaliation or blame of hasty resentment or vindictive memory. They distinctly command unresisting endurance of violence and wrong, whether directed against person or property. Now, can this precept be carried out, and would it be well that it should be?

The first consideration that occurs to us is that obedience to it has never been seriously attempted. The common sense or the common instinct of Christians, in all ages and in all lands, has quietly but peremptorily put it aside as not meant for use. Indeed, Christians have habitually fought from the earliest times just as savagely as Pagans. They have seldom dreamed even of confining themselves to self-defence—self-defence, indeed, being condemned just as decidedly as aggression. Nay, they have habitually fought in the name, and, as they firmly believed, in the cause of Christ, have gloried in the title of "good soldiers of Christ," have died with priestly blessing and absolution amid the rage of conflict, confident that their reward was sure, and that angels would bear them straightway to the bosom of the beloved Master whose orders they had so strangely set at naught. One sect, indeed, among Christians have professed to take this precept of Jesus literally—and what precept is to be so taken if this is not?—and have professed to obey it to the letter. But, in the first place, the Society of Friends never pretended to carry out more than one-half of it. They never went the length commanded in the

turn to him the other also. And if any man..... take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whomsoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." "Put up thy sword, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." "Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."

It is true that in one of the Evangelists, just before his arrest, Jesus is reported to have said to the twelve: "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." But the passage is so unintelligible, and so entirely out of keeping with the context, that it is almost certainly a case of misreporting, or misconception, or wholly unwarranted tradition. A few hours later Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world; else would my servants fight."

text, of *facilitating* assault and coercion. They never, we believe, denied themselves the luxury of passive resistance in its most resolute and ingenious devices. They did not return a blow ; but they did not make the first so easy or so pleasant as to invite a second. And they have nearly died out. In the next place, they tried the experiment under circumstances which practically made non-resistance comparatively safe and easy—namely, under the ægis of police and law. It is but seldom that any of us now have actually to ward off a blow, or by force to resist an attempt at robbery, because, theoretically and potentially at least, the assailant knows and we know that the accredited guardians of order are there to do it for us. In fact, the daily routine of civilised life is organised on the assumption that the necessity for self-defence and resistance to evil is taken off our hands. Obedience to Christ's precept becomes wonderfully simplified—or rather it is dexterously evaded—when we have only to hand over our enemy to the nearest constable. We, in fact, do resist, and resist like the merest Pagan—only we resist by deputy—disobeying vicariously, that we may be in a condition to obey in person.

The truth is, that the whole of our criminal law and our police arrangements are based upon a systematic repudiation of the precepts in question; and the order of modern society and the security of modern life could not otherwise exist. In savage communities and in disordered times every man must succumb to violence or must defend himself. In such times obedience to the Christian precept would simply mean the extermination or enslavement of all Christians, the supremacy of the violent by the self-suppression of the gentle. In our days division of labour is in the ascendant; and we delegate the duties of resisting violence and evil to a professional class. If bad men abound—and where would be the meaning of Christian precepts and exhortations to a Christian life if they did not?—then, if the criminal class are not to prosper and to reign, police and the repressive and punitive law must exist and

act, must restrain and retribute. Who among us would for a moment advocate their abolition? Who that deems it right to maintain them can pretend that the Christian precept of non-resistance is obeyable in these days, or that he is endeavouring to obey it? His mind may be penetrated with the spirit of patience, humanity, and consideration for his fellow-men which led Jesus to utter that command; but the command itself he simply repudiates and evades.

There is still another view of the subject to be taken. The worst ill-service you can do to the violent is to show them that they may work their wicked will unpunished and unchecked by the natural instincts of humanity. It is to make them "masters of the situation," to encourage them by success and impunity, to enthrone them as monarchs of the world. It is to put goodness under the foot of evil, and so to drive back the progress of Humanity, to retard the coming of "the Kingdom of Heaven." It is, too, to harden the sinner in his wrong, the criminal in his crime, the brute in his brutality; to teach him to proceed in outrages and iniquities that pay so well; to make him heap up wrath against the day of wrath. Hundreds, who would have been stopped at the outset of their criminal career by prompt and timely resistance, are led on by the impunity which submission secures, till habits of crime are formed and recovery becomes hopeless. Non-resistance, then, becomes connivance and complicity in wrong.

The orthodox reply to these common-sense representations is well known, but has never been convincing. The wrongdoer, it is said, will be so amazed and melted by the calm acquiescence of his victim that his heart will be touched and his conscience awakened by the unexpected issue. He will be taken unawares, as it were—approached on an unguarded side; and thus be disarmed in place of being baffled, and converted instead of being defeated. But, we apprehend, this anticipation assumes one or two postulates fatal to its realisation, and somewhat contradictory. It assumes that resistance and

retaliation *are the rule*—else there would be nothing in the attitude of meek endurance to surprise the violent man into reflection and repentance. It implies, moreover, a susceptibility on the part of the violent which the habit of violence soon destroys. It seems, too, to pre-suppose a moral atmosphere that could only be created by a community of non-resisting Christians, or a world at least in which the wrong-doers were so comparatively few that they did not suffice to form a public opinion and class-sympathies of their own. It imagines the criminal, the oppressor, and the self-seeker, recoiling from the very facility and completeness of their success, and at the very moment when the prospect of its joys most radiantly dawns upon them. It expects them to be “touched by grace” just when the career of wrong looks most inviting and most full of promise. Such things may be—such things have been in isolated instances; but can they ever become normal? Can they be counted upon so as to form a safe or rational guide for conduct?

There is, however, one case in which the non-resistance doctrine is so obviously inapplicable that no one, we believe, has ever dreamed of practising it—namely, in the case of quarrels between nations. For one country to submit to outrage and wrong at the hands of another, when the means of resistance lay in its power, has never been held right or obligatory. The question has never seriously been brought under discussion; it being perfectly clear that the relative position of different nations from the earliest times even to our own having always been that of jealous rivalry, ceaseless controversy either smouldering or flagrant, and hostility latent or avowed, any people that habitually and notoriously submitted to violence would simply be over-run, enslaved, or trampled out. The doctrine of non-resistance would mean nothing but the destruction of the gentler and finer races, and the rampant tyranny of the stronger; the reign of violence, not of peace; the triumph of Satan, not of

Christ; in a word, the suicide of all meek and truly Christian peoples.

It is plain, then, that we have here one of three or four instances in which true Christianity must be held to require a disregard of its own precepts in favour of its own principles, in which Christ's exhortations are a guide to the spirit we must cherish, not to the conduct we must pursue. We must cultivate the temper which will effectually prevent us from being quick to resent or prone to retaliate, or severe to punish; but without abnegating those natural instincts which are sometimes our safest guides, or ceasing to maintain that firm attitude of self-protection which, under the governance of good feeling and good sense, is the best antagonist to the prevalence of violence upon earth.

II. *Alms-giving*.¹—Scarcely any precept in the Gospel is more distinct or reiterated than this. No duty has been more peremptorily insisted upon by the Church in all times and in all countries. It was one of the chief functions of the monastic institutions in the Middle Ages. It was made a legal obligation in the days which succeeded them. It is periodically inculcated from Protestant pulpits, and the Catholics are still more positive in enforcing it on all the faithful. Our own country swarms with proofs how literally and widely, generation after generation, the obligation has been acknowledged and fulfilled. The Reports of the Charity Commission, in countless volumes, bear testimony to the innumerable charities that exist, and explain a little what they have done. The recognition of the obligation of alms-giving is, to this day, nearly as prevalent and as influential as ever. It is of all Christian precepts that which is most strictly obeyed—

¹ “Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” “Sell that thou hast and give alms.” “Let thine alms be in secret, and thy Father, who seeth thee in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.” “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none.” “Give alms of such things as ye have; and behold all things are clean unto you.”

obedience to it being easier than to any other. A pious man and a tender-hearted woman do not feel comfortable or *good* unless they habitually give to beggars, or spend a given portion of their income in succouring the poor, or those who seem such.

Yet nothing can be more certain than that all this is very wrong and does infinite mischief. The more literally the precept ["give to him that asketh of thee"] is obeyed, the more harm does it do. No conclusion has been more distinctly or definitely proved than that nearly all charity, popularly so called—more especially all indiscriminate alms-giving—is simply and singularly noxious. It is noxious, most of all, to the objects of it—whom it fosters in all mean and unchristian vices, in idleness, self-indulgence, and falsehood. It is noxious, in the next place, to the deserving and industrious poor, from whom it diverts sympathy. It is noxious, also, to the entire community, among whom it creates and cherishes a class of most pernicious citizens. The form which charity has a tendency to assume in societies so complicated as all civilised societies are growing now, is such as to drain the practice of nearly all its incidental good, and aggravate its peculiar mischiefs. The alms-giver has not his kindly feelings called forth by personal intercourse with the poor; he *subscribes*, he does not *give*; and charitable endowments and bequests are ingenious contrivances for diffusing the most widespread pauperism. Paupers become sneaks and vagrants; and vagrants soon grow into criminals. It is needless to dwell on this; the consentaneous voice of modern benevolence and statesmanship alike is crying out against alms-giving as a mischief and a sin—as anything but philanthropy or charity—as a sentimental self-indulgence, and the very reverse of a Christian virtue, a distinct, and now nearly always a conscious, complicity in imposture, fraud, laziness, and sensuality. Everyone conversant with the question, all true lovers of their fellow-men, all earnest and practical labourers in the field of social

improvement, in the precise measure of their experience agree that, in all schemes and efforts for rectifying the terrible evils of our crowded civilisation, the most ubiquitous and insurmountable impediments arise out of the practice of indiscriminate alms-giving and systematic charity. One of the most pernicious and objectionable of our daily habits is in strict obedience to one of the clearest and most positive of Christian precepts.

Nor is it in England only that alms-giving is bad. It is bad everywhere; it is bad even in the East; it is very bad in Italy; it is worst of all perhaps in Spain. Everywhere it *creates* a special class of the worthless and the vicious, who soon become the criminal. *It is of its essence to do this.* The antagonism between the Christian precept and what ought to be the conduct of really Christian men is direct, complete, undeniable, and all but universal.

The mischief has arisen out of the time-honoured practice—a practice which surely now-a-days would be more honoured in the breach than the observance—of looking into the Gospel as a code of conduct instead of a well-spring of spiritual influence, and picking out texts to act by and to judge by, as a French judge opens chapter and verse of the Code Napoleon, instead of imbuing ourselves with "the same mind that was in Christ," and letting our behaviour afterwards flow freely therefrom. Christ directed us "to do good" to our fellow-men, especially to the poor and helpless among them. In our stupid literalism we have taken this as a command to do them all the harm we can. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none"—read as an exhortation to use our abundance and our advantages to succour the needy and assist the less fortunate, is conceived in a beautiful and righteous spirit. But how, when the second coat has been provided to meet next year's exigencies at the cost of much difficult self-denial, and when the coat of the coatless man has been pawned for drink, and when the one which I give him is sure to follow its predecessor up the spout? Is thrift to be discouraged and sodden

sensuality to be fostered, in the name of a Christian duty? The solution of the difficulty is very plain. Jesus put the abstract principle in a parable or a concrete shape—as he always did: He commanded a benevolent frame of mind in the form of a precept to the simplest action to which that frame of mind would instinctively lead in circumstances when reflection would suggest nothing to control the impulse. Probably he never reflected on the danger of creating a whole tribe of begging impostors. Perhaps the danger did not exist in that day. In any case, what he really designed and desired was to produce a spirit of boundless compassion and love which should inspire his disciples with anxiety to do all the good possible, to render all the aid possible to those who were in distress or want; his aim was to elevate, not to degrade, to foster the Christian virtues, not the selfish vices; and the very texts that we read as enjoining alms-giving are really those which, interpreted aright, most distinctly prohibit it. Here it is not that a Christian life is not feasible in our days; it is only that it has become more difficult because less simple; and that in order to disentangle its dictates from its *dicta*, and to pierce to its inner significance, demands more intellectual effort and more intellectual freedom than we are prone to exercise. Here, if anywhere, it is “the letter that killeth, and the spirit that giveth life.” What we have to ask ourselves is, “What would Christ, with all the circumstances before him, have directed in these times?”

III. *Improvvidence*.—There is scarcely any exhortation in the line of social morality more incessantly or more unanimously addressed to the people of this country than that which urges them to provide for the future, “to lay by for a rainy day”; to store up something of their daily earnings against the time when those earnings may fail or be interrupted. Assuredly there is no exhortation of which they stand more in need, nor one which they more habitually neglect. Manifestly there is no duty the sedulous

discharge of which more vitally concerns their future welfare and their present peace. It is their improvidence that condemns them to squalor, to indigence, to dependence, to wretched habitations, to unwholesome surroundings, and to all those moral evils and dangers which follow in the wake of these things. Few things can be more certain than that, if our working classes are ever to emerge from their present most unsatisfactory condition, if they are to become respectable citizens and true Christians, they must learn to save for to-morrow's needs, and to regard it as something very like a sin to leave to-morrow to take care of itself. To spend all their gains when those gains are ample, as they so habitually do, is obviously not only a folly, but something very like a fraud, inasmuch as it is wasting their own substance, in reliance that when it fails they will be fed out of the substance of others. It is the conduct so distinctly condemned in the case of the foolish virgins—with an aggravation. They do not forget to bring their oil; they deliberately waste it, knowing that they may say to their wiser neighbours, “Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.” The workman who, in receipt of good wages, saves nothing out of those wages is *wilfully improvident, relying on the providence of others*; for what is the property from which charitable funds are derived and on which poor rates are levied but the accumulated savings of the provident and thoughtful? What is all invested wealth, indeed, but the steadily augmented economies of those who, generation after generation, have taken thought for the morrow? It is not too much to say that, if our artisan classes would for two generations—perhaps even for one—be as frugal and as hoarding as the French peasant is, and as the better portion of the Scotch and Swiss once were, the whole face of the country would be changed; they would be men of property instead of being Proletaires; they could live in comfortable dwellings in place of wretched hovels and crowded alleys; they might be men of comparative leisure instead of mere toilers all day and

every day, from childhood to old age; education would be as much within their reach as it is within the reach of their betters now; and the soil would be prepared in which all the Christian virtues and most civilised enjoyments could easily take root and flourish. With providence would come sobriety, with property would come independence, and all the facilities for a worthy and a happy life would grow up around them. In a word, providence, if not the very first duty of the social man, ranks very high among his duties, and is the *sine quâ non* of any decided and permanent improvement in either his social or his moral state. About this there can be no doubt. As to this there is no difference of opinion.

