

death ; there is no evidence that he ever saw him during his life. He states that he had "received" that he was seen by various other persons, but he does not give the slightest information as to who told him, or what reasons he had for believing the statements to be correct ; and still less does he narrate the particulars of the alleged appearances, or even of his own vision. Although we have no detailed statements of these extraordinary phenomena, we may assume that, as Paul himself believed that he had seen Jesus, certain other people of the circle of his disciples likewise believed that they had seen the risen Master. The whole of the evidence for the Resurrection reduces itself to an undefined belief on the part of a few persons, in a notoriously superstitious age, that after Jesus had died and been buried they had seen him alive. These visions, it is admitted, occurred at a time of the most intense religious excitement, and under circumstances of wholly exceptional mental agitation and distress. The wildest alternations of fear, doubt, hope, and indefinite expectation added their effects to oriental imaginations already excited by indignation at the fate of their Master, and sorrow or despair at such a dissipation of their Messianic dreams. There was present every element of intellectual and moral disturbance. Now, must we seriously ask again whether this bare and wholly unjustified belief can be accepted as satisfactory evidence for so astounding a miracle as the Resurrection? Can the belief of such men, in such an age, establish the reality of a phenomenon which contradicts universal experience? It comes to us in the form of bare belief from the Age of Miracles, unsupported by facts, uncorroborated by evidence, unaccompanied by proof of investigation, and unprovided with material for examination. What is such belief worth? We have no hesitation in saying that it is absolutely worth nothing.

We might here well bring our inquiry to a close, for we have no further evidence to deal with. The problem, however, is so full of interest that we cannot yet lay it down, and although we must restrain our argument within certain rigid limits, and wholly refrain from entering into regions of mere speculation, we may further discuss the origin and nature of the belief in the Resurrection. Recognising the fact that, although its nature and extent are very indefinite, there existed an undoubted belief that after his death Jesus was seen alive, the argument is advanced that there must have been a real basis for this belief. "The existence of a Christian society," says an apologetic writer, "is the first and (if rightly viewed) the final proof of the historic truth of the miracle on which it was founded. It may, indeed, be said that the Church

was founded upon the belief in the Resurrection, and not upon the Resurrection itself; and that the testimony must therefore be limited to the attestation of the belief, and cannot reach to the attestation of the fact. But belief expressed in action is for the most part the strongest evidence which we can have of any historic event. Unless, therefore, it can be shown that the origin of the apostolic belief in the Resurrection, with due regard to the fulness of its characteristic form and the breadth and rapidity of its propagation, can be satisfactorily explained on other grounds, the belief itself is a sufficient proof of the fact."¹ This is obviously Paley's argument of the Twelve men² in a condensed form. Belief in action may be the strongest evidence which we can have of any historic event; but when the historic event happens to be an event in religious history, and an astounding miracle like the Resurrection, such bare evidence, emanating from such an age, is no evidence at all. The breadth and rapidity of its propagation absolutely prove nothing but belief in the report of those who believed; although it is very far from evident that people embraced Christianity from a rational belief in the Resurrection. No one pretends that the Gentiles who believed made a preliminary examination of the truth of the Resurrection. If breadth and rapidity of propagation be taken as sufficient proof of the truth of facts, we might consider Buddhism and Mohammedanism as satisfactorily attested creeds. There could not be a greater fallacy than the supposition that the origin of a belief must be explained upon other grounds, or that belief itself accepted as a sufficient proof of the fact asserted. The truth or falsehood of any allegation is determined by a balance of evidence, and the critic is no more bound to account for the formation of erroneous belief than he is bound to believe because he may not, after a great lapse of time, be able so clearly to demonstrate the particular manner in which that erroneous belief originated, that any other mode is definitely excluded. The allegation that a dead man rose from the dead and appeared to several persons alive is contrary to universal experience; but, on the other hand, the prevalence of defective observation, mistaken inference, self-deception, and credulity, any of which might lead to such belief, are only too much in accordance with it. Is it necessary to define which peculiar form of error is present in every false belief before, with this immense preponderance of evidence against it, we finally reject it? We think not. Any explanation consistent with universal experience must be adopted, rather than a belief which is contradictory to it.

There are two theories which have been advanced to explain

¹ Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 3rd ed., p. 106 f.

² *Evidences and Horæ Paulinæ*, ed. Potts, 1850, p. 6.

the origin of the Apostolic belief in the Resurrection, to which we may now briefly refer ; but it must be clearly understood that the suggestion of an explanation is quite apart from our examination of the actual evidence for the Resurrection. Fifty explanations might be offered, and be considered unsatisfactory, without in the least degree altering the fact that the testimony for the final miracle of Christianity is totally insufficient, and that the allegation that it actually occurred cannot be maintained. The first explanation, adopted by some able critics, is that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but, being taken down alive, and his body being delivered to friends, he subsequently revived. In support of this theory, it is argued that Jesus is represented by the Gospels as expiring after having been but three to six hours upon the cross, which would have been an unprecedentedly rapid death. It is affirmed that only the hands and not the feet were nailed to the cross. The *crurifragium*, not usually accompanying crucifixion, is dismissed as unknown to the three Synoptists, and only inserted by the fourth Evangelist for dogmatic reasons ; and of course the lance-thrust disappears with the leg-breaking. Thus the apparent death was that profound faintness which might well fall upon such an organisation after some hours of physical and mental agony on the cross, following the continued strain and fatigue of the previous night. As soon as he had sufficiently recovered, it is supposed that Jesus visited his disciples a few times to re-assure them, but with precaution on account of the Jews, and was by them believed to have risen from the dead, as indeed he himself may likewise have supposed, reviving as he had done from the faintness of death.¹ Seeing, however, that his death had set the crown upon his work, the Master withdrew into impenetrable obscurity, and was heard of no more.