Yet it is not to be denied that this prime duty, this imperative obligation, this indispensable condition of human advancement, is not only deprecated, but actually denounced and prohibited, in that Sermon on the Mount which we are accustomed to look to as the embodiment of the Christian rule of life.¹

The words of Christ, and the exhortations of Christians, statesmen, economists, and moralists, are, then, directly at variance—and the latter are undeniably in the right. How is the difficulty to be met? How must the discrepancy be reconciled? Why not meet the question honestly and boldly,

¹ Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.....Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not better than they?.....And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field.....shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?.....Take, therefore, no thought, saying what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.....Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.

and avow that Jesus was addressing hearers in a very different position and state of mind from the labourers and artisans of England—hearers who were wont to be not too careless, but too anxious, about the morrow; whose climate rendered comparatively little necessary, and yielded that little to very moderate toil; the conditions of whose civilisation were incomparably simpler than ours, and the obligations of whose labour less onerous.² It may well be, then, that the exhortations which were sound and appropriate to them are inapplicable to us. But we may probably, with perfect safety and with no irreverence, go a step further, and observe that Jesus, as was natural and customary, not only spoke with that Oriental picturesqueness of style which is almost inevitably exaggeration, but fixed his own thought and directed that of his hearers upon the one side and phase of truth with which he was at the moment dealing, to the exclusion of all qualifying considerations which must be taken into account as soon as we begin to frame a code of conduct or a system of action out of one isolated discourse addressed to one fraction of a great problem.³ Here, as elsewhere, the idea which lies at the root of the teaching is undeniably correct, for that idea deprecates and assails the inordinate worldliness which constituted one of the most insurmountable obstacles to the reception of Christ's doctrine. The error is ours, not Christ's—and consists in perversely applying an exhortation addressed to a congregation among whom a particular quality of mind and temper was in excess to a congregation with whom it is most lamentably deficient. Had Jesus preached to English artizans, we may feel certain that

¹ See Renan, *Vie de Jesus*, ch. x., for a vivid delineation of the entirely different surroundings and features of the life of the Galilean fishermen and peasants to whom these exhortations were originally addressed.

² It must be remembered, too, that all these exhortations to lay up treasures in heaven, and not on earth, were delivered under the prevailing impression that the Kingdom of Heaven, where all things would be differently ordered, was close at hand.

he would have chosen a different theme, and used far other language. But that is by no means all that needs to be said. Not a word of Christ's rebuke to those who were eaten up by excessive care for the good things of the world, and were led thereby to neglect treasures immeasurably more precious, can be pleaded in justification of those who are so far from undervaluing these good things that they insist upon their instantaneous enjoyment and their immediate exhaustion; who lay by nothing for to-morrow only because, like the brutes that perish, they choose to eat up everything to-day; who, if they follow the letter of the law in laying up no treasure upon earth, utterly flout its spirit, inasmuch as they certainly lay up no treasure in heaven either. To eschew over-anxiety for future comfort and well-being, in order that we may be the freer for the work of righteousness, is the part of all true followers of Jesus; to "take no thought for the morrow" that we may indulge the more unrestrainedly in the indolence and sensualities of to-day, and to plead Gospel warrant for the sin, is to "wrest Scripture to our own destruction." It would be well that divines should make this more clear. The form which Christ's teaching would take were he to come on earth now, without the least real change in its essential spirit, would probably be: Take thought for to-morrow, and provide for its necessities, in order that, when to-morrow comes, you may be free enough from sordid wants and gnawing cares to have some moments to spare for the things that belong unto your peace.

IV. *Denunciation of Wealth.*—There is no line of conduct so emphatically condemned by Christ, and so eagerly pursued by Christians, as the pursuit of riches. There is no mistake about either fact. Throughout the Gospels riches are spoken of not only as a peril and temptation to the soul, but as something evil in themselves, something to be atoned for, something to be singled out for condemnation. The young man who has kept all the Commandments from his youth up, and asks what he must

do further to secure eternal life, is told to despoil himself of all his great possessions and give them to the poor. He is reluctant to do so, and Jesus thereupon observes that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." According to Luke, he said: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man, without the faintest intimation that he had any other fault than wealth, is relegated to the place of torment; while the beggar, without the faintest intimation that he had any other merit but his indigence and his sores, is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and the startling and sole reason assigned for the award is that now it is the turn of Lazarus to be made comfortable. It is true that in one passage the harshness of Christ's denunciation is modified into the phrase, "How hard it is for them that *trust in uncertain riches* to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"; and when his disciples are horrified at hearing that hard sentence about the needle's eye, and exclaim, "Who, then, can be saved?" he holds out a mysterious hope that in the infinite resources of the Most High some way of escape from the sweeping condemnation may be found. Still the prevailing tone and teaching of the Gospel cannot be gainsaid or veiled. It is to the effect that the poor are the more especial favourites of God; that wealth is a thing to be shunned, not to be sought; that it distinctly stands in the way of salvation, and will probably have to be atoned for hereafter by terrific compensation.

Yet in spite of this emphatic warning, riches have been the most general pursuit of Christians in all ages and among all classes, with rare exceptions in the monkish ages; among real and earnest, as well as among merely professing Christians; among the accredited teachers of the Gospel (to a considerable extent), as well as among the mere following flock of lay disciples. Nay more, the most really Christian nations have been, and still are, the most devoted

to the pursuit of gain ; the most rigidly and ostentatiously Christian sections of those nations—shall we say the Quakers and the Scotch?—have been among the steadiest and most quietly successful in the search. Nor do they even affect to fancy that they are wrong or disobedient in thus eagerly striving for that wealth which their Master so distinctly ordered them to eschew and dread ; they put aside or pass by his teaching with a sort of staring unconsciousness, as if it in no way concerned them ; with a curious unanimity they vote his exhortations obsolete, abstract, or inapplicable ; the most respectable of the religious world give one day to their Saviour and six days to their ledger ; the most pious banker, the purest liver, the most benevolent nobleman, never dreams of “despising riches,” or of casting from him his superfluous possessions as a snare to his feet and a peril to his soul. On the contrary, he is grateful to God for them ; he returns thanks for the favour which has so blessed his poor efforts to grow affluent ; he resolves that he will use his wealth for the glory of God.

Now, which is wrong—Christ in denouncing riches, or Christians in cherishing them? Our Master in exhorting us to shun them, or his disciples in seeking them so eagerly? Will modern society permit us to despise them? And would it be well for modern society that we should? The answer, if we dare to state it plainly, does not seem to be doubtful, or very recondite. We must imbue ourselves with the spirit of Christ’s teaching as enduring and surviving, ever extant through all forms and all times ; and then we may safely ignore the letter as simply the accidental and temporary garment in which he clothed his meaning. This is probably the unperverted impulse of every true man, if he be a reflective man as well. Perhaps, indeed, the discrepancy between what Jesus preached, and that which every good and wise man would echo now, lies rather in the phraseology than in the essence of the doctrine. Jesus—living among the poor, cognisant of their “sacred patience” and their humble virtues, bent upon startling

his world out of the self-indulgent ease into which it had sunk, and profoundly impressed with the terrible influence which the abundance and the love of earthly possessions exercise in enervating the soul, incapacitating it for all high enterprise, all self-denying effort, all difficult achievement, seeing with a clearness which excluded for the moment all modifying considerations, the benumbing power of that fatal torpor and apathy which creeps over even nobler natures when this life is too luxurious and too joyful—saw that absolute renunciation would be easier and safer than the righteous use of wealth. We, on the other hand, who know—what was invisible in those simpler days—how necessary is the accumulation of capital to those great undertakings which carry on the progress and the civilisation of our complex modern communities—naturally and rightly regard the employment of affluence, and not its pursuit or its possession, as the fit subject of our moral judgments. It was in the grave of a rich disciple that Jesus was laid after the crucifixion ; and in the parable of the talents he praised and recompensed the men who had doubled their capital by honest trading, while condemning and despoiling the feckless and unprofitable idler. And the wise and right-minded of our day would denounce as unmercifully as Christ himself the rich man whose riches blind him to the far higher value of spiritual aims and intellectual enjoyments ; whose luxury and lavish expenditure make life difficult for all around him ; whose ostentation is an evil and a temptation to those who take him as their model ; to whom opulence is not a grand means, a solemn trust, and a grave responsibility, but merely a source of sensual indulgence and of vacant worthlessness ; or who passes his youth and manhood in adding house to house and field to field, wasting life without what alone renders life worth having. We see, too, perhaps more clearly than could be seen in earlier times, that poverty has its own special and terrible temptations and obstacles to virtue, as well as wealth ; and that with us, at least, not affluence

indeed, but assuredly competence, smooths the way, for the weaker brethren, to a crowd of Christian excellences. And finally, we recognise now, what was not known—perhaps was not the case—then, that though a rich man may use his wealth righteously and well, it is scarcely possible for him to get rid of it without doing mischief, and therefore doing wrong.

V. *Communism*.—It cannot be said that the Gospel anywhere distinctly preaches a community of goods, though it may be felt that the general tone of Christ's exhortations tends in that direction. But there can be no doubt that the earliest body of disciples, those who constituted what is termed the "Church of Jerusalem," did so interpret the teaching of their Master, and "had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need." The same statement is repeated still more fully and distinctly in the fourth chapter of the Acts: "There was no one among them that lacked"; "lands and houses were sold, and the produce laid at the Apostles' feet for distribution"; "neither said any man that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common." It is difficult to describe the sinking of all private property in a common fund in plainer language; and the strange story of Ananias and Sapphira, though the words are peculiar, can scarcely be held to invalidate the conclusion.

We can scarcely deny, then, that Communism is in some sort a corollary of Christ's teaching, though not a positively commanded part of Christianity. It has been held to be such by reforming sects and theorists in many ages, and various are the attempts recorded in history to reduce it to practice. The notion has been constantly reappearing during the last century, now in France, now in America. Many minds of no ordinary power have spoken in favour of the *conception*. Even Mr. J. S. Mill—who would have been a great Christian if he had not been a great thinker—has said that the idea at the root

of it was irrefragably sound, "that every man should *work* according to his capacities, and should *receive* according to his wants." Yet nothing is more certain than that every endeavour to carry out the scheme in practice has always failed, and, as the eminent man just named has admitted, must always fail, being constantly shipwrecked on the same rock. The characteristics of human nature forbid success. As men are constituted, if they receive according to their wants, they never will work according to their capacities. If they are fed and provided with all they need, they will, as a rule, work as little as they can. As regards masses of men, it is only their regard for self that will compel them to do their duty by the community. The institution of private property, the conviction that "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat," alone calls forth adequate exertions, alone controls indefinite multiplications, alone counteracts inveterate laziness, alone raises nations out of squalor and barbarism, alone lifts man above the condition of the beasts that perish. Where communism prevails, nine men out of every ten try to get as much and to do as little as they can; and the system, therefore, is found to be simply suicidal. It encounters, too, whenever attempted, another fatal difficulty. It is impossible for any external authority to determine what are each man's capacities, or each man's needs. Practically, therefore, communism is fatal to civilisation, fatal to order, fatal to freedom, fatal to progress; and if Christianity commands, favours, or indicates communism, Christianity is fatal to all these good things. But the dim idea, the sound nucleus, which lies latent in the communistic creed—the conception, namely, that all our possessions, as well as all our gifts, are to be held in trust for the general good of all—is eminently and distinctively Christian.

It will be answered that Christianity aims, and professes, so to remould men's natures, and to eliminate their vices, and to neutralise their selfishness, as to make a community of goods feasible, and not only compatible with, but conducive to, the

highest and surest advance of the species. But we are dealing with the practical question: "Is a Christian life liveable in our day?" And if communism be only possible and safe when all men are moulded in Christ's image and permeated by his spirit, and is noxious and fatal to the best interests of humanity under all other conditions, then, if a community of goods be implied in a Christian life, that life indisputably is not practicable now. It is found in actual fact, and has been found in all lands and in all times, that the institution of private property, with all the selfishness it involves and all the selfishness it fosters, is alone capable of drawing forth from our imperfect natures that strenuous and enduring exertion from which all progress springs. And this experience is the one sufficing, and perhaps the only unanswerable, justification of that often assailed and questioned institution.

To sum up the results of our inquiry. It may be safely pronounced that non-resistance, almsgiving, improvidence, and communism are not practicable in these days, and would be decidedly noxious, and therefore obviously wrong; while contempt of riches, if stopping short of that naked condemnation of them conveyed in the bald letter of the Gospel teaching, would be feasible enough. But the spirit and temper which Oriental imagination, hasty generalisation, unreflecting intelligence, unacquainted with the requirements of complex civilisation, and habitually hyperbolic phraseology, would naturally embody in those four exhortations, are as obligatory and as feasible as ever. The *thought*—the nucleus of the inner meaning—is sacred still and of enduring truth. It is only the casual and separable shell of words in which that thought was once conveyed that we must regard as having passed away, or possibly as never having been more than figuratively or exceptionally appropriate.