We have given but the baldest outline of this theory ; for it would occupy too much space to represent it adequately and show

¹ Gfrörer, who maintains the theory of a *Scheintod* with great ability, thinks that Jesus had believers amongst the rulers of the Jews, who, although they could not shield him from the opposition against him, still hoped to save him from death. Joseph, *a rich man*, found the means of doing so. He prepared the new sepulchre close to the place of execution, to be at hand—begged the body from Pilate—the immense quantity of spices bought by Nicodemus being merely to distract the attention of the Jews—and Jesus, being quickly carried to the sepulchre, was restored to life by their efforts. He interprets the famous verse, John xx. 17, curiously. The expression, “I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father,” etc., he takes as meaning simply the act of dying—“going to heaven” ; and the reply of Jesus is equivalent to : “Touch me not, for I am still flesh and blood—I am not yet dead.” Jesus sees his disciples only a few times mysteriously, and, believing that he had set the final seal to the truth of his work by his death, he then retires into impenetrable gloom (*Das Heiligthum und die Wahrheit*, p. 107 f., p. 231 f.).

the ingenuity with which it is worked out, and the very considerable support which it receives from statements in the Gospels, and from inferences deducible from them. We do not ourselves adopt this explanation, although it must be clearly repeated that, were the only alternative to do so or to fall back upon the hypothesis of a miracle, we should consider it preferable. A serious objection brought against the theory seems to be that it is not natural to suppose that, after such intense and protracted fatigue and anxiety, followed by the most cruel agony on the cross, agony both of soul and body,¹ ending in unconsciousness only short of death, Jesus could within a short period have presented himself to his disciples with such an aspect as could have conveyed to them the impression of victory over death by the Prince of Life. He must still, it is urged, have presented the fresh traces of suffering and weakness little calculated to inspire them with the idea of divine power and glory. This is partly, but not altogether, true. There is no evidence, as we shall presently show, that the appearances of Jesus occurred so soon as is generally represented; and, in their astonishment at again seeing the Master whom they supposed to be dead, the disciples could not have been in a state minutely to remark the signs of suffering,² then probably, with the power of a mind like that of Jesus over physical weakness, little apparent. Time and imagination would doubtless soon have effaced from their minds any such impressions, and left only the belief that he had risen from the dead to develop and form the Christian doctrine. A more powerful objection seems to us the disappearance of Jesus. We cannot easily persuade ourselves that such a teacher could have renounced his work and left no subsequent trace of his existence. Still, it must be admitted that many explanations might be offered on this head, the most obvious being that death, whether as the result of the terrible crisis through which he had passed or from some other cause, may soon after have ensued. We repeat, however, that we neither advance this explanation nor think it worth while to discuss it seriously, not because we think it untenable, although we do not adopt it, but because we consider that there is another explanation of the origin of belief in the Resurrection which is better, and which is, in our opinion, the true one. We mean that which is usually called the "vision hypothesis."

¹ Holsten remarks that the cry put into the mouth of Jesus on the Cross, in the first and second Synoptics, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" if genuine, can scarcely be otherwise historically conceived than as a surrender of his last hope that God's will would not continue his sufferings even unto death (*Zum Ev. des Paulus u. Petr.*, p. 227).

² The repeated statement in the Gospels, that the women and his disciples did not at first recognise the risen Jesus, is quoted in connection with this point.

The phenomenon which has to be accounted for is the Apostolic belief that, after he had been dead and buried, Jesus "was seen" ($\omega\phi\theta\eta$) by certain persons. The explanation which we offer, and which has long been adopted in various forms by able critics, is that doubtless Jesus was seen, but the vision was not real and objective, but illusory and subjective: that is to say, Jesus was not himself seen, but only a representation of Jesus within the minds of the beholders. This explanation not only does not impeach the veracity of those who affirmed that they had seen Jesus, but, accepting to a certain extent a subjective truth as the basis of the belief, explains upon well-known and natural principles the erroneous inference deduced from the subjective vision. It seems to us that the points to be determined are simple and obvious: Is it possible for a man to mistake subjective impressions for objective occurrences? Is it possible that any considerable number of persons can at the same time receive similar subjective impressions and mistake them for objective facts? If these questions can be answered affirmatively, and it can be shown that the circumstances, the characters, the constitution of those who believed in the first instance, favoured the reception of such subjective impressions and the deduction of erroneous inferences, it must be admitted that a satisfactory explanation can thus be given of the Apostolic belief on other grounds than the reality of a miracle opposed to universal experience.

No sooner is the first question formulated than it becomes obvious to everyone who is acquainted with psychological and physiological researches, or who has even the most elementary knowledge of the influence of the mind upon the body, that it must at once be answered in the affirmative. Indeed, the affirmation that subjective impressions, in connection with every sense, can be mistaken for, and believed to be, actual objective effects is so trite that it seems almost superfluous to make it. Every reader must be well acquainted with illustrations of the fact. The only difficulty is to deal authoritatively with such a point within moderate compass. We must limit ourselves to the sense of sight. "There are abundant proofs," says Sir Benjamin Brodie, "that impressions may be made in the brain by other causes simulating those which are made on it by external objects through the medium of the organs of sense, thus producing false perceptions, which may, in the first instance, and before we have had time to reflect on the subject, be mistaken for realities."¹ The limitation here introduced, "before we have had time to reflect on the subject," is, of course, valid in the case of those whose reason is capable of rejecting the false perceptions, whether on the ground

¹ *Psychological Inquiries*, 1854, p. 78; cf. 79 f.

of natural law or of probability; but, in anyone ignorant of natural law, but familiar with the idea of supernatural agency and the occurrence of miraculous events, it is obvious that reflection, if reflection of a sceptical kind can even be assumed, would have little chance of arriving at any true discrimination of phenomena. Speaking of the nervous system and its functions, and more immediately of the relation of the Cerebrum to the Sensorium and the production of spectral illusions, Dr. Carpenter says, in his work on the *Principles of Mental Physiology*: "Still stronger evidence of the same associated action of the Cerebrum and Sensorium is furnished by the study of the phenomena designated as *Spectral Illusions*. These are clearly *sensorial* states *not* excited by external objects; and it is also clear that they frequently originate in cerebral changes, since they represent *creations* of the mind, and are not mere reproductions of past sensations." Dr. Carpenter refers, in illustration, to a curious illusion to which Sir John Herschel was subject, "in the shape of the involuntary occurrence of visual impressions, into which geometrical regularity of form enters as the leading character. These were not of the nature of those ocular Spectra which may be attributed with probability to retinal changes."¹ Dr. Carpenter then continues: "We have here *not* a reproduction of sensorial impressions formerly received, but a *construction* of *new* forms by a process which, if it had been carried on *consciously*, we should have called imagination. And it is difficult to see how it is to be accounted for in any other way than by an unconscious action of the cerebrum; the products of which impress themselves on the sensorial consciousness, just as, in other cases, they express themselves through the motor apparatus."² The illusions described by Sir John Herschel, who, as he himself says, was "as little visionary as most people," should be referred to.

Of the production of sensations by ideas there can be no possible doubt,³ and, consequently, as little of the realisation by the person in whom they are produced of subjective impressions exactly as though they were objective. With regard to false perceptions, Dr. Carpenter says: "It has been shown that the action of *ideational* states upon the Sensorium can modify or even produce *sensations*. But the action of pre-existing states of Mind is still more frequently shown in modifying the *interpretation* which we put upon our sense-impressions. For, since almost every such interpretation is an act of *judgment* based upon experience, that judgment will vary

¹ Sir John Herschel gives a full account of them in his *Popular Lectures on Scientific Subjects* (Daldy, Isbester, & Co., 1876, p. 402 f.).