And we may use our freedom of penetrating to the true spirit and meaning of Christ's teaching through its casual or disguising letter, with the more boldness that

it is only this spirit as to which we can feel absolutely certain. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, while his sayings are recorded for us in Greek; and they must, therefore, have passed through the process of translation from one language into another; and, moreover, from one language into another whose genius is as singularly distinct as that of the German from that of the French. The record, too, it is pretty certain, did not take shape till at least half a century, or about a generation and a half, after the date of the events recorded—ample time for those events (whether facts or words) to have been moulded and modified, by the invariable practice of tradition, into the conceptions of the human intermediaries by whose agency they were handed down—a time so ample that this process of modification could not fail to have operated largely. And, finally, the Gospels themselves abound in indications that both the disciples who heard and repeated Christ's sayings, and the evangelists who recorded them in a foreign language, did not always conceive them rightly or comprehend them fully. Thus, what our English Testament practically contains is simply the form which the precepts of a great prophet and Master, orally delivered, have definitely assumed after having passed for a space of fifty years or more, by the process of oral tradition, through a succession of uncritical and imaginative minds, none of which grasped or understood them in their fulness or their pure simplicity; and after being subsequently exposed to the double risk of transfusion, first from a Semitic into an Aryan, and then from a classic into a Teutonic, tongue. It would seem, therefore, self-evident that this is a case in which reliance on special phrases and expressions, as well as on particular narrative details, must be singularly unsafe and unwise; and, as a fact, we find that even theologians who most loudly deprecate and repudiate this conclusion, when formalised in words, do practically recognise its truth, by putting their own gloss and interpretation on the bare language of Scripture wherever they find it necessary to do so; and that the

extent to which they use this liberty is merely a question of degree. Only then, we may fairly conclude—indeed, are forced to conclude—only that “mind which was in Christ,” that spirit, temper, enduring and inspiring character; that life, in fine, which shone through all his actions and permeated all his sayings, and which was so vital, so essential, so omnipresent, and so unmistakable, as to have survived through all the channels and processes of transmission we have described, and defied their perils, can safely be taken or followed as his real teaching. Doubts and disputes among Christians have been infinite as to the “doctrine” of Christ—as to the “particulars” of what he said and did. None, we believe, ever truly differed as to the tone and temper of his mind or of his teaching, as to the essential features of his character, as to what he meant by “ME” when he said “Follow me,” “Learn of *me*, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.”

We may see now, too, how shallow and how groundless are the fallacies of those who jump to the conclusion that, in order to realise and carry out a truly Christian life, it is necessary to upset society, to abolish the hierarchy of ranks, and introduce a forced equality of position and possessions. The Gospel, rightly read, gives no countenance to those wild theories of ignorance, thoughtlessness, and envy. The New Testament contains many precepts as to our behaviour in those relations which spring out of that very inequality of conditions which Christianity, in the view of Communists, is supposed to discountenance. Some of the more distinctively Christian virtues, such as obedience and humility, would seem to be especially appropriate to a social organisation where rank, if not “caste,” holds sway. Certainly, as we have learned by experience, some of the most un-Christian vices, such as envy, lie deep at the root of the passion for equality, and have been seen to flourish with malignant strength where that passion has been most clamorous. Assuredly, too, we should say that a system of civilisation in

which masters and servants, rulers and subjects, rich and poor, the humble and the great, are recognised and established, appears to offer field and scope for a wider range and a greater variety of Christian excellencies than a community in which a dead level of uniformity should prevail. Nor can we conceive any single form or manifestation of “the mind which was in Christ” that may not thrive in fullest vitality in society as now constituted, and find ample work in purging its evils and developing its capabilities, without seeking to disturb its foundations. If Christianity cannot flourish under any phase of social and political organisation, if the seed of its more peculiar qualities can only germinate and fructify in soil enriched with the ruins of ancient orders and ancestral institutions, and flattened down by the hard grinding steam-roller of democracy, it can scarcely be the mighty or divine moral agency we have hitherto conceived it.

Our conclusion, then, is, that we are and may remain Christians, and that we can and ought to obey the Christian rule of life; but that in order to do either we must deal with the kernel, not the husk; we must penetrate to the true mind and temper of Jesus through the accretions which have overlaid it, the literalism which has disfigured it, and (be it said with all reverence) the Orientalism and the incompleteness, if not the imperfection, which mingled with and coloured it. Holding this, the utmost possible conquests of intelligence and learning are divested of their terrors. It is not with Christianity that science can ever be at issue; only with theology calling itself Christian.

And now, having reached a time of life when most subjects are grave, and when some have grown very solemn—when the angry passions of the controversialist can find no breath or aliment in the thin, calm atmosphere of fading years; when egotism has little left to gather round it; and when few sentiments survive in pristine vividness but the love of nature and the reverence for

truth—I may be allowed one parting word, which, though personal, will scarcely be deemed obtrusive. I not only disclaim any position or feeling of antagonism to Christianity; I claim to have written this book on behalf, and in the cause, of the religion of Jesus, rightly understood. I entirely repudiate the pretensions of those whom I hold to have especially misconceived and obscured that religion, to be its exclusive or rightful representatives. I hold that thousands of the truest servants of our Lord are to be found among those who decline to wear what it is the fashion to pronounce his livery, with the grotesque and hideous facings of each successive age. I resent as an arrogant assumption the habitual practice of refusing the name of Christian to all who shrink away from or assail the errors and corruptions with which its official defenders have overlaid the faith of Christ. And I can find no words of adequate condemnation for the shallow insolence of men who are not ashamed to fling the name of “atheist” on all whose conceptions of the Deity are purer, loftier, more Christian, than their own. Those who dare to dogmatise about his nature or his purposes, prove by that very daring their hopeless incapacity even to grasp the skirts or comprehend the conditions of that mighty problem.¹ Even if the human intellect could reach the truth about him, human language would hardly be adequate to give expression to the transcendent

thought. Meanwhile, recognising and realising this with an unfeigned humbleness which yet has nothing disheartening in its spirit, my own conception—perhaps from early mental habit, perhaps from incurable and very conscious metaphysical inaptitude—approaches far nearer to the old current image of a personal God than to any of the sublimated substitutes of modern thought. Strauss’s *Universum*, Comte’s *Humanity*, even Mr. Arnold’s *Stream of Tendency that Makes for Righteousness*, excite in me no enthusiasm, command from me no worship. I cannot pray to the *Immensities* and the *Eternities* of Carlyle. They proffer me no help; they vouchsafe no sympathy; they suggest no comfort. It may be that such a Personal God is a mere anthropomorphic creation. It may be—as philosophers with far finer instruments of thought than mine affirm—that the conception of such a being, duly analysed, is demonstrably a self-contradictory one. But at least in resting in it, I rest in something I almost seem to realise; at least I share the view which Jesus indisputably held of the Father whom he obeyed, communed with, and worshipped; at least I escape the indecent familiarity and the perilous rashness, stumbling now into the grotesque, now into the blasphemous, of the infallible creed-concocters who stand confidently ready with their two-foot rule to measure the Immeasurable, to define the Infinite, to describe in precise scholastic phraseology the nature of the Incomprehensible and the substance of the great Spirit of the universe.

I have but one word more to say—and that is an expression of unfeigned *amazement*—so strong as almost to throw into the shade every other sentiment, and increasing with every year of reflection, and every renewed perusal of the genuine words and life of Jesus—that, out of anything so simple, so beautiful, so just, so loving, and so grand, *could* have grown up or been extracted anything so marvellously unlike its original as the current creeds of Christendom; that so turbid a torrent *could* have flowed from so pure a fountain, and

¹ “It must be that the light divine,
That on your soul is pleased to shine,
Is other than what falls on mine:

“For you can fix and formalise
The Power on which you raise your eyes,
And trace him in his palace-skies.

“You can perceive and almost touch
His attributes, as such and such—
Almost familiar over much.

“You can his thoughts and ends display,
In fair historical array,
From Adam to the judgment-day.

“I cannot think him here or there—
I think him ever everywhere—
Unfading light, unstifled air.”

—*The Two Theologies: Palm Leaves*,
by LORD HOUGHTON.

yet persist in claiming that fountain as its source; that any combination of human passion, perversity, and misconception *could* have reared such a superstructure upon such foundations. Out of the teaching of perhaps the most sternly anti-sacerdotal prophet who ever inaugurated a new religion, has been built up (among the Catholics and their feeble imitators here) about the most pretentious and oppressive priesthood that ever weighed down the enterprise and the energy of the human mind. Out of the life and words of a Master, whose every act and accent breathed love and mercy and confiding hope to the whole race of man, has been distilled (among Calvinists and their cognates) a creed of general damnation and of black despair. Christ set at naught "observances," and trampled upon those prescribed with a rudeness that bordered on contempt:—Christian worship, in its most prevailing form, has been made almost to *consist* in rites and ceremonies, in sacraments and feasts and fasts and periodic prayers. Christ preached personal righteousness, with its roots going deep down into the inner nature, as the one thing needful:—his accredited messengers and professed followers say No! purity and virtue are filthy rags; salvation is to be purchased only through vicarious merits and "imputed" holiness. Jesus taught his disciples to trust in and to worship a tender Father, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy:—those who speak in his name in these later days tell us rather of a relentless Judge, in whose picture, as they draw it, it is hard to recognise either

justice or compassion. In Christ's grand and simple creed, expressed in his plainest words, "eternal life" was the assured inheritance of those who loved God with all their hearts, who loved their neighbours as themselves, and who walked purely, humbly, and beneficently while on earth:—in their Christian sects and churches of to-day, in their recognised formularies and their elaborate creeds, all this is repudiated as infantine and obsolete; the official means and purchase-money of salvation are altogether changed; eternal life is reserved for those, and for those only, who accept or profess a string of metaphysical propositions conceived in a scholastic brain and put into scholastic phraseology; and, to crown the whole, a Hell is conceived so horrible as to make Heaven an impossibility,—for what must be the temper of the Elect Few who could taste an hour's felicity, while the immeasurable myriads of their dearest fellow-beings—their husbands and wives, their mothers, their children—were writhing in eternal torments within sight and hearing of *their* paradise? Theologians transmogrify the pure precepts and devotion of Jesus into a religion as nearly as possible their opposite, and then decree that, whoever will not adopt their travesty, "without doubt shall perish everlastingly." It is the old spectacle which so disturbed Jeremiah, reproduced in our own days:—
 "A wonderful and a horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule through their means; and the people love to have it so: *and what will be the end thereof?*"

THE CREED OF CHRISTENDOM

CHAPTER I.

INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

WHEN an Inquirer, brought up in the popular Theology of England, questions his teachers as to the foundations and evidence of the doctrines he has imbibed, he is referred at once to the Bible as the source and proof of all: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." The Bible, he is told, is a sacred book of supreme and unquestionable authority, being the production of writers directly inspired by God to teach us truth—being, in the ordinary phrase, THE WORD OF GOD. This view of the Bible he finds to be universal among all religious sects, and nearly all religious teachers; all at least of whom, in this country, he is likely to hear. This belief in the Inspiration of the Scriptures is, indeed, stated with some slight variations, by modern Divines; some affirming that every statement and word was immediately dictated from on high; these are the advocates of *Plenary or Verbal Inspiration*;—others holding merely that the Scriptural writers were divinely informed and authorised Teachers of truth and narrators of fact, thoroughly imbued with, and guided by, the Spirit of God, but that the words, the earthly form in which they clothed the ideas, were their own. These are the believers in the *essential Inspiration* of the Bible.

It is obvious that the above are only

two modes of stating the same doctrine—a doctrine incapable of being defined or expressed with philosophical precision, from our ignorance of the *modus operandi* of divine influences on the mind of man. Both propositions mean, if they have any distinct meaning at all, this affirmation:—that every statement of fact contained in the Scriptures is true, as being information communicated by the Holy Spirit—that every dogma of Religion, every idea of Duty, every conception of Deity, therein asserted, *came from God*, in the natural and unequivocal sense of that expression. That this *is* the acknowledged and accepted doctrine of Protestant Christendom at least is proved by the circumstance that all controversies among Christian sects turn upon the interpretation, not the authority, of the Scriptures; insomuch, that we constantly hear disputants make use of this language: "Only show me such or such a doctrine in the Bible, and I am silenced."—It is proved, too, by the pains taken, the humiliating subterfuges so often resorted to, by men of science to show that their discoveries are not at variance with any text of Scripture;—pains and subterfuges now happily discarded by nearly all, as unworthy alike of the dignity of Science and the rights of controversy, and as no longer required amid the increasing enlightenment of the

age.—It is proved by the observation, so constantly forced upon us, of theologians who have been compelled to abandon the theory of Scriptural Inspiration or to modify it into a negation, still retaining, as tenaciously as ever, the consequences and corollaries of the doctrine; phrases which sprung out of it, and have no meaning apart from it; and deductions which could flow from it alone.—It is proved, moreover, by the indiscriminate and peremptory manner in which texts are habitually quoted from every part of the Bible, to enforce a precept, to settle a doctrine, or to silence an antagonist.—It is proved, finally, by the infinite efforts made by commentators and divines to explain discrepancies and reconcile contradictions which, independently of this doctrine, could have no importance or significance whatever.

This, accordingly, is the first doctrine for which our Inquirer demands evidence and proof. It does not occur to him to doubt the correctness of so prevalent a belief: he is only anxious to discover its *genesis* and its foundation. He immediately perceives that the Sacred Scriptures consists of two separate series of writings, wholly distinct in their character, chronology, and language—the one containing the sacred books of the Jews, the other those of the Christians. We will commence with the former.

Most of our readers who share the popular belief in the divine origin and authority of the Jewish Scriptures would probably be much perplexed when called upon to assign grounds to justify the conviction which they entertain from habit. All that they could discover may be classed under the following heads:—

I. That these books were received as sacred, authoritative, and inspired Writings by the Jews themselves.

II. That they repeatedly and habitually represent themselves as dictated by God, and containing His *ipsissima verba*.

III. That their contents proclaim their origin and parentage, as displaying a purer morality, a loftier religion, and

altogether a holier tone, than the unassisted, uninspired human faculties could, at that period, have attained.

IV. That the authority of the Writers, as directly commissioned from on High, was in many cases attested by miraculous powers, either of act or prophecy.

V. That Christ and His Apostles decided their sacred character, by referring to them, quoting them, and assuming or affirming them to be inspired.

Let us examine each of these grounds separately.

I. It is unquestionably true that the Jews received the Hebrew Canon, or what we call the Old Testament, as a collection of divinely-inspired writings, and that Christians, on their authority, have generally adopted the same belief.—Now, even if the Jews had held the same views of inspiration that now prevail, and attached the modern meaning to the word; even if they had known accurately who were the Authors of the sacred books, and on what authority such and such writings were admitted into the Canon, and such others rejected;—we do not see why their opinion should be regarded as a sufficient guide and basis for ours; especially when we remember that they rejected as an Impostor the very Prophet whom we conceive to have been inspired beyond all others. What rational or consistent ground can we assign for disregarding the decision of the Jews in the case of Jesus, and accepting it submissively in the case of Moses, David, and Isaiah?

But, on a closer examination, it is discovered that the Jews cannot tell us when, nor by whom, nor on what principle of selection, this collection of books was formed. All these questions are matters of pure conjecture, or of difficult and doubtful historic inference;—and the ablest critics agree only in the opinion that no safe opinion can be pronounced. One ancient Jewish legend attributes the formation of the Canon to the Great Synagogue, an imagined “company of Scribes,” *συναγωγή γραμματέων*,

presided over by Ezra.—Another legend, equally destitute of authority, relates that the collection already existed, but had become much corrupted, and that Ezra was inspired for the purpose of correcting and purifying it;—that is, was inspired for the purpose of ascertaining, correcting, and affirming the inspiration of his Predecessors. A third legend mentions Nehemiah as the Author of the Canon. The opinion of De Wette—probably the first authority on these subjects—an opinion founded on minute historical and critical investigations, is, that the different portions of the Old Testament were collected or brought into their present form, at various periods, and that the whole body of it “came gradually into existence, and, as it were, of itself and by force of custom and public use, acquired a sort of sanction.” He conceives the Pentateuch to have been completed about the time of Josiah, the collection of Prophets soon after Nehemiah, and the devotional writings not till the age of the Maccabees.¹ His view of the grounds which led to the reception of the various books into the sacred Canon, is as follows:—“The writings attributed to Moses, David, and the Prophets were considered inspired on account of the personal character of their authors. But the other writings, which are in part anonymous, derive their title to inspiration sometimes from their contents and sometimes from the cloud of antiquity which rests on them. Some of the writings which were composed after the exile—such, for example, as the song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel—were put on this list on account of the ancient authors to whom they were ascribed; others—for example, Chronicles and Esther—on account of their contents; and others again, as Ezra and Nehemiah, on account of the distinguished merit of their authors in restoring the Law and worship of God.”²

¹ Introduction to the Critical Study of the Old Testament (by Parker), i. 26–35.

² De Wette, i. 40.

Again: the books of the Hebrew Canon were customarily classed among the Jews into three several divisions—the Books of the Law, the Prophets, and the other sacred writings, or Hagiographa, as they are termed—and it is especially worthy of remark that Philo, Josephus, and all the Jewish authorities ascribed different degrees of inspiration to each class, and moreover did not conceive such inspiration to be exclusively confined to the Canonical writers, but to be shared, though in a scantier degree, by others;—Philo extending it even to the Greek translators of the Old Testament; Josephus hinting that he was not wholly destitute of it himself; and both maintaining that even in their day the gifts of prophecy and inspiration were not extinct, though limited to few.¹ The Talmudists held the same opinion; and went so far as to say that a man might derive a certain kind or degree of inspiration from the study of the Law and the Prophets. In the Gospel of John xi. 51 we have an intimation that the High Priest had a kind of *ex officio* inspiration or prophetic power.—It seems clear, therefore, that the Jews, on whose authority we accept the Old Testament as *inspired*, attached a very different meaning to the word from that in which our Theologians employ it; in their conception it approaches (except in the case of Moses) much more nearly to the divine *afflatus* which the Greeks attributed to their Poets.—“Between the Mosaic and the Prophetic Inspiration, the Jewish Church asserted such a difference as amounts to a diversity. . . . To Moses and to Moses alone—to Moses, in the recording, no less than in the receiving of the law—and to every part of the five books called the books of Moses, the Jewish Doctors of the generation before and coeval with the

¹ De Wette, i. 39–43. A marked confirmation of the idea of graduated inspiration is to be found in Numbers xii. 6–8. Maimonides (De Wette, ii. 361) distinguishes eleven degrees of inspiration, besides that which was granted to Moses. Abarbanel (De Wette, i. 14) makes a similar distinction.

Apostles, assigned that unmodified and absolute *θεοπνευστία*, which our divines, in words at least, attribute to the Canon collectively."¹ The Samaritans, we know, carried this distinction so far that they received the Pentateuch alone as of divine authority, and did not believe the other books to be inspired at all.

It will, then, be readily conceded that the divine authority, or proper inspiration (using the word in our modern, plain, ordinary, theological sense), of a series of writings of which we know neither the date, nor the authors, nor the collectors, nor the principle of selection, cannot derive much support or probability from the mere opinion of the Jews;—especially when the same Jews did not confine the quality of inspiration to these writings exclusively;—when a large section of them ascribed this attribute to five books only out of thirty-nine;—and when they assigned to different portions of the collection different *degrees* of inspiration—an idea quite inconsistent with the modern one of infallibility.—“In infallibility there can be no degrees.”²

II. The second ground alleged for the popular belief in the Inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures appears to involve both a confusion of reasoning and a misconception of fact. These writings, I believe I am correct in stating, nowhere affirm their own inspiration, divine origin, or infallible authority. They frequently, indeed, use the expressions, “Thus saith Jehovah,” and “the Word of the Lord came to Moses,” &c., which seem to imply that in these instances they consider themselves as recording the very words of the Most High; but they do not declare that they are as a whole dictated by God, nor even that in these instances they are enabled to record His words with infallible accuracy. But even if these writings did contain the most solemn and explicit assertion of their own inspiration, that assertion ought not

to have, and in the eye of reason could not have, any weight whatever, till that inspiration is proved from independent sources—after which it becomes superfluous. It is simply the testimony¹ of a witness to himself—a testimony which the falsest witness can bear as well as the truest. To take for granted the attributes of a writer from his own declaration of those attributes is, one would imagine, too coarse and too obvious a logical blunder not to be abandoned as soon as it is stated in plain language. Yet, in the singular work which I have already quoted—singular and sadly remarkable, as displaying the strange inconsistencies into which a craven terror of heresy (or the imputation of it) can betray even the acutest thinkers—Coleridge says, *first* “that he cannot find any such claim (to supernatural inspiration) made by the writers in question, explicitly or by implication” (p. 16);—*secondly*, that where the passages asserting such a claim are supposed to be found, “the conclusion drawn from them involves obviously a *petitio principii*—namely, the supernatural dictation, word by word, of the book in which the assertion is found; for until this is established the utmost such a text can prove is the current belief of the Writer’s age and country” (p. 17);—and, *thirdly*, that, “whatever is referred by the sacred penman to a direct communication from God; and whenever it is recorded that the subject of the history *had asserted himself* to have received this or that command, information, or assurance, from a super-human intelligence; or where the Writer, in his own person, and in the character of an historian, relates that the word of God came to Priest, Prophet, Chieftain, or other Individual; *I receive the same with full belief*, and admit its inappellable authority” (p. 27).—What is this, but to say, at p. 27, that he receives as “inappellable” that which, at p. 17, he

¹ Coleridge, “Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit,” p. 19.

² Coleridge, p. 18.

¹ “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (*i. e.*, is not to be regarded), John vi. 31.

declares to involve an obvious *petitio principii*?—that any self-asserted infallibility—any distinct affirmation of divine communication or command, however improbable, contradictory, or revolting—made in any one of a collection of books, “the dates, selectors, and compilers of which” he avers to be “unknown, or recorded by known fabulists” (p. 18)—must be received as of supreme authority, without question, and without appeal?—What would such a reasoner as Coleridge think of such reasoning as this, on any other than a Biblical question?

III. The argument for the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures derived from the character of their contents, will bear no examination. It is true that many parts of them contain views of Duty, of God, and of Man’s relation to Him, which are among the purest and loftiest that the human intellect can grasp;—but it is no less true that other passages, at least as numerous and characteristic, depict feelings and opinions on these topics as low, meagre, and unworthy as ever took their rise in savage and uncultured minds. These passages, as is well known, have long been the opprobrium of orthodoxy and the despair of Theologians; and so far are they from being confirmatory of the doctrine of scriptural inspiration, that nothing but the inconsiderate and absolute reception of this doctrine has withheld men from regarding and representing them in their true light. The contents of the Hebrew Canon *as a whole* form the most fatal and convincing argument against inspiration *as a whole*. By the popular creed as it now stands, the nobler portions are compelled to bear the mighty burden of the lower and less worthy;—and often sink under their weight.

IV. The argument for the Inspiration of the Old Testament Writers, drawn from the supposed miraculous or prophetic powers conferred upon the writers, admits of a very brief refutation. In the *first* place, as we do not know who the Writers were, nor at what date

the books were written, we cannot possibly decide whether they were endowed with any such powers or not.—*Secondly*, as the only evidence we have for the reality of the miracles rests upon the divine authority, and consequent unfailing accuracy, of the books in which they are recorded, they cannot, without a violation of all principles of reasoning, be adduced to prove that authority and accuracy.—*Thirdly*, in those days, as is well known, superhuman powers were not supposed to be confined to the direct and infallible organs of the divine commands, nor necessarily to imply the possession of the delegated authority of God;—as we learn from the Magicians of Pharaoh, who could perform many, though not all, of the miracles of Moses;—from the case of Aaron, who, though miraculously gifted, and God’s chosen High Priest, yet helped the Israelites to desert Jehovah and bow down before the Golden Calf;—and from the history of Balaam, who, though in daily communication with God and *especially* inspired by Him, yet accepted a bribe from His enemies to curse His people, and pertinaciously endeavoured to perform his part of the contract.—And, *finally*, as the dogmatic or credential value of prophecy depends on our being able to ascertain the date at which it was uttered, and the precise events which it was intended to predict, and the impossibility of foreseeing such events by mere human sagacity, and, moreover, upon the original language in which the prophecy was uttered not having been altered by any subsequent recorder or transcriber to match the fulfilment more exactly;—and as in the case of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Canon (as will be seen in a subsequent chapter), great doubt rests upon almost all these points; and as, moreover, for one prediction which was justified, it is easy to point to two which were falsified, by the event;—the prophecies, even if occasionally fulfilled, can assuredly, in the present stage of our inquiry, afford us no adequate foundation

on which to build the inspiration of the *library* (for such it is) of which they form a part.

V. But the great majority of Christians would, if questioned, rest their belief in the Inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures upon the supposed sanction or affirmation of this view by Christ and his Apostles.—Now, as Coleridge has well argued in a passage already cited, until we know that the words of Christ conveying this doctrine have been faithfully recorded, so that we are actually in possession of his view—and that the apostolic writings conveying this doctrine were the production of inspired men—“the utmost such texts can prove is the current belief of the Writer’s age and country concerning the character of the books then called the Scriptures.”—The inspiration of the Old Testament, in this point of view, therefore, rests upon the inspiration of the New—a matter to be presently considered. But let us here ascertain what is the actual amount of divine authority attributed to the Old, by the writers of the New Testament.

It is unquestionable that these Scriptures are constantly referred to and quoted, by the Apostles and Evangelists, as authentic and veracious histories. It is unquestionable, also, that the prophetic writings were considered by them *to be prophecies*—to contain predictions of future events, and especially of events relating to Christ. They received them submissively; but misquoted, misunderstood, and misapplied them, as will hereafter be shown.—Further, however incorrectly we may believe the words of Christ to have been reported, his references to the Scriptures are too numerous, too consistent, and too probable, not to bring us to the conclusion that he quoted them as having, and deserving to have, unquestioned authority over the Jewish mind. On this point, however, the opinions of Christ, as recorded in the Gospel, present remarkable discrepancies, and even contradictions. On the one hand, we read of His saying, “Think not that I

am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and Earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled.”¹ He quotes the Decalogue as “from God”; and he says that “God spake to Moses.”² It is true that he nowhere affirms the inspiration of the Scriptures, but he quotes the prophecies, and even is said to represent them as of prophesying of him.³ He quotes the Psalms controversially, to put down antagonists, and adds the remark, “the Scriptures cannot be broken.”⁴ He is represented as declaring once positively, and once incidentally,⁵ that “Moses wrote of him.”⁶

On the other hand, he contradicted Moses, and abrogated his ordinances in an authoritative and peremptory manner, which precludes the idea that he supposed himself dealing with the direct commands of God.⁷ This is done in many points specified in Matt. v. 34-44;—in the case of divorce, in the most positive and naked manner (Matt. v. 31, 32; xix. 8. Luke xvi. 18; Mark x. 4-12);—in the case of the woman taken in adultery, who would have been punished with a cruel death by the Mosaic law but whom Jesus dismissed with—“Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more” (John viii. 5-11);—

¹ Matt. v. 17, 18. Luke xvi. 17.