² *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 4th ed., 1876, p. 113 f.

³ *Ib.*, p. 155 f.

according to our mental condition at the time it is delivered; and will be greatly affected by any dominant idea or feeling, so as even to occasion a complete mis-interpretation of the objective source of the sense-impression, as often occurs in what is termed 'absence of mind.' The following case, mentioned by Dr. Tuke¹ as occurring within his own knowledge, affords a good example of this fallacy: 'A lady was walking one day from Penrhyn to Falmouth, and, her mind being at that time, or recently, occupied by the subject of drinking-fountains, thought she saw in the road a newly-erected fountain, and even distinguished an inscription upon it—namely, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*"' Some time afterwards she mentioned the fact with pleasure to the daughters of a gentleman who was supposed to have erected it. They expressed their surprise at her statement, and assured her that she must be quite mistaken. Perplexed with the contradiction between the testimony of her senses and of those who would have been aware of the fact had it been true, and feeling that she could not have been deceived ("for seeing is believing"), she repaired to the spot, and found to her astonishment that no drinking-fountain was in existence—only a few scattered stones, which had formed the foundation upon which the suggestion of an expectant imagination had built the superstructure. The subject having previously occupied her attention, these sufficed to form, not only a definite erection, but one inscribed by an appropriate motto corresponding to the leading idea.'"²

We may give as another illustration an illusion which presented itself to Sir Walter Scott.³ He had been reading, shortly after the death of Lord Byron, an account in a publication professing to detail the habits and opinions of the poet. As Scott had been intimate with Lord Byron, he was deeply interested in the publication, which contained some particulars relative to himself and other friends. "Their sitting-room opened into an entrance hall, rather fantastically fitted up with articles of armour, skins of wild animals, and the like. It was when laying down his book, and passing into this hall, through which the moon was beginning to shine, that the individual of whom I speak saw, right before him, and in a standing posture, the exact representation of his departed friend whose recollection had been so strongly brought to his imagination. He stopped for a single moment, so as to notice the wonderful accuracy with which fancy had impressed upon the bodily eye the peculiarities of dress and posture of the illustrious poet. Sensible, however, of the delusion, he felt no sentiment save that of wonder at the extraordinary accuracy of the

¹ *Influence of the Mind on the Body*, p. 44.

² Carpenter, *ib.*, 206 f.

³ It is likewise quoted by Dr. Carpenter, p. 207 f.

resemblance, and stepped onward towards the figure, which resolved itself, as he approached, into the various materials of which it was composed. These were merely a screen, occupied by great-coats, shawls, plaids, and such other articles as usually are found in a country entrance-hall. The spectator returned to the spot from which he had seen the illusion, and endeavoured, with all his power, to recall the image which had been so singularly vivid. But this was beyond his capacity," etc.¹ Although Sir Walter Scott might be sensible of the delusion, it may be more than doubted whether, in the first century of our era, such an apparition proceeding from or connected with religious agitation of mind would have been considered so.

Dr. Abercrombie² mentions many instances of spectral illusions, "some of the most authentic facts" relating to which he classes under the head of "intense mental conceptions so strongly impressed upon the mind as, for the moment, to be believed to have a real existence." We cannot, however, venture to quote illustrations.³ Dr. Hibbert, in whose work on Apparitions many interesting instances are to be found, thus concludes his consideration of the conditions which lead to such illusions: "I have at length concluded my observations on what may be considered as the leading mental laws which are connected with the origin of spectral impressions. The general inference to be drawn from them is, that *Apparitions are nothing more than morbid symptoms, which are indicative of an intense excitement of the renovated feelings of the mind.*"⁴ Subjective visions, believed to have had objective reality, abound in the history of the world. They are familiar to all who have read the lives of the Saints, and they have accompanied the progress of Christianity in various forms from the trances of Montanism to the vision of the "Immaculate Conception" in the Grotto of Lourdes.

If we turn to the inquiry whether a similar subjective impression can be received by many persons at one time and be mistaken by them for an objective reality, an equally certain reply in the affirmative must unhesitatingly be given. The contagiousness of emotion is well known,⁵ and the rapidity with which panic, for instance, spreads from a single individual to the mass is remarked every day. The most trifling incident, unseen by more than a

¹ *Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1868, Letter i., p. 37 f.

² *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers*, 19th ed., p. 274 f.

³ Everyone remembers the case of Luther and his visions of the Devil.

⁴ *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions*, by Samuel Hibbert, M.D., F.R.S.E., 2nd ed., 1825, p. 375.

⁵ We might point in illustration to the use of "Tongues" in the Corinthian Church, where the contagiousness of the ecstatic state is exemplified (1 Cor. xiv. 23, 26 f.).

few, and, therefore, more pliant in the imagination of the many, has instantaneously convinced multitudes of the most erroneous inferences. We need not refer to the numerous religious and other mental epidemics which have swept over the face of the world, infecting society with the wildest delusions. From Montanism to camp meetings and revivals in our own day, it has been demonstrated that religious excitement and dominant ideas have spread with astonishing rapidity and power amongst the circles in which they have arisen. In certain states of nervous expectation, false impressions are instantaneously transmitted from one to another in a religious assembly. Dr. Carpenter says: "Moreover, if not only a single individual, but several persons, should be 'possessed' by one and the same idea or feeling, the same misinterpretation may be made by all of them; and in such a case the concurrence of their testimony does not add the least strength to it. Of this we have a good example in the following occurrence cited by Dr. Tuke, as showing the influence of a 'dominant idea' in falsifying the perceptions of a number of persons at once:—'During the conflagration at the Crystal Palace in the winter of 1866-67, when the animals were destroyed by the fire, it was supposed that the Chimpanzee had succeeded in escaping from his cage. Attracted to the roof, with this expectation in full force, men saw the unhappy animal holding on to it, and writhing in agony to get astride one of the iron ribs. It need not be said that its struggles were watched by those below with breathless suspense, and, as the newspapers informed us, 'with sickening dread.' But there was no animal whatever there; and all this feeling was thrown away upon a tattered piece of blind, so torn as to resemble to the eye of fancy the body, arms, and legs of an ape!' (*Op. cit.*, p. 44). Another example of a like influence affecting several individuals simultaneously in a similar manner is mentioned by Dr. Hibbert in his well-known treatise on Apparitions: 'A whole ship's company was thrown into the utmost consternation by the apparition of a cook who had died a few days before. He was distinctly seen walking ahead of the ship, with a peculiar gait by which he was distinguished when alive, through having one of his legs shorter than the other. On steering the ship towards the object it was found to be a piece of floating wreck.' Many similar cases might be referred to, in which the imagination has worked up into 'apparitions' some commonplace objects, which it has invested with attributes derived from the previous mental state of the observer; and the belief in such an apparition as a reality, which usually exists in such cases, unless antagonised by an effort of the reason, constitutes a *delusion*."¹

¹ *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 1876, p. 208 f.