² Matt. xv. 4-6; xxii. 31. Mark vii. 9-13; xii. 26.

³ Matt. xv. 7; xxiv. 15. Luke iv. 17-21; xxiv. 27.

⁴ John x. 35.

⁵ John v. 46. Luke xxiv. 44.

⁶ It seems more than doubtful whether any passages in the Pentateuch can fairly be considered as having reference to Christ. But passing over this, if it shall appear that what we now call “the Books of Moses” were not written by Moses, it will follow, either that Christ referred to Mosaic writings which we do not possess; or that, like the contemporary Jews and modern Christians, he erroneously ascribed to Moses books which Moses did not write.

⁷ “Ye have heard that it has been said of old time;”—“Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives,” &c., &c.

in the case of clean and unclean meats, as to which the Mosaic law is rigorous in the extreme, but which Christ puts aside as trivial, affirming that unclean meats *cannot* defile a man, though Moses declared that it "made them abominable." (Matt. xv. 11; Mark vii. 15.) Christ even supersedes in the same manner one of the commands of the Decalogue—that as to the observance of the Sabbath, his views and teaching as to which no ingenuity can reconcile with the Mosaic law.¹

Finally, we have the assertion in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy (iii. 16), which, though certainly translatable two ways,² either *affirms* the inspiration of the Hebrew Canon as a whole, or *assumes* the inspiration of certain portions of it.—On the whole, there can, I think, be little doubt that Christ and his Apostles received the Jewish Scriptures, as they then were, as sacred and authoritative. But till *their* divine authority is established, it is evident that this, the *fifth*, ground for believing the inspiration of the Old Testament, merges in the *first*, *i.e.*, the belief of the Jews.

So far, then, it appears that the only evidence for the Inspiration of the Hebrew Canon is the fact that the Jews believed in it.—But we know that they also believed in the Inspiration of other writings;—that *their* meaning of the word "Inspiration" differed essentially from that which now prevails;—that their theocratic polity had so interwoven

¹ See this whole question most ably treated in the notes to Norton, Genuineness of the Gospels, ii. § 7.

² The English, Dutch, and other versions render it, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching," &c., &c. (an obviously incorrect rendering, unless it can be shown that *γραφή* is always used by Paul in reference to the Jewish Canon exclusively). The Vulgate, Luther, Calmet, the Spanish and Arabic versions, and most of the Fathers, translate it thus: "All divinely inspired writings are also profitable for teachings," &c. This is little more than a truism. But Paul probably meant, "Do not despise the Old Testament, because you have the Spirit; *since you know it was inspired*, you ought to be able to make it profitable," &c.

itself with all their ideas, and modified their whole mode of thinking, that almost every mental suggestion, and every act of power, was referred by them *directly* to a superhuman origin.¹—"If" (says Mr. Coleridge) "we take into account the habit, universal with the Hebrew Doctors, of referring all excellent or extraordinary things to the Great First Cause, without mention of the proximate and instrumental causes—a striking illustration of which may be obtained by comparing the narratives of the same event in the Psalms and the Historical Books;—and if we further reflect that the distinction of the Providential and the Miraculous did not enter into their forms of thinking—at all events not into their mode of conveying their thoughts;—the language of the Jews respecting the Hagiographa will be found to differ little, if at all, from that of religious persons among ourselves, when speaking of an author abounding in gifts, stirred up by the Holy Spirit, writing under the influence of special grace and the like."²—We know, moreover, that the Mahometans believe in the direct inspiration of the Koran as firmly as ever did the Hebrews in that of their sacred books; and that in matters of such mighty import the belief of a special nation can be no safe or adequate foundation for our own.—The result of this investigation, therefore, is, that the popular doctrine of the inspiration, divine origin, and consequent unimpeachable accuracy and infallible authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, *rests on no foundation whatever*—unless it shall subsequently appear that Christ and his Apostles affirmed it, and had means of knowing it and judging of it, superior to and independent of those possessed by the Jews of their time.

I have purposely abstained in this place from noticing those considerations which directly negative the doctrine in question; both because many of these will be more suitably introduced in

¹ De Wette, i. 39.

² Letters of Inspiration, p. 21.

subsequent chapters, and because, if a doctrine is shown to be without foundation or *unproved*, *disproof* is superfluous.—In conclusion, let us carefully note that this inquiry has related solely to the divine origin and infallible authority of the *Sacred Writings*, and is entirely distinct from the question as to the substantial truth of the narratives and the correctness of the doctrine they contain—a question to be decided by a different method of inquiry. Though wholly uninspired, they may transmit narratives, faithful in the main, of God's dealings with man, and may be records of a real and authentic revelation.—All we have yet made out is this: that the mere fact of finding any statement or dogma in the Hebrew Scriptures is no sufficient proof or adequate warranty that it came from God.

It is not easy to discover the grounds on which the popular belief in the inspiration, or divine origin, of the New Testament Canon, as a whole, is based. Probably, when analysed, they will be found to be the following.

I. That the Canonical Books were selected from the uncanonical or apocryphal by the early Christian Fathers, who must be supposed to have had ample means of judging; and that the inspiration of these writings is affirmed by them.

II. That it is natural to imagine that God, in sending into the World a Revelation intended for all times and all lands, should provide for its faithful record and transmission by inspiring the transmitters and recorders.

III. That the Apostles, whose unquestioned writings form a large portion of the Canon, distinctly affirm their own inspiration; and that this inspiration was distinctly promised them by Christ.

IV. That the Contents of the New Testament are their own credentials, and by their sublime tone and character, proclaim their superhuman origin.

V. That the inspiration of most of the writers may be considered as

attested by the miracles they wrought, or had the power of working.

I. The writings which compose the volume called by us the New Testament had assumed their present collective form, and were generally received throughout the Christian Churches, about the end of the second century. They were selected out of a number of others; but by whom they were selected, or what principle guided the selection, history leaves in doubt. We have reason to believe that in several instances writings were selected or rejected, not from a consideration of the external or traditional evidence of their genuineness or antiquity, but from the supposed heresy or orthodoxy of the doctrines they contained. We find, moreover, that the early Fathers disagreed among themselves in their estimate of the genuineness and authority of many of the books;¹ that some of them received books which we exclude, and excluded others which we admit;—while we have good reason to believe that some of the rejected writings, as the Gospel of the Hebrews, and that for the Egyptians, and the Epistles of Clement and Barnabas, have at least as much title to be placed in the sacred Canon as some already there—the Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, and that of Jude, for example.

It is true that several of the Christian Fathers who lived about the end of the second century, as Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, distinctly affirm the inspiration of the Sacred Writings, as those writings were received, and as that word was understood, by them.² But we find that they were in

¹ See the celebrated account of the Canon given by Eusebius, where five of our epistles are "disputed";—the Apocalypse, which we receive, is by many considered "spurious"; and the Gospel of the Hebrews, which we reject, is stated to have been by many, especially of the Palestinian Christians, placed among the "acknowledged writings." De Wette, i. 76.

² De Wette, i. 63-66.

the habit of referring to and quoting indiscriminately the Apocryphal as well as the Canonical Scriptures. Instances of this kind occur in Clement of Rome (A.D. 100), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 200), and, according to Jerome, in Ignatius also, who lived about A.D. 107.¹ Their testimony, therefore, if valid to prove the inspiration of the Canonical Scriptures, proves the inspiration of the rejected Scriptures likewise; and by necessary sequence, proves the error and incompetency of the compilers of the Canon, who rejected them. No one, however, well acquainted with the writings of the Fathers will be of opinion that their judgment in these matters, or in any matters, ought to guide our own.²

II. The second argument certainly carries with it, at first sight, an appearance of much weight; and is, we believe, with most minds, however unconsciously, the argument which (as Paley expresses it) "does the business." The idea of Gospel inspiration is received, not from any proof that *it is so*, but from an opinion, or feeling, that *it ought to be so*. The doctrine arose, not because it was provable, but because it was wanted. Divines can produce no stronger reason for believing in the inspiration of the Gospel narratives than their own opinion that it is not likely God should have left so important a series of facts to the ordinary chances of History. But on a little reflection it will be obvious that we have no ground whatever for presuming that God will act in this or in that manner under any given circumstances, beyond what previous analogies may furnish; and in this case no analogy exists. We cannot even form a probable guess *a priori* of His mode of operation;—but we find that generally, and indeed in all cases of which we have any certain knowledge,

¹ De Wette, p. 54, &c.

² See "Ancient Christianity," by Isaac Taylor, *passim*, for an exposition of what these Fathers could write and believe. See also "Literature and Dogma," by Matthew Arnold, p. 283, for a few curious specimens.

He leaves things to the ordinary action of natural laws;—and if, therefore, it is "natural" to presume anything at all in this instance, that presumption should be that God did *not* inspire the New Testament writers, but left them to convey what they saw, heard, or believed, as their intellectual powers and moral qualities enabled them.

The Gospels, as professed records of Christ's deeds and words, will be allowed to form the most important portion of the New Testament Collection.—Now, the idea of God having inspired *four* different men to write a history of the same transactions—or rather of many different men having undertaken to write such a history, of whom God inspired *four* only to write correctly, leaving the others to their own unaided resources, and giving us no test by which to distinguish the inspired from the uninspired—certainly appears self-confuting and anything but "natural." If the accounts of the same transactions agree, where was the necessity for more than one? If they differ (as they notoriously do), it is certain that only one can be inspired;—and which is that one? In all other religions claiming a divine origin, this incongruity is avoided.

Further, the Gospels nowhere affirm, or even intimate, their own inspiration¹—a claim to credence, which, had they possessed it, they assuredly would not have failed to put forth. Luke, it is clear from his exordium, had no notion of his own inspiration, but founds his title to take his place among the annalists, and to be listened to as at least equally competent with any of his competitors, on his having been from the first cognisant of the transactions he was about to relate. Nor do the Apostolic writings bear any such testimony to them; nor could they well do so, having (with the exception of the Epistles of

¹ Dr. Arnold, "Christian Life," &c., p. 487,— "I must acknowledge that the Scriptural narratives do not claim this inspiration for themselves." Coleridge, "Confessions," p. 16,— "I cannot find any such claim made by these writers, either explicitly or by implication."

John) been composed previous to them.

III. When we come to the consideration of the Apostolic writings, the case is different. There are, scattered through these, apparent claims to superhuman guidance and teaching, though not direct assertion of inspiration. It is, however, worthy of remark that none of these occur in the writings of any of the Apostles who were contemporary with Jesus, and who attended his ministry;—in whom, if in any, might inspiration be expected; to whom, if to any, was inspiration promised. It is true that we find in John¹ much dogmatic assertion of being the sole teacher of truth, and much denunciation of all who did not listen submissively to him; but neither in his epistles nor in those of Peter, James, nor Jude, do we find any claim to special knowledge of truth, or guarantee from error by direct spiritual aid. All assertions of inspiration are, we believe, confined to the epistles of Paul, and may be found in 1 Cor. ii. 10—16. Gal. i. 11, 12. 1 Thess. iv. 8. 1 Tim. ii. 7.

Now, on these passages we have to remark, *first*, that “having the Holy Spirit,” in the parlance of that day, by no means implied our modern idea of *inspiration*, or anything approaching to it; for Paul often affirms that it was given to many, nay, to most, of the believers, and in *different degrees*.² Moreover, it is probable that a man who believed he was inspired by God would have been more dogmatic and less argumentative. He would scarcely have run the risk of weakening his revelation by a presumptuous endeavour to prove it; still less by adducing in its behalf arguments which are often far from being irrefragable.³

Secondly. In two or three passages

¹ 1st Epistle iv. 6. “We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

² 1 Cor. xii. 8; and xiv., *passim*.

³ Gal. iii. 16, for example. See Arnold’s “Literature and Dogma,” p. 140.

he makes a marked distinction between what he delivers as his own opinion, and what he speaks by authority:—“The Lord says, not I;”—“I, not the Lord;”—“This I give by permission, not by commandment,” &c., &c. Hence Dr. Arnold infers,¹ that we are to consider Paul as speaking from inspiration wherever he does not warn us that he “speaks as a man.” But unfortunately for this argument the Apostle expressly declares himself to be “speaking by the word of the Lord,” in at least one case where he is manifestly and admittedly in error, viz., in 1 Thess. iv. 15;² of which we shall speak further in the following chapter.

Thirdly. The Apostles, *all* of whom are supposed to be alike inspired, differed among themselves, contradicted, depreciated, and “withstood” one another.³

Fourthly. As we showed before in the case of the Old Testament writers, the Apostles’ assertion of their own inspiration, even were it ten times more clear and explicit than it is, being *their testimony to themselves*, could have no weight or validity as evidence.

But, it will be urged, the Gospels record that Christ promised inspiration to his apostles.—In the first place, Paul was not included in this promise. In the next place, we have already seen that the divine origin of these books is a doctrine for which no ground can be shown; and their correctness, as records of Christ’s words, is still to be established. When, however, we shall have clearly made out that the words promising inspiration were really uttered by Christ, and meant what we interpret them to mean, we shall have brought ourselves into the singular and embarrassing position of maintaining *that Christ promised them that which in result they did not possess*; since there can be no degrees of inspiration, in the ordinary

¹ “Christian Course and Character,” pp. 488–9.