We must maintain, indeed, that a number of persons assembled under the influence of strong similar ideas, and excited by the same active religious emotion, are more likely to be affected by similar subjective impressions to the extent of believing them to be objective than one or two would be. The excitement of each acts upon the whole body, and is itself increased by reaction from the aggregate emotion. Each receives impressions from the other, which are vividly felt even without being verified by personal experience. The most nervous temperament in the assembly gives the final impetus to the excited imagination of the rest. In moments of supreme expectation and doubt enthusiasm overcomes reason. If one man see, if one man hear, the mental impression is credited with an objective cause, even when unfelt by others, and then a similar impression is soon carried from the brain to the sensorium of all. This does not involve the supposition of a diseased mind in ordinary cases, and in the instances which we have in view the false perceptions were, obviously, determined and encouraged by foregone conclusions of a nature rarely possible, and, when existing, rarely resisted. "There are many persons," adds Dr. Carpenter, "quite sane upon ordinary matters, and even (it may be) distinguished by some special form of ability, who are yet affected with what the writer once heard Mr. Carlyle term a 'diluted insanity'; allowing their minds to become so completely 'possessed' by 'dominant ideas' that their testimony as to what they declare themselves to have witnessed—even when several individuals concur in giving exactly the same account of it—must be regarded as utterly untrustworthy."¹

That subjective impressions can, in the opinion of eminent Apologists, be recorded by an Evangelist as objective reality, we have already pointed out in connection with the statement of the first Synoptist, that "Many bodies of the saints were raised; and they came out of the sepulchres after his Resurrection and appeared unto many" (xxvii. 52 f.). Milman and Dr. Farrar explain this by the supposition that the earthquake "seemed to have filled the air with ghostly visitants, who after Christ had risen appeared to linger in the Holy City."² It follows as a logical consequence that, as this subjective impression felt by many at once is described in the Gospel as objective, these writers not only admit the possibility of such a mistake on the part of the observers, but that the Gospel, in adopting that mistake, may be suspected of a similar course in recording the appearances of Jesus.³

¹ *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 1876, p. 209.

² Farrar, *Life of Christ*, ii., p. 419; Milman, *Hist. of Christianity*, i. 336 f. Passages quoted p. 817 f.

³ We refer readers to some most interesting remarks of Dr. Lightfoot on the miraculous elements in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (*Apost. Fathers*, part ii.,

We have thus replied to the question whether the "vision hypothesis" could explain the belief of 500, or even of eleven persons, who supposed they had seen Jesus, and we do not think that any one who seriously considers the age and the circumstances under which the phenomenon is alleged to have occurred can doubt that such belief could very easily have resulted from merely subjective impressions. Before going further into the discussion of the matter, however, we must again, with a little more minuteness, call attention to the date of the actual statements upon which the whole argument turns. The Apostle Paul writes about a quarter of a century after the time when it is said that Jesus "was seen" by those whom he names. Whatever opinion may be formed as to the amount of information obtained by Paul during the visit he paid to Jerusalem for the purpose of making the acquaintance of Peter, it is undeniable that some years had elapsed between the time when Jesus is supposed to have been seen and the time when Paul could have received information regarding these appearances from any of the Apostles. If we date the death of Jesus in the year 33, almost the latest date assigned to it by any eminent critic, and the conversion of Paul about A.D. 38-40,¹ it will be remembered that the Apostle himself states that he did not go to Jerusalem till three years after, which brings us to A.D. 41-43 as the earliest time when Paul first came in personal contact with Peter and James. He did not go up to Jerusalem again for fourteen years after that, and we have no reason to believe that he met any of the Apostles in the interval, but the contrary, from his own account of that second visit, Gal. ii. 2. He could not, therefore, have heard anything of the appearances of Jesus even from Peter and James till some eight to ten years after they had taken place. From the other Apostles, in all probability, he cannot have heard anything till nearly twenty years had elapsed since they supposed they had seen Jesus.

Where did he get his information regarding the 500 brethren at once? From whom did he get it? If the supposed appearance took place, as so many suggest, in Galilee, the date of his information is still more uncertain. If, on the other hand, it occurred in Jerusalem, whilst so many of the number were visitors

1885, p. 598) which are particularly appropriate whilst considering this argument. They are quoted in *A Reply to his Essays*, 1889, p. 154 f.

¹ The *Chronicon Paschale* dates it 42; and the following critics date it as noted: Michaelis, about 37? Kuinoel, 40; Heinrichs, 37? Eichhorn, 37 or 38; Hug, 35; Schmidt, 41; Bertholdt, 40; Feilmoser, 35; Winer, 38? de Wette, 37 or 38; Schott, 37; Schrader, 39; Anger, 38? Wieseler, 40; Ewald, 38; Meyer, 35 (Wieseler, *Chronologie des apost. Zeitalters*, 1848, *Chronologische Tabelle*; Meyer, *Apog.*, p. 24).

only, it is obvious that the greater part must subsequently have left the Holy City and become scattered to their respective homes. The difficulty of obtaining information from more than a few of the 500 becomes obvious. In any case, from no authority which we are entitled to assume could Paul have been minutely informed of these appearances less than eight to ten years after they occurred, and, then, of the vision of the Eleven, only from one of the number to whom the first vision appeared. Now, no one who considers the operation of memory, even in persons of more than usual sobriety of imagination, dealing with circumstances not likely to be exaggerated or distorted by feeling in the course of time, can doubt that, in ten years, all the details of such occasions, amidst which much excitement certainly prevailed, must have assumed a very different aspect from that which they originally bore. We may be permitted to quote a few words on this subject: "Though we are accustomed to speak of memory as if it consisted in an *exact* reproduction of past states of Consciousness, yet experience is continually showing us that this reproduction is very often *inexact*, through the modification which the 'trace' has undergone in the interval. Sometimes the trace has been partially obliterated; and what remains may serve to give a very erroneous (because imperfect) view of the occurrence.....And where it is one in which our own Feelings are interested, we are extremely apt to lose sight of what goes against them, so that the representation given by Memory is altogether one-sided. This is continually demonstrated by the entire dissimilarity of the accounts of the same occurrence or conversation, which shall be given by two or more parties concerned in it, even when the matter is fresh in their minds, and they are honestly desirous of telling the truth. And this diversity will usually become still more pronounced with the lapse of time, the trace becoming gradually but unconsciously modified by the habitual course of thought and feeling; so that when it is so acted on after a lengthened interval as to bring up a reminiscence of the original occurrence, that reminiscence really represents, *not* the actual occurrence, but the modified trace of it."¹ This is specially likely to occur where, as in our case, there were Old Testament prophecies supposed to describe minutely the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, to furnish lines which the transformation of memory must insensibly follow. Unconsciously, we may be certain, the misty outlines of the original transaction would acquire consistency and take form according to the tenour of so infallible an index. It would require a memory of iron and of more than stubborn doggedness to resist the unobtrusive influence of supposed prophecies. Be it clearly understood that we speak