² See also 1 Cor. vii. 29. Philip. iv. 5.

³ Gal. ii. 11–14. 2 Peter iii. 16. Acts xv. 6–39. Compare Rom. iii., and Gal. ii. and iii., with James ii.

and dogmatic sense of the word; and since the Apostles clearly were not altogether inspired, inasmuch as they fell into mistakes,¹ disputed, and disagreed among themselves.

The only one of the New Testament writings which contains a clear affirmation of its own inspiration is the one which in all ages has been regarded as of the most doubtful authenticity—viz., the Apocalypse. It was rejected by many of the earliest Christian authorities. It is rejected by most of the ablest Biblical critics of to-day. Luther, in the preface to his translation inserted a protest against the inspiration of the Apocalypse, which protest he solemnly charged every one to prefix who chose to publish the translation. In this protest one of his chief grounds for the rejection is the suspicious fact that this writer alone blazons forth his own inspiration.

IV. The common impression seems to be that the contents of the New Testament are their own credentials—that their superhuman excellence attests their divine origin. This may be perfectly true in substance without affecting the present question; since it is evident that the excellence of particular passages, or even of the great mass of passages, in a book can prove nothing for the divine origin of the whole—unless it can be shown that all the portions of it are indissolubly connected. This or that portion of its contents may attest by its nature that this or that special portion came from God, but not that the book itself, including everything in it, had a divine source. A truth, or a doctrine, may be divinely revealed, but humanly recorded, or transmitted by tradition; and may be mixed up with other things that are erroneous; else the passages of scriptural truth contained in a modern

¹ The error of Paul about the approaching end of the world was shared by all the Apostles. James v. 8. 1 Peter iv. 7. 2 Peter iii. 12. 1 John ii. 18. Jude, verse 18.

[It may be added that there is no reason to believe that any of these epistles were the composition of Apostles.]

sermon would prove the whole sermon inspired and infallible.

V. The argument for Inspiration, drawn from the miraculous gifts of the alleged recipients of inspiration—a matter to which we shall refer when treating of miracles—is thus conclusively met by a recent author: "Shall we say that miracles are an evidence of inspiration in the person who performs them? And must we accept as infallible every combination of ideas which may exist in his mind? If we look at this question abstractedly, it is not easy to perceive the necessary connection between superhuman *power* and superhuman wisdom. . . . And when we look more closely to the fact, did not the minds of the Apostles retain some errors, long after they had been gifted with supernatural power? Did they not believe in demons occupying the bodies of men and swine? Did they not expect Christ to assume a worldly sway? Did not their Master strongly rebuke the moral notions and feelings of two of them, who were for calling down fire from Heaven on an offending village? It is often said that where a man's asseveration of his infallibility is combined with the support of miracles, his inspiration is satisfactorily proved; and this statement is made on the assumption that God would never confer supernatural power on one who could be guilty of a falsehood. What, then, are we to say respecting Judas and Peter, both of whom had been furnished with the gifts of miracle, and employed them during a mission planned by Christ, and of whom, nevertheless, one became the traitor of the garden, and the other uttered against his Lord three falsehoods in one hour?"¹

So far, then, our inquiry has brought us to this negative conclusion: that we

¹ "Rationale of Religious Inquiry," p. 30. Moreover the law of Moses directs that a false prophet, even though he work miracles in attestation, shall be put to death,—and St. Paul says that if "an angel from Heaven" preaches any doctrine that conflicts with *his*, "let him be accursed." Deut. xiii. Galatians i. 8.

can discover no ground for believing that the Scriptures—*i.e.*, either the Hebrew or the Christian Canonical Writings—are *inspired*, taking that word in its ordinary acceptation—*viz.*, that they “came from God;” were dictated or suggested by Him; were supernaturally preserved from error, both as to fact and doctrine; and must therefore be received in all their parts as authoritative and infallible. This conclusion is perfectly compatible with the belief that they *contain* a human record, and in substance a faithful record, of a divine revelation—a human history, and, in the main, a true history, of the dealings of God with man. But they have become to us, by this conclusion, *records, not revelations*;—histories to be investigated like other histories;—documents of which the date, the authorship, the genuineness, the accuracy of the text, are to be ascertained by the same principles of investigation as we apply to other documents. In a word, we are to examine them and regard them, not as the Mahometans regard the Koran, but as Niebuhr regarded Livy, and as Arnold regarded Thucydides—documents out of which the good, the true, the sound, is to be educed.

ADDENDUM.

The Author devotes a further chapter to the question of Inspiration, in which he

discusses the somewhat nebulous and obsolete speculations of Coleridge and Arnold; men who were incapable of subscribing the popular view, and yet loth to compendiously reject it. Mr. Greg points out that their evasiveness amounts to repudiation; but a repetition of his reasoning does not seem to be called for, and we may content ourselves with a simple reproduction of the concluding words of his second chapter, which are as true to-day as in 1850.

The present position of this question in the public mind of Christendom is singularly anomalous, fluctuating, and unsound. The doctrine of Biblical Inspiration still obtains general credence, as part and parcel of the popular theology; and is retained as a sort of tacit assumption, by the great mass of the religious world, though abandoned as untenable by their leading thinkers and learned men;—many of whom, however, retain it in name, while surrendering it in substance; and do not scruple, while admitting it to be an error, to continue the use of language justifiable only on the supposition of its truth. Nay, further;—with a deplorable and mischievous inconsistency, they abandon the doctrine, but retain the deductions and corollaries which flowed from it, and from it alone. They insist upon making the superstructure survive the foundation. They refuse to give up possession of the property, though the title by which they hold it has been proved and is admitted to be invalid.

CHAPTER II.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY OF THE PENTATEUCH AND THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON GENERALLY

THE next comprehensive position which our Inquirer finds at the root of the popular theology, commanding a

tacit and almost unquestioned assent, is this:—That the Old Testament narratives contain an authentic and faithful

History of the actual dealings of God with man;—that the events which they relate took place as therein related, and were recorded by well-informed and veracious writers;—that wherever God is represented as visiting and speaking to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and others, He did really so appear and communicate His will to them;—that the ark, as built by Noah, was constructed under the detailed directions of the Architect of all Worlds; that the Law, as contained in the Pentateuch, was delivered to Moses and written down by him under the immediate dictation of Jehovah, and the proceedings of the Israelites minutely and specifically directed by him; that, in a word, the Old Testament is a literal and veracious history, not merely a national legend or tradition. This fundamental branch of the popular theology also includes the belief that the Books of Moses were written by Moses, the book of Joshua by Joshua, and so on; and further that the Prophetical Books, and the predictions contained in Historical Books, are *bonâ fide Prophecies*—genuine oracles from the mouth of God, uttered through the medium of His servants, whom at various times He instructed to make known His will and institutions to His chosen People.

That this is the popular belief in which we are all brought up, and on the assumption of which the ordinary language of Divines and the whole tone of current religious literature proceeds, no one will entertain a doubt; and that it has not been often broadly laid down or much defended is attributable to the circumstance, that, among Christians, it has rarely till of late been directly questioned or openly attacked. The proposition seems to have been assumed on the one side and conceded on the other, with equally inconsiderate ease.

Now, be it observed that if the Hebrew Narratives bore, on the face of them, an historical rather than a legendary character, and were in themselves probable, natural, and consistent, we might accept

them as substantially true without much extraneous testimony, on the ground of their antiquity alone. And if the conceptions of the Deity therein developed were pure, worthy, and consistent with what we learn of Him from reason and experience, we might not feel disposed to doubt the reality of the words and acts attributed to Him. But so far is this from being the case, that the narratives, eminently legendary in their tone, are full of the most astounding, improbable, and perplexing statements; and the representations of God which the Books contain are often monstrous, and utterly at variance with the teachings of Nature and Christianity. Under these circumstances, we, of course, require some sufficient reason for acceding to such difficult propositions and receiving the Hebrew Narratives as authentic and veracious Histories; and the only reason offered to us is *that the Jews believed them*.¹

But we remember that the Greeks believed the Legends in Herodotus, and the Romans the figments in Livy—and the Jews were at least as credulous and as nationally vain as either. We need, therefore, some better sponsors for our creed.

If, indeed, we were only required to accept the authority of the Jews for the belief that they sprung from Abraham, were captives in Egypt, received a com-

¹ Even this, however, must be taken *cum grano*. The Jews do not seem to have invariably accepted the historical narratives in the same precise and literal sense as we do. Josephus, or the traditions which were current among his countrymen, took strange liberties with the Mosaic accounts. There is a remarkable difference between his account of Abraham's dissimulation with regard to his wife, and the same translation in Genesis xx.—Moreover, he explains the passage of the Red Sea as a natural, not a miraculous event; and many similar discrepancies might be mentioned. See De Wette, ii. 42.

Observe, also, the liberty which Ezekiel considered himself warranted in taking with the Mosaic doctrine that God will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children (c. xviii. *passim*), a liberty scarcely compatible with a belief on his part that such doctrine was, as alleged, divinely announced.

plete code of Laws and system of theocratic polity from Moses, conquered Canaan, and committed manifold follies, frauds, and cruelties in their national career—we might accede to the demand without much recalcitration. But we are called on to admit something very different from this. We are required to believe that Jehovah, the Ruler of all Worlds, the Pure, Spiritual, Supreme, Ineffable Creator of the Universe—Our Father who is in Heaven—so blundered in the creation of man, as to repent and grieve, and find it necessary to destroy His own work—selected one favoured people from the rest of His children—sanctioned fraud—commanded cruelty—contended, and for a while in vain, with the magic of other Gods—wrestled bodily with one patriarch—ate cakes and veal with another—sympathised with and shared in human passions—and manifested “scarcely one untainted moral excellence”;—and we are required to do this painful violence to our feelings and our understandings, simply because these coarse conceptions prevailed some thousand years ago among a People whose history, as written by themselves, is certainly not of a nature to inspire us with any extraordinary confidence in their virtues or their intellect. They were the conceptions prevalent among the Scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus denounced as dishonourers of religion and corrupters of the Law, and who crucified Him for endeavouring to elevate them to a purer faith.

It is obvious, then, that we must seek for some other ground for accepting the earlier Scriptural narratives as genuine histories;—and we are met in our search by the assertion that the Books containing the statements which have staggered us, and the theism which has shocked us, were written by the great Law-giver of the Jews—by the very man whom God commissioned to liberate and organise His peculiar People. If indeed the Pentateuch was written by that same Moses whose doings it records, the case is materially altered;

—it is no longer a traditional or legendary narrative, but a history by an actor and a contemporary, that we have before us. Even this statement, however, were it made out, would not cast its ægis over the Book of *Genesis*, which records events from four to twenty-five centuries before the time of Moses.

But when we proceed to the investigation of this point, we discover, certainly much to our surprise, not only that there is no independent evidence for the assertion that Moses wrote the books which bear his name, but that we have nearly all the proof which the case admits of, that he did *not* write them,¹ and that they were not composed—at all events did not attain their present form—till some hundreds of years after his death. It is extremely difficult to lay the grounds of this proposition before general readers—especially English readers—in a form at once concise and clear; as they depend upon the results of a species of scientific criticism with which, though it proceeds on established and certain principles, very few in this country, even of our educated classes, are at all acquainted. In the conclusions arrived at by this scientific process, unlearned students must acquiesce as they do in those of Astronomy, or Philology, or Geology;—and all that can be done is to give them a very brief glimpse of the mode of inquiry adopted, and the kind of proof

¹ “After coming to these results,” says De Wette, ii. 160, “we find no ground and no evidence to show that the books of the Pentateuch were composed by Moses. Some consider him their author merely from traditional custom, because the Jews were of their opinion; though it is not certain that the more ancient Jews shared it; for the expressions ‘the Book of the Law of Moses,’ ‘the Book of the Law of Jehovah by the hand of Moses,’ only designate him as the author or mediator of the *Law*, not as the author of the *Book*.—The Law is ascribed to the ‘Prophets’ in 2 Kings xvii. 13, and in Ezra ix. 11. The opinion that Moses composed these books is not only opposed by all the signs of a later date which occur in the Book itself, but also by the entire analogy of the history of the Hebrew literature and language.”

adduced: this we shall do as concisely and as intelligibly as we can; and we will endeavour to state nothing which is not considered as established by men of the highest eminence in this very difficult branch of intellectual research.

The discovery in the Temple of the Book of the Law, in the reign of King Josiah, about B.C. 624, as related in 2 Kings xxii., is the first certain trace of the existence of the Pentateuch in its present form.¹ That if this, the Book of the Law of Moses, existed before this time, it was generally unknown, or had been quite forgotten, appears from the extraordinary sensation the discovery excited, and from the sudden and tremendous reformation immediately commenced by the pious and alarmed Monarch, with a view of carrying into effect the ordinances of this law.—Now we find that when the Temple was built and consecrated by Solomon, and the Ark placed therein (about B.C. 1000), this “Book of the Law” *was not there*—for it is said (1 Kings viii. 9), “There was nothing in the Ark save the two Tables of Stone which Moses put there at Horeb.”² Yet on turning to Deuteronomy xxxi. 24-26, we are told that when Moses had made an end of writing the words of the Law in a book, he said to the Levites, “Take this Book of the Law and put it in the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there to witness against you,” &c., &c.

This “Book of the Law” which was found in the Temple in the reign of Josiah (B.C. 624), which *was not there* in the time of Solomon (B.C. 1000), and which is stated to have been written and placed in the Ark by Moses (B.C. 1450), is almost certainly the one ever afterwards referred to and received as the “Law of God,” the “Law of Moses,” and quoted as such by Ezra and Nehe-

miah.¹ And the only evidence we have that Moses was the author of the books found by Josiah appears to be the passage in Deuteronomy xxxi., above cited.