¹ Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 1876, p. 456.

of an unconscious process, which is perfectly consistent with complete belief that the transformed trace exactly represents what originally took place.

Adhering more closely to the point before us, can we suppose that the account which Paul received of these appearances, after that lapse of time, was a perfectly sober and unwarped description of what actually took place? We think not. Is it possible that the vision of the 500, for instance, had escaped the maturing influence of time? or that of the Eleven? We believe that it is not possible. However, Paul does not give a single detail, and consequently this argument mainly affects the abstract value of all such evidence, whether at first or second hand, but it likewise makes more vague the original transaction, so indefinitely sketched for us, which we have to explain. What was it the 500 really saw? "Jesus," says the report matured by time; and modern divines, taking the statement in its most objective sense, demand an explanation of the unknown phenomenon which led 500 to believe that they actually saw the risen Master. Did the 500 originally think anything of the kind? What impression did the individuals receive? Did any two receive precisely the same impressions? There is not the slightest evidence that they did. Although Paul gives the most meagre report of these appearances that could well be conceived, it must be remembered that the impression made upon his own mind was not by the events themselves, but by the narrative of the events recounted at least eight or ten years afterwards. There can be no doubt that, earlier, Paul the persecutor must also frequently have heard of the Resurrection, and of alleged occasions when Jesus had been seen after his death and burial, from persecuted members of the Christian community; but beyond the undefined certainty of this we are not entitled to go. That what he heard must have received warmth of colouring from the fire of persecution is most probable. Of this, however, we shall speak presently.

It is not necessary further to enlarge upon the superstition of the age of which we write. We have elsewhere quoted the opinion of an orthodox divine and Hebrew scholar on the character of the Jewish people about that period. "Not to be more tedious, therefore, in this matter," he says, "let two things only be observed: i. That the nation under the second Temple was given to magical arts beyond measure; and ii. That it was given to an easiness of believing all manner of delusions beyond measure."¹ And again: "It is a disputable case whether the Jewish nation were more mad with superstition in matters of

¹ Lightfoot, *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ*; Works, ed. Pitman, 1823, xi., p. 81.

religion, or with superstition in curious arts."¹ Even supposing the Twelve to have been men of superior intelligence to most of their fellow countrymen of the period, it cannot reasonably be questioned that they were "men of like passions" and failings with the rest, and that, as were the most eminent men of all countries for centuries after, they were ignorant of the true order of nature, full of superstitious ideas regarding cosmical phenomena, and ready at all times to believe in miracles and supernatural interference with the affairs of life. As Jews, moreover, they had inherited belief in angelic agency and divine apparitions. The Old Testament is full of narratives in which God appears to the Patriarchs and Lawgivers of Israel. Celestial visions had been familiar to every Jew from his infancy, and the constant personal communications of God with his peculiar people were still the most sacred traditions of the nation.

Nursed in the prevalent superstition of the time, educated by the Law and the Prophets to familiarity with the supernatural, and prepared by the fervid imagination of their race to recognise wonders in heaven and earth, the disciples were naturally prepared for the great Christian Miracle. The special circumstances in which they were placed at the death of Jesus conduced in the highest degree to excite that expectant attention which, in their state of profound agitation, rendered them readily susceptible of extraordinary impressions. The disciples had for a long period followed Jesus and felt the influence of his elevated character. It may be doubted how far they had entered into the spirit of his teaching, or understood the spiritual wisdom which lay beneath the noble simplicity of his language; but it cannot be doubted that his personal greatness must have produced a profound effect upon their minds. When they came at last to understand, if in a material and imperfect way, his views as to his Messianic character, they can have had little difficulty in believing, in spite of the mysterious lowliness and humility of his aspect, although probably in a sense widely different from his own, that the hope of Israel had at last come, and that the hour of her redemption was at hand. It is probable that, as the enmity of the priests and rulers increased, and the danger of his position became more apparent, whilst he disdained unworthily to shrink from his public work, he must have felt all the peril before him, and observed the anxiety of his followers. It may be conceived that, under such circumstances, his teaching may have assumed even a higher spirituality than before, and, rising above the clouds of the present, soared out into that calmer future when the religion he founded would be accepted by men, and become a light to

¹ *Ib.*, xi., p. 299 f.

the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel. It is probable that he may have spoken of his death in spiritual terms as a sacrifice for them and for the world, which would secure the triumph of his work and regenerate mankind. Comforting those who had left all and followed him, but from whom he might so soon be parted, and knowing their doubts and fears, he must have re-assured their minds by inspiring views of the inseparable nature of his union with those who loved him and did his commandments; his spirit dwelling within them and leading them safely through the world, in the peace and security of souls raised by the truth beyond the reach of its corruption and its wrong.

That they must have felt the strongest conviction of his Messianic character cannot be doubted, however confused may have been their ideas of the exact nature of his office, and of the manner in which his coming was to secure the triumph of Israel. The shock to their expectations and the utter dissipation of their hopes which must have been felt in the first moment of his arrest, hurried trial, and cruel condemnation can well be imagined. It is probable that, in that first moment of terror and bewilderment, the disciples indeed all forsook him and fled. No one who had consorted with the Great Teacher, however, and felt the influence of his mind, could long have resisted the reaction to nobler thoughts of him. In all the bitterness of sorrow for the loss of their master and friend, in horror at his agonising and shameful death, and in doubt, consternation, and almost despair, they must have gathered together again and spoken of these strange events. Believing Jesus to have been the Messiah, how could they interpret his death on the cross? If he was the Messiah, could he thus die? If Enoch and Elijah, if Moses, precursors of the Messiah, had not seen death, how could that prophet like unto Moses whom God had raised up end his career by a shameful death on the cross?