But how did it happen that a book of such immeasurable value to the Israelites, on their obedience to which depended all their temporal blessings, which was placed in the sanctuary by Moses, and found there by Josiah, was not there in the time of Solomon?—Must it not have been found there by Solomon, if really placed there by Moses? for Solomon was as anxious as Josiah to honour Jehovah and enforce His Law.² In a word, have we any reason for believing that Moses really wrote the Book of Deuteronomy, and placed it in the Ark, as stated therein?—Critical science answers in the negative.

In the first place, Hebrew scholars assure us that the style and language of the Book forbids us to entertain the idea that it was written either by Moses, or near his time; as they resemble too closely those of the later writers of the Old Testament to admit the supposition that the former belonged to the 15th, and the latter to the 5th century before Christ. To imagine that the Hebrew language underwent no change, or a very slight one, during a period of two thousand years—in which the nation underwent vast political, social, and moral changes, with a very great admixture of foreign blood—is an idea antecedently improbable, and is contradicted by all analogy. The same remark applies, though with somewhat

¹ Subsequent references seem especially to refer to Deuteronomy.

² Conclusive evidence on this point may, we think, be gathered from Deut. xxxi. 10, where it is commanded that the law shall be publicly read every seventh year to the people assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles; and from xvii. 18, where it is ordained that each king on his accession shall write out a copy of the Law. It is impossible to believe that this command, had it existed, would have been neglected by all the pious and good kings who sat on the throne of Palestine. It is clear that they had never heard of such a command.

¹ De Wette, ii. 153.

² The same positive statement is repeated 2 Chron. v. 10.

less force, to the other four books of the Pentateuch.¹

Secondly. It is certain that Moses cannot have been the author of the *whole* of the Book of Deuteronomy, because it records his own death, c. xxxiv. It is obvious also that the last chapter must have been written, not only after the death of Moses, but a long period after, as appears from verse 10. "And there arose not another prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Now, there are no critical signs of style or language which would justify the assumption that the last chapter was the production of a different pen, or a later age, than the rest of the Book.

Thirdly. There are several passages scattered through the book which speak *in the past tense* of events which occurred after the Israelites obtained possession of the land of Canaan, and which must therefore have been written subsequently—probably long subsequently—to that period. For example: "The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime, but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; *as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the Lord gave unto them.*" Deut. ii. 12. Many other anachronisms occur, as throughout c. iii., especially verse 14; xix. 14; xxiv. 1-3; ii. 20-23. •

Finally, as we have seen, at xxxi. 26, is a command to place the book of the Law in the Ark, and a statement that it was so placed. Now as it was not in the Ark at the time when the Temple was consecrated, this passage must have been written subsequent to that event. See also verses 9-13.

Now either all these passages must have been subsequent interpolations, or they decide the date of the whole book. But they are too closely interwoven, and too harmoniously coalesce, with the rest to justify the former supposition. We are therefore driven to adopt the conclusion of De Wette and other

¹ De Wette, ii. 161.

critics, that the Book of Deuteronomy was written about the time of Josiah, shortly before, and with a view to, the discovery of the Pentateuch in the Temple.¹

With regard to the other four books attributed to Moses, scientific investigation has succeeded in making it quite clear, not only that they were written long after his time, but that they are a compilation from, or rather an imperfect fusion of, two principal original documents, easily distinguishable throughout by those accustomed to this species of research, and appearing to have been a sort of legendary or traditional histories, current among the earlier Hebrews. These two documents (or classes of documents) are called the *Elohistic*, and *Jehovistic*, from the different Hebrew names they employ in speaking of the Supreme Being;—the one using habitually the word ELOHIM, which our translation renders GOD, but which, being plural in the original, would be more correctly rendered *The Gods*;—the other using the word JEHOVAH, or JEHOVAH ELOHIM, *The God of Gods*—rendered in our translation THE LORD GOD.²

The existence of two such documents, or of two distinct and often conflicting narratives, running side by side, will be obvious on a very cursory perusal of the Pentateuch, more especially of the Book of Genesis; and the constant recurrence of these duplicate and discrepant statements renders it astonishing that the books in question could ever have been regarded as one original history, proceeding from one pen. At the very commencement we have separate and varying accounts of the Creation:—the *Elohistic one*, extending from Gen. i.-ii. 3, magnificent, simple, and sublime, describing the form of the animate and

¹ It is worthy of remark that the Book of Joshua (x. 13) quotes the Book of Jashar, which must have been written as late as the time of David (2 Samuel i. 18). See De Wette, ii. 187.

² There are, however, other distinctive marks. De Wette, ii. 77. Bauer, Theol. des Alt. Test. c. ii. § 1.

inanimate world by the fiat of the Almighty, and the making of man, male and female, in the image of God—but preserving a total silence respecting the serpent, the apple, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden;—the other, or Jehovistic, extending from Gen. ii. 4 to iii. 24, giving a different account of the formation of man and woman—describing the Garden of Eden with its four rivers, one flowing into the Persian Gulf and another surrounding Ethiopia¹—narrating the temptation, the sin, and the curse, and adding a number of minute and puerile details, bespeaking the conceptions of a rude and early age, such as God teaching Adam and Eve to make coats of skin in lieu of the garments of fig leaves they had contrived for themselves.

The next comparison of the two documents presents discrepancies almost equally great. The document Elohim, Gen. v. 1-32, gives simply the Genealogy from Adam to Noah, giving SETH as the name of Adam's first-born son;—whereas the document Jehovah, Gen. iv. 1-26, gives CAIN as the name of Adam's first-born and SETH as that of his last.² Shortly after we have two slightly-varying accounts³ of the flood; one being contained in vi. 9-22; vii. 11-16, 18-22;

¹ Cush, or "the land of swarthy men."

² "There is," says Theodore Parker, "a striking similarity between the names of the alleged descendants of Adam and Enos (according to the Elohim document, the grandson of Adam). It is to be remembered that both names signify *Man*."

I.	II.
1. Adam.	1. Enos.
2. Cain.	2. Cainan.
3. Enoch.	3. Mahalaleel.
4. Irad.	4. Jared.
5. Mehujael.	5. Enoch.
6. Methusael.	6. Methusaleh.
7. Lamech (Gen. iv. 17-19).	7. Lamech (Gen. v. 9-25)."

The reader may draw his own inferences from this, or see those of Buttmann, in his "Mythologus," I. c. vii. p. 171. See also on this matter, Kenrick on "Primeval History," p. 59.

³ One account affirms that *seven* specimens of clean beasts went into the ark; the other that only *two* so entered.

viii. 1-19; the other comprising vi. 1-8; vii. 7-10, 17, 23.

We will specify only one more instance of the same event twice related with obvious and irreconcilable discrepancies, viz., the seizure of Sarah in consequence of Abraham's timid falsehood. The document Elohim (Gen. xx.) places the occurrence in Gerar and makes Abimelech the offender—the document Jehovah (xii. 10-19) places it in Egypt, and makes Pharaoh the offender; whilst the same document again (xxvi. 1-11) narrates the same occurrence, representing Abimelech as the offender and Gerar as the locality, but changing the persons of the deceivers from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac and Rebekah.

Examples of this kind might be multiplied without end; which clearly prove the existence of at least two historical documents blended, or rather bound together, in the Pentateuch. We will now proceed to point out a few of the passages and considerations which negative the idea of *either* of them having been composed in the age or by the hand of Moses.¹

The Elohim document must have been written *after the expulsion of the Canaanites* and the settlement of the Israelites in the Promised Land, as appears from the following passages (*inter alia*),—

"Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things . . . that the land vomit not you out also, *as it vomited forth the nations which were before you*" (Lev. xviii. 24, 27, 28).

"For I was stolen away *out of the land of the Hebrews*" (Gen. xl. 15). Palestine would not be called the land

¹ The formula, "unto this day," is frequently found under circumstances indicating that the writer lived long subsequent to the events he relates (Gen. xix. 38; xxvi. 33; xxxiii. 32). We find frequent archæological explanations, as Ex. xvi. 36: "Now an omer (an ancient measure) is the tenth part of an ephah" (a modern measure).—Explanations of old names, and additions of the modern ones which had superseded them, repeatedly occur, as at Gen. xiv. 2, 7, 8, 17; xxiii. 2; xxxv. 19.

of the Hebrews till after the settlement of the Hebrews therein.

“And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; *the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan*” (Gen. xxiii. 2). “And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, *which is Bethlehem*” (xxxv. 19). “And Jacob came unto the city of Arba, *which is Hebron*” (xxxv. 27). These passages indicate a time subsequent to the erection of the Israelitish cities.

The document must have been written *in the time of the Kings*; for it says, Gen. xxxvi. 31, “These are the Kings that reigned in the land of Edom, *before there reigned any King over the children of Israel.*” Yet it must have been written *before the end of the reign of David*, since Edom, which David subdued, is represented in ch. xxxvi. as still independent. The conclusion, therefore, which critical Science has drawn from these and other points of evidence is, that the Elohim documents were composed in the time of Saul, or about B.C. 1055, four hundred years after Moses.

The Jehovistic documents are considered to have had a still later origin, and to date from about the reign of Solomon, B.C. 1000. For they were written *after the expulsion of the Canaanites*, as is shown from Gen. xii. 6 and xiii. 7: “The Canaanite *was then in the land.*” “The Canaanite and Perizzite *dwelt then in the land.*” They appear to have been written *after the time of the Judges*, since the exploits of Jair the Gileadite, one of the Judges (x. 4), are mentioned in Numb. xxxii. 41; *after Saul's victory over Agag*, King of the Amalekites, who is mentioned there—“and his King shall be higher than Agag” (Numb. xxiv. 7);—and if, as De Wette thinks, the Temple of Jerusalem is signified by the two expressions (Exod. xxiii. 19; xv. 13), “The House of Jehovah,” and the “habitation of thy holiness,”—they must have been composed after the erection of that edifice. This, however, we consider as inconclusive. On the other hand, it is thought that they must

have been written *before the time of Hezekiah*, because (in Numb. xxi. 6-9) they record the wonders wrought by the Brazen Serpent, which that King destroyed as a provocative to Idolatry (2 Kings xviii. 4). We are aware that many persons endeavour to avoid these conclusions by assuming that the passages in question are later interpolations. But—not to comment upon the wide door which would thus be opened to other and less scrupulous interpreters—this assumption is entirely unwarranted by evidence, and proceeds on the previous assumption—equally destitute of proof—that the Books in question *were* written in the time of Moses—the very point under discussion. To prove the Books to be written by Moses by rejecting as interpolations all passages which show that they could not have been written by him—is a very clerical, but a very inadmissible, mode of reasoning.

It results from this inquiry that the Pentateuch assumed its present form about the reign of King Josiah, B.C. 624, eight hundred years after Moses;—that the Book of Deuteronomy was probably composed about the same date;—that the other four books, or rather the separate documents of which they consist, were written between the time of Samuel and Solomon, or from four to five hundred years after Moses;—that they record the traditions respecting the early history of the Israelites and the Law delivered by Moses then current among the Priesthood and the people, with such material additions as it seemed good to the Priests of that period to introduce;—and that there is not the slightest reason to conclude that the historical narratives they contain were anything more than a collection of the national traditions then in vogue.¹

[The concluding portion of the chapter deals with the “reconcilers of science and theology,” such as Whewell and Buckland, but their speculations are now

¹ De Wette and other critics are of opinion that both the Elohist and Jehovistic authors

quite obsolete, and we may content ourselves with listening to the author's parting words:—]

It will not do for Geologists and Astronomers, who wish to retain some rags of orthodoxy, however soiled and torn, to argue, as most do, 'that the Bible was not intended as a revelation of physical science, but only of moral and religious truth.' This does not meet the difficulty; for the Bible does not merely use the common language, and so *assume* the common errors, on these points—it gives a distinct account of the Creation, in the same style, in the same narrative, in the same book, in which it narrates the Fall of Man, the Deluge, the Revelation to Abraham, the history of Jacob and Joseph. The writer evidently had no conception that when he related the Creation of the Earth, the Sea, and the Sun he was inventing or perpetuating a monstrous error; and that when he related the Fall he was revealing a mighty and mysterious truth;

and when he narrated the promise to Abraham he was recording a wondrous prophecy. The Bible professes *to give information* on all these points alike: and we have precisely the same Scriptural ground for believing that God first made the Earth and then the Sun for the especial benefit of the Earth; that the globe was submerged by rain which lasted forty days; and that everything was destroyed except the animals which Noah packed into his Ark—as we have for believing that Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise for a transgression; that God promised Abraham to redeem the world through his progeny; and that Jacob and Moses were the subjects of the divine communications recorded as being made to them. All the statements are made in the same affirmative style and on the same authority. The Bible equally professes to teach us *fact* on all these matters. There is no escape by any quibble from the grasp of this conclusion.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPHECIES

A PROPHECY, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, signifies a prediction of future events which could not have been foreseen by human sagacity, and the knowledge of which was supernaturally communicated to the prophet. It is

of the Pentateuch had access to more ancient documents extant in their times, and think it probable that some of these materials may have been Mosaic (De Wette, ii. 139).

[Kuenen places the Jehovistic document about 800 B.C. and the Elohist about 750 B.C. The four earlier books of the Hexateuch assumed their present form about 450 B.C., and Deuteronomy, as Mr. Greg states, about 600 B.C.]

clear, therefore, that in order to establish the claim of any anticipatory statement, promise, or denunciation to the rank and title of a prophecy, four points must be ascertained with *precision*—viz., what the event was to which the alleged prediction was intended to refer; that the prediction was uttered *in specific, not vague, language* before the event; that the event took place specifically, not loosely, as predicted; and that it could not have been foreseen by human sagacity.

Now, there is no portion of the sacred

writings over which hangs a veil of such dim obscurity, or regarding the meaning of which such hopeless discrepancies have prevailed among Christian divines, as the Prophetical Books of the Hebrew Canon. The difficulties to which the English reader is exposed by the extreme defects of the received translation, its confused order, and erroneous divisions are at present nearly insuperable. No chronology is observed; the earlier and the later, the genuine and the spurious are mixed together; and sometimes the prophecies of two individuals of different epochs are given us under the same name. In the case of some of the more important of them we are in doubt as to the date, the author, and the interpretation; and on the question whether the predictions related exclusively to Jewish or to general history, to Cyrus or to Jesus, to Zerubbabel or to Christ, to Antiochus Epiphanes, to Titus or to Napoleon; to events long past, or to events still in the remote future—the most conflicting opinions have been held with equal confidence by men of equal learning. It would carry us too far, and prove too unprofitable an occupation, to enumerate these contradictory interpretations; we shall in preference content ourselves with a brief statement of some considerations which will show how far removed we are on this subject from the possession of that clear certainty, or even that moderate verisimilitude of knowledge, on which alone any reasonings, such as have been based on Hebrew prophecy, can securely rest. There is no department of theology in which divines have so universally *assumed* their conclusions and modified their premises to suit them as in this.

I. In the first place, it is not un-structive to remind ourselves of a few of the indications scattered throughout the Scriptures of what the conduct and state of mind of the Prophets often were. They seem, like the utterers of Pagan oracles, to have been worked up before giving forth their prophecies into a species of religious frenzy, produced

or aided by various means, especially by music and dancing.¹ Philo says, "The mark of true prophecy is the rapture of its utterance; in order to attain divine wisdom the soul must go out of itself, and become drunk with divine frenzy."² The same word in Hebrew (and Plato thought in Greek also) signifies "to prophecy" and "to be mad";³ and even among themselves the prophets were often regarded as madmen⁴—an idea to which their frequent habit of going about naked⁵ and the performance occasionally of still more disgusting ceremonies greatly contributed. That many of them were splendid poets and noble-minded men there can be no doubt; but we see in conduct like this little earnest of sobriety or divine inspiration, and far too much that reminds us of the fanatics of eastern countries and of ancient times.

II. Many, probably most, of the so-called prophecies were not intended as predictions in the proper meaning of the word, but were simply promises of prosperity or denunciations of vengeance *contingent* upon certain lines of conduct. The principle of the Hebrew theocracy was that of temporal rewards or punishments consequent upon obedience to, or deviation from, the divine ordinances; and in the great proportion of cases the prophetic language seems to have been nothing more than a reminder or fresh renunciation of the principle. This is clearly shown by the circumstances that several of the prophecies, though originally given, not in the contingent, but in the positive form, were *rescinded*, or contradicted by later prophetic denunciations, as in the case of Eli, David, Hezekiah, and Jonah. The rescinding of prophecy in 1 Sam. ii. 30 is very remarkable, and shows how little

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 10; x. 5; 2 Kings iii. 15, 16.

² Quoted in Mackay's "Progress of the Intellect," ii. 192.

³ Newman, "Heb. Mon." p. 34. Plato derived *μάντις* from *μαίνεσθαι*.

⁴ 2 Kings ix. 11; Jeremiah xxix. 26.

⁵ 2 Sam. vi. 16, 20; 1 Sam. xix. 24; Is. xx. 3; Ezek. iv. 4, 6, 8, 12, 15; 1 Kings xx. 35-33.

these enunciations were regarded by the Israelites from our modern point of view. Compare 2 Sam. vii. 10, where the Israelites are promised that they shall not be moved out of Canaan nor afflicted any more, with the subsequent denunciations of defeat and captivity in a strange land. Compare, also, 2 Sam. vii. 12-16, where the permanent possession of the throne is promised to David, and that the lineal descendant shall not fail him to sit upon the throne of Judah, with the curse pronounced on his last royal descendant, Coniah—"Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. xxii. 30; xxxvii. 30). See, also, the curious argument as to the *liability of prophecy to be rescinded*, in the same book (Jer. xxxiii. 17-26). The rescinding of the prediction or denunciation in the case of Hezekiah is recorded in Isaiah xxxviii. 1-5, and that of Jonah in the Book which bears his name, iii. 4-10.

III. It is now clearly ascertained, and generally admitted among critics, that several of the most remarkable and specific prophecies were never fulfilled at all, or only very partially and loosely fulfilled. Among these may be specified the denunciation of Jeremiah (xxii. 18, 19; xxxvi. 30), against Jehoiakim, as may be seen by comparing 2 Kings xxiv. 6;—and the denunciation of Amos against Jeroboam II. (vii. 11), as may be seen by comparing 2 Kings xiv. 23-29. The remarkable, distinct, and positive prophecies in Ezekiel (xxvi., xxvii.), relating to the conquest, plunder, and destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, we can now state on the highest authorities,¹ were not fulfilled. Indeed (in ch. xxix. 18) is a confession that he failed, at least so far as spoil went. The same may be said of the equally clear and positive prophecies of the conquest and desolation

¹ Heeren's "Researches," ii. 11. Grote, iii. 439.

of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xliiii. 10-13; Ezek. xxix.; xxx. 1-19), as Dr. Arnold, in his Sermons on Prophecy (p. 48) fully admits.¹ Jeremiah's prophecy of the Captivity of Seventy years, and the destruction of Babylon (xxv.) have generally been appealed to as instances of clear prophecy exactly and indisputably fulfilled. But in the first place, at the time this prediction was delivered, the success of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem was scarcely doubtful; in the second place, the Captivity cannot, by any fair calculation, be lengthened out to seventy years;² and in the third place, the desolation of Babylon ("perpetual desolation" is the emphatic phrase) which was to take place at the end of the seventy years, as a punishment for the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, did not take place till long after. Babylon was still a flourishing city under Alexander the Great; and, as Mr. Newman observed, "it is absurd to present the emptiness of *modern* Babylon as a punishment for the pride of Nebuchadnezzar," or as a fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy.—Gen. xlix. 10, must also be considered to present a specimen of prophecy signally falsified by the event, and being composed in the palmiest days of Judah, was probably little more than a hyperbolic expression of the writer's confidence in the permanence of her grandeur. Finally, in Hosea we have a remarkable instance of self-contradiction, or virtual acknowledgment of the non-fulfilment of prophecy. In viii. 13 and ix. 3, it is affirmed, "Ephraim shall return to Egypt"; while in xi. 5, it is said, "Ephraim shall not return to

¹ Grote, *ubi supra*.—"Hebrew Monarchy," p. 363.

² The chronologies of Kings and Chronicles do not quite tally; but taking that of Jeremiah himself, the desolation begun in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 599, was continued in B.C. 588, and concluded in B.C. 583.—The exile ended some say 538, some 536. The longest date that can be made out is 66 years, and the shortest only 43. To make out 70 years fairly, we must date from B.C. 606; the *first* year of Nebuchadnezzar.

Egypt." Isaiah (xvii. 1) pronounces on Damascus a threat of ruin as emphatic as any that was pronounced against Tyre, Egypt, or Babylon. "It is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." Yet Damascus is to this day the most flourishing city in those countries.

IV. We find from numberless passages both in the prophetic and the historical books, that for a considerable period the Hebrew nation was inundated with false prophets,¹ whom it was difficult and often impossible to distinguish from the true, although we have both prophetic and sacerdotal tests given for this express purpose. It even appears that some of those whom we consider as true prophets were by their contemporaries charged with being, and even punished for being, the contrary. In Deut. xviii. 20-22, the decision of the prophet's character is made to depend upon the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of his prophecy. In Deut. xiii. 1-5, this test is rejected, and the decision is made to rest upon the doctrine which he teaches: if this be false he is to be stoned, whatever miraculous proofs of his mission he may give.² From Jer. xxix. 26, 27, it appears that the High Priest assumed the right of judging whether a man was a false or a true prophet; though Jeremiah himself does not seem to have been willing to abide by this authority, but to have denounced priests and the prophets who supported them (Jer. v. 31). Pashur the priest, we learn (xx. 1-7), put Jeremiah in the stocks for his false prophecies; and Shemaiah reproves the Priest Jehoiada for not having repeated the punishment, and is violently denounced by the prophet in consequence (xxix. 24-32.).

V. In the case of nearly all the prophets we have little external or independent evidence as to the date at which their prophecies were uttered, and

¹ Jeremiah v. 31; xxiii. 16-34. Ezekiel xiv. 9-11.

² See also the whole remarkable chapter, Jer. xxviii.

none as to the period at which they were written down;¹ while the internal evidence on these points is dubious, conflicting, and, in the opinions of the best critics, generally unfavourable to the popular conceptions.—The Books of Kings and Chronicles, in which many of these prophecies are mentioned, and the events to which they are supposed to refer, are related, were written, or compiled in their present form, the former near the termination of the Babylonian Exile, or somewhere about the year B.C. 530, *i.e.*, from 50 to 200 years² after the period at which the prophecies were supposed to have been delivered;—while the latter appear to have been a much later compilation, some critics dating them about 260, and others about 400 before Christ.³

It is probably not too much to affirm that we have no instance in the prophetic Books of the Old Testament of a prediction, in the case of which we possess, at once and combined, clear and unsuspecting proof of the date, the precise event predicted, the exact circumstances of that event, and the inability of human sagacity to foresee it. There is no case in which we can say with certainty—even where it is reasonable to suppose that the prediction was uttered before the event—that the narrative has not been tampered with to suit the prediction, or the prediction modified to correspond with the event.⁴

¹ "Hebrew Monarchy," p. 352 (note.)

² Amos and Hosea flourished probably about 790 B.C. Jeremiah about 600. Zechariah about 520. De Wette, ii. 436. [Kuenen and Wellhausen think, however, that Kings was substantially completed before the Exile, *i.e.*, about B.C. 600, a few short passages implying an exilic standpoint being introduced afterward.]

³ Such at least is the most probable result at which critical science has yet arrived. De Wette, ii. 248, 265. [Driver, Intro., p. 486, thinks B.C. 332, the earliest date to which Chronicles can be assigned. Most critics agree, though Nöldeke puts it as late as B.C. 200.]

⁴ De Wette and other theologians consider that in many cases where the prophecy is unusually definite, this has certainly been done. ii. 357, 363.

The following remarks will show how little *certain* is our knowledge, even in the case of the principal prophets.

Isaiah, as we learn in the first and the sixth chapters of his Book, appeared as a Prophet in the last year of the reign of King Uzziah (B.C. 759), and prophesied till the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (B.C. 710). We hear of him in the 2nd Book of Kings and Chronicles, but not till the reign of Hezekiah; except that he is referred to in 2 Chron. xxvi. 22, as having written a history of Uzziah. The prophecies which have come down to us bearing his name extend to sixty-six chapters, *of the date of which* (either of their composition or compilation) *we have no certain knowledge*; but of which the last twenty-seven are confidently decided by competent judges to be the production of a different Writer, and a later age; and were doubtless composed during the Babylonish Captivity, later therefore than the year B.C. 600, or about 150 years after Isaiah. The grounds of this decision are given at length in De Wette.¹ They are found partly in the marked difference of style between the two portions of the Book, but still more in the obvious and pervading fact that the Writer of the latter portion *takes his stand* in the period of the Captivity, speaks of the Captivity as an existing circumstance or condition, and comforts his captive Countrymen with hopes of deliverance at the hand of Cyrus. It appears as the general summary result of critical research, that our present collection consists of a number of promises, denunciations, and exhortations, actually uttered by Isaiah, and brought together by command, probably of Hezekiah, greatly enlarged and interpolated by writings upwards of a century later than his time, which the ignorance or unfair intentions of subsequent collectors and commentators have not

¹ De Wette, ii. 364-390. [Several other sections of the Book are not the work of Isaiah, such as chaps. xiii., xv., xvi. 1-12, and probably others. The entire compilation cannot be earlier than B.C. 536.]

scrupled to consecrate by affixing to them his venerable name.

Jeremiah appears to have prophesied from about B.C. 630-580, or before and at the commencement of the Captivity at Babylon, and the chief portion of his writings refer to that event, which in his time was rapidly and manifestly approaching. The prophecies appear to have been written down by Baruch, a scribe, from the dictation of Jeremiah (xxxvi.) and to have been collected soon after the return from exile,¹ but by whom and at what precise time is unknown;—and commentators discover several passages in which the original text appears to have been interpolated, or worked over again. Still, the text seems to be far more pure, and the real, much nearer to the professed, date, than in the case of Isaiah.

The genuineness of the Book of Ezekiel is less doubtful than that of any other of the Prophets. His prophecies relate chiefly to the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened during his time. He appears to have been carried into exile by the victorious Chaldæans about eleven years before they finally consummated the ruin of the Jewish Nation by the destruction of their Capital. His prophecies appear to have continued many years after the Captivity—sixteen according to De Wette.²

Of all the prophetic writings, the Book of Daniel has been the subject of the fiercest contest. Divines have considered it of paramount importance, both on account of the definiteness and precision of its predictions, and the supposed reference of many of them to Christ. Critics, on the other hand, have considered the genuineness of the Book to be peculiarly questionable; and few now, of any note or name, venture to defend it. In all probability we have no remains of the real prophecies of the actual Daniel—for that such a person, famed for his wisdom and virtue, did exist, appears from Ezek. xiv. and xxxviii.

¹ De Wette, ii. 416 and 396.

² De Wette, ii. 426.