Throughout that time of fiery trial and supreme mental agitation they must have perpetually sought in their own minds some explanation of the terrible events then occurring and seeming to blast all their hopes, and doubtless mystic utterances of Jesus must have assumed new meanings—meanings probably different from his own. In the accounts of the coming Messiah in the prophets they must have searched for some light by which to solve the inexplicable problem. Is it not conceivable that, in that last time of danger and darkness, when he saw the persecution against him become more vehement, and felt that the path which he had chosen led him through danger and distress, perhaps to death Jesus may, in the bitter contemplation of that fanatical opposition of bigotry and superstition, have applied to himself the description of the suffering servant of God,

suffering—as all noble souls have done who are in advance of their age, and preach great truths which condemn either directly or by implication the vices and follies of their time—"the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely," and, worse still, the ignoble insults of popular ignorance and fickleness? Here might seem to them the solution of the enigma; and, returning from that first flight of terror and bewilderment, feeling all the intense reaction of affection and grief, and faith in the Master quickened by shame at their abandonment of him in his moment of supreme affliction, still believing that he must be the Messiah, and in mute longing and expectation of the next events which were to confirm or confound their hopes, the disciples must have been in the climax of nervous agitation and excitement, and ready to receive any impression which might be suggested in their embarrassment.¹

According to Paul, it was Peter who first saw the risen Jesus. According to the first and fourth Gospels, the first appearance was to the women, and notably, in the latter, to Mary Magdalene, out of whom had been cast "seven devils," and whose temperament probably rendered her unusually susceptible of all such impressions. Did Paul intentionally omit all mention of the appearances to the women, or did he not know of them? In the latter case, we have an instructive light thrown on the Gospel tradition; in the former, the first suggestion of the Resurrection becomes even more clearly intelligible. It will be observed that in all this explanation we are left chiefly to conjecture, for the statements in the Gospels cannot, upon any point, be used with the slightest confidence. On the other hand, all that is demanded is that a probable or possible explanation of the origin of the belief in the Resurrection should be given; and, in the total absence of historical data, we are entitled to draw inferences as to the course of events at the time. It may well be that a mistake as to the sepulchre, rendered not improbable if any hint of the truth be conveyed in the conflicting traditions of the Gospel, or one of many other suggestions which might be advanced, might lead the women or Peter to believe that the sepulchre was empty. Or some other even trifling circumstance, which we can no longer indicate with precision, might convey to the women or to Peter, in their state of nervous excitement, the last impulse wanting to cause that rapid revulsion from extreme depression, which is so suitable to the state which we may, perhaps,

¹ Ewald points out that, according to the belief of the period, the souls of the dead hovered for a time between heaven and earth, and he considers that the belief undeniably played an important part in this sphere of visions of the Christ (*Gesch. d. V. Isr.*, vi., p. 72 a.).

be allowed to call creative subjectivity. If we are to accept the indications scattered about the New Testament, the impetuous ardent temperament of Peter was eminently one to bound into sudden ecstatic enthusiasm, and in all probability some commonplace or trifling incident may have been the spark which kindled into flame the materials already at glowing heat. The strong subjective impression that Jesus had risen would create a vision of him which, at once confirming previous conclusions, resolving perplexing doubts, and satisfying feverish expectations, would be accepted by each mind with little or no question as an objective reality. If Peter, or even the women, brought to the disciples the assurance that they had seen the Lord, we cannot doubt that, in the unparalleled position in which they were then placed, under all the circumstances of intense feeling and religious excitement at the moment, such emotions would be suddenly called into action as would give to these men the impression that they had seen the Master whom they had lost. These subjective impressions would be strengthened daily and unconsciously into ever more objective consistency, and, being confirmed by supposed prophecy, would be affirmed with a confidence insensibly inspired by dogmatic considerations. That the news would fly from believer to believer, meeting everywhere excited attention and satisfying eager expectancy, is certain; and that these devout souls, swayed by every emotion of glad and exultant enthusiasm, would constantly mistake the suggestions of their own thoughts for objective realities is probable. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again "according to the Scriptures." This would harden every timid supposition into assurance; and, as time went on, what was doubtful would become certain, what was mysterious, clear; and those who had seen nothing would take up and strengthen the tradition of those who had seen the Lord.

It is argued that there was not time for the preparation of the disciples to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus between his crucifixion and "the third day," when that event is alleged to have occurred, and, consequently, no probability of subjective impressions of so unexpected a nature being received. To those Apologists who adopt this argument we might point to many passages in the Gospels which affirm that the Resurrection on the third day was predicted. These, however, we assign, of course, to a later date. The argument assumes that there was no preparation in the teaching of Jesus, but this, as we have endeavoured to suggest, is not the case. If there had been no other, the mere assurance that he was the Messiah must have led to reflections, which demanded some other sequel to his career than the death of a slave. The mere suggestion of such a problem as must have proposed itself to the minds of the disciples: If all is to end here,

Jesus was not the Messiah: if he was the Messiah, what will now happen? must have led to expectant attention. But there was much more than this. In such moments as those of the Passion, thought works feverishly and fast. It is not to be supposed that Peter and the rest did not foresee the end, when Jesus was led away prisoner in the hands of his enemies. It is still less to be imagined that their minds were not ceaselessly revolving that problem, on the solution of which depended their fondest hopes and highest aspirations. It is most probable, indeed, that no time could have found the disciples in a state so ripe for strong impressions as that immediately succeeding the death of their Master.

There are, however, other aspects in which this point may be placed. What evidence is there that Jesus was seen, or supposed to have been seen, on the third day? Absolutely none worthy of the name. Paul does not say that he was; and as for the Gospels, their statement is of no value, and the tradition which they record may be set down as a foregone dogmatic conclusion. Paul very distinctly shows this. He says: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he has been raised the third day, according to the Scriptures."¹ The repetition of the phrase, "according to the Scriptures," is very marked, and points to the fact that the purpose for which Jesus died—"for our sins"—and the date of his Resurrection—"the third day"—are statements directly based upon Scripture. We have mentioned that the Scriptures supposed to indicate the third day do not really apply to the Messiah at all, but this does not affect the question before us. Now, believing this epoch to be defined in prophecy, this is precisely one of those points upon which memory would, in the lapse of time, be most likely to adjust itself to the prophecy. We will assume that Jesus was not "seen" before the third day. It is obvious that, if he was seen forty days after, it might be affirmed that he had been actually raised long before, on the third day. The vision occurring on the third day itself, even, could not prove that he had not "risen" before. There is, in fact, no reason to fix the third day except the statement of "Scripture," and, the moment we accept that, we must recognise the force of dogmatic influence.² The fact that the third day has from early times been set apart as the Christian Sabbath does not prove anything. If the third day was

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 3 f.

² We do not go into any argument based on the order given in the first two Synoptics to go into Galilee—a three days' journey at least—where the disciples were to see Jesus. Nor need we touch upon other similar points which arise out of the narratives of the Gospels.

believed to be the day indicated by "Scripture" for the Resurrection, of course that day would be selected as the time at which it must have occurred, and on which it should be commemorated. So far as the vision hypothesis is concerned, the day is of no consequence whatever, and the objection upon this point has no force.

There is another consideration which we must mention, which is not only important in connection with an estimate of the evidence for the Resurrection, but the inferences from which clearly support the explanation we are proposing. Before stating it we may, in passing, again refer to the fact that it is nowhere affirmed that anyone was an eye-witness of the actual Resurrection. It is supposed to be proved by the circumstance that Jesus was subsequently "seen." Observe, however, that the part of this miracle which could not well have been ascribed to subjective impressions—the actual resurrection—is, naturally enough, not seen by anyone, but that which comes precisely within the scope of such subjective action is said to have been seen by many. To come at once to our point, neither Paul, nor the Gospels, nor Christian tradition in any form, pretends that Jesus was seen by any one but his disciples and those who believed in him. In fact, Jesus only appeared to those who were prepared by faith and expectant attention to see him in the manner we assert. We are at present merely speaking of the earlier appearances, and reserving Paul for separate discussion. Why, we may inquire, did Jesus not appear to his enemies as well as to his friends? Nothing of course could have been more intelligible than his desire to comfort and reassure those who believed in and mourned for him, but to do this by no means excluded a wider manifestation of himself, supposing him to have actually risen from the dead. On the hypothesis that he only rose again and was seen through the yearning and enthusiastic faith of his followers, the reason why he was not seen by others is not hard to find. Yet it might be thought that the object of at once establishing beyond doubt his supernatural mission, and convincing his enemies of their crime and the Jews of their blindness and folly, was important enough. Had he shown himself to the Chief Priests and elders, and confounded the Pharisees with the vision of him whom they had so cruelly nailed to the accursed tree, how might not the future of his followers have been smoothed, and the faith of many made strong! Or if he had stood again in the Courts of the Roman Procurator, no longer a prisoner buffeted and spat upon, but the glorious Messiah, beyond the reach of Jewish malignity or Roman injustice! But no, he was seen by none but those devoted to him. We shall, of course, be told by Apologists that this also was "for the trial of our faith"; though, to anyone who earnestly reflects, it

must seem childish to ask men to believe what is beyond their reason, yet conceal the evidence by which reason is supposed to be guided. The reply, however, is clear: for the trial of our faith or for any other reason, it is nevertheless certain that this evidence does not exist. When the argument which we are now discussing was first advanced long ago by Celsus, Origen had no better refutation than, after admitting the fact that Jesus was not after his resurrection seen as before publicly and by all men, to take refuge in the belief that the passage of Paul regarding his appearances contains wonderful mysteries which, if understood, would explain why Jesus did not show himself after that event as he had done before it.¹

We must now proceed to show that the vision of Paul is satisfactorily explained by the same hypothesis. We have already proved that there is no evidence of any value that Paul's conversion was due to his having seen Jesus in a manner which he believed to be objective and supernatural. To represent the arch persecutor Paul transformed in a moment, by a miraculous vision of Jesus, into the Apostle of the Gentiles was highly characteristic of the author of Acts, who further represents Paul as immediately preaching publicly in Damascus and confounding the Jews. Widely different is the statement of Paul. He distinctly affirms that he did not communicate with flesh and blood, nor went he up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before him, but that he immediately went away into Arabia. The Fathers delighted in representing this journey to Arabia as an instance of Paul's fervour and eagerness to preach the Gospel in lands over which its sound had not yet gone forth. There can be no doubt, however, that Paul's journey to Arabia and his sojourn there were for the purpose of reflection. It is only in legends that instantaneous spiritual revolutions take place. In sober history the process is more slow and progressive. We repeat that there is no evidence which can at all be accepted that Paul's conversion was effected by a vision, and that it is infinitely more probable that it was, so to say, merely completed and crowned by "seeing Jesus"; but, at the same time, even if the view be held that this vision was the decisive circumstance which induced Paul at once to resign his

¹ *Contra Cels.*, ii. 63. It is curious that, in an earlier chapter, Origen, discussing the question of Celsus, whether any one who had been actually dead had ever risen with a real body, says that if Celsus had been a Jew who believed that Elijah and Elisha had raised little children he could not have advanced this objection. Origen adds that he thinks the reason why Jesus appeared to no other nation but the Jews was, that they had become accustomed to miracles, and could, by comparing the works of Jesus and what was told of him with what had been done before, recognise that he was greater than all who had preceded him. ii. 57.

course of persecution and embrace Christianity, our argument is not materially affected. In any case, much silent, deep, and almost unconscious preparation for the change must long before have proceeded in the mind of Paul, which was finally matured in the Arabian waste. Upon no view that is taken can this be excluded; upon every ground of common sense, experience, and necessary inference, it must be admitted.

Indifference is the only great gulf which separates opinions. There was no stolid barrier of apathy between Saul of Tarsus and belief in the Messiahship of Jesus. In persecuting Christianity, Paul proved two things: the earnestness and energy of his convictions, and the fact that his attention was keenly directed to the new sect. Both points contributed to the result we are discussing. Paul's Judaism was no mere formalism. It was the adoption, heart and soul, of the religion of his people; which was to him no dead principle, but a living faith stimulating that eager, impetuous character to defend its integrity with "fire and sword." He did not, like so many of his countrymen, turn away with scorn from the followers of the despised Nazarene and leave them to their delusion; but turned to them, on the contrary, with the fierce attraction of the zealot whose own belief is outraged by the misbelief of others. The earnest Jew came into sharp collision with the earnest Christian. The earnestness of each was an element of mutual respect. The endurance and firmness of the one might not melt the bigoted resolution of the other, but it arrested his attention and commanded his unconscious sympathy. Just so would the persecutor have endured and resisted persecution; so, subsequently, he actually did meet it. And what was the main difference between the persecutor and the persecuted? It consisted in that which constituted the burden of the apostolic preaching: the belief that "this was the Christ." The creed of the new sect at least was not complicated. It was little more at that time than a question of identity, until Paul himself developed it into an elaborate system of theology.

In this question of identity, however, there was comprised a vast change of national ideas. To the devout Jew—looking for the hope of Israel, yearning and praying for the advent of that Son of David who was to sit upon the throne of his fathers, restore the fortunes of the people, drive out the heathen and subdue the nations again to the yoke of Israel, establishing the worship of God in its purity and turning the Gentiles to the service of the God of Gods—it was an abhorrent thought that the lowly peasant who had died a shameful death on Golgotha should be represented as the Messiah, the promised King of the Jews. Still, there was something sufficiently startling in the idea to excite reflection. A political aspirant, who pretended to play the part, and after some

feeble attempt at armed insurrection had been crushed by the heel of the Roman, could not have attracted attention. In that there would have been no originality to astonish, and no singularity to require explanation. This man, on the contrary, who was said to be the Messiah, assumed no earthly dignity; claimed no kingdom in this world; had not even a place whereon to lay his head; but ended a short and unambitious career as the teacher of a simple but profound system of morality by death on a cross. There was no vulgar imitation here. This was the reverse of the Messiah of the Jews. In spite of so much dissimilarity, however, there was in the two parties a fundamental agreement of belief. The Jew expected the Messiah; the Christian believed he had now come. The Messiah expected by the Jew was certainly a very different Saviour from the despised and rejected Jesus of Nazareth, but at the root of the Christian faith lay belief in a Messiah. It was a thoroughly Jewish belief, springing out of the covenant with the fathers, and based upon the Law and the Prophets. The difference was not one of principle, but one of details. Their interpretation of the promises was strangely dissimilar, but the trust of both was in the God of Israel. To pass from one to the other did not involve the adoption of a new religion, but merely a modification of the views of the old. Once convinced that the Messiah was not a political ruler but a spiritual guide, not a victorious leader but a suffering servant of God, the transition from Judaic hopes to recognition of Jesus was almost accomplished.

It is clear that Paul, in his capacity of Persecutor, must have become well acquainted with the views of the Christians, and probably must have heard them repeatedly expounded by his captives before the Jewish Sanhedrin. He must have heard the victims of his blind religious zeal affirming their faith with all that ecstatic assurance which springs out of persecution. The vision of Peter contributed to the vision of Paul. There can be no doubt that Paul must have become aware of the application to Jesus of Old Testament prophecies, and of the new conception thence derived of a suffering Messiah. The political horizon was certainly not suggestive of the coming of the Lord's Anointed. Never had the fortunes of Israel been at a lower ebb. The hope of a Prince of the house of David to restore dominion to the fallen race was hard to entertain. The suggestion of an alternative theory based upon a new interpretation of the prophets, if startling, was not untimely, when the old confidence was becoming faint in many minds, and the hope of his coming seemed so distant and unsure. If we do not misjudge the character of Paul, however shocked he may have been at first by the substitution of a crucified Nazarene for the triumphant Messiah of his earlier visions, there must have been something profoundly pleasing to his

mind in the conception of a spiritual Messiah. As he became familiar with the idea, it is probable that flashes of doubt must have crossed his mind as to the correctness of his more material views. If the belief were true, which Christians professed, that this Jesus, despised and rejected of men, was the suffering servant of God, and this servant of God actually the Messiah! If the claim of this Jesus, who had been esteemed smitten of God and afflicted had been verified by his rising again from the dead and ascending to the right hand of God! This aspect of the Messianic idea had a mystery and significance congenial to the soul of Paul. The supernatural elements could have presented no difficulties to him. Belief in the Resurrection was part of his creed as a Pharisee. That the risen Messiah should have been seen by many, the fundamental idea once admitted, could not surprise the visionary Jew. We can well imagine the conflict which went on in the ardent mind of Paul when doubts first entered it; his resistance and struggle for the faith of his youth; the pursuance, as duty, of the course he had begun, whilst the former conviction no longer strengthened the feverish energy; the excitement of religious zeal in the mad course of persecution not to be arrested in a moment, but become, by growing doubt, bitterness and pain to him; the suffering inflicted sending its pang into his own flesh. There was ample preparation in such a situation for the vision of Paul.

The constitution and temperament of the Apostle were eminently calculated to receive impressions of the strongest description. We have mentioned the conjecture of many able men that his "stake in the flesh" was a form of epilepsy. It is, of course, but a conjecture, though one which has great probability,¹ and we must not treat it otherwise; but, if it could be proved correct, much light would be thrown upon Paul's visions. We have discussed the Apostle's statements regarding the supernatural Charismata in the Church, and have seen his extreme readiness to believe in the lavish bestowal of miraculous gifts, where others could recognise but ordinary qualities. That Paul should be able to claim the power of speaking with tongues more than all the Corinthians, whose exercise of that spiritual gift he so unceremoniously restrains, is in perfect keeping with all that we elsewhere learn about him. Everywhere we find the keenly impressionable nature so apt to fall into the ecstatic state when brought under the influence of active religious emotion. "I must glory," he exclaims with irresistible impulse on coming to a theme so congenial to him, "I must glory; it is not indeed expedient, but I will come to visions and revelations of the

¹ Cf. Gal. iv. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 3.

Lord."¹ Even when he speaks of the stake in his flesh, which he does in such suggestive connection with his visions, he describes it as sent lest he should "be exalted above measure by the excess of the revelations."² We have so repeatedly had to refer to Paul's claim to have received his Gospel by special revelation that we need not again speak of it here. If we could quote Acts as a genuine representation of Christian tradition regarding Paul, we might point out the visions and revelations therein so freely ascribed to him, but his own writings are amply sufficient for our purpose. Even his second journey to Jerusalem is attributed to the direction of revelation.³

The only vision regarding which the Apostle gives any particulars is that referred to, 2 Cor. xii. 2: "I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I know not, whether out of the body I know not, God knoweth), such an one caught up even unto the third heaven. 3. And I know such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I know not, God knoweth), 4. that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5. For such an one will I boast," etc.⁴ It has been argued from this passage, and the repetition of the expression "whether in the body or out of the body I know not," that Paul himself could clearly distinguish objective facts from subjective impressions. No interpretation could well be more erroneous. It is evident that Paul has no doubt whatever of his having been in the third heaven and in Paradise, and as little of his having heard the unspeakable words. That is quite objectively real to him. His only doubt is whether the body was caught up with his soul upon this occasion.⁵ No one who has carefully considered such phenomena and examined the statements here made can have any doubt as to the nature of this vision. The conception of being caught up into "the third heaven," "into Paradise," and there hearing these "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter," betrays in no doubtful manner the source of the subjective impressions. Of course, divines who are prepared to see in this passage the account of an actual objective event will not consider it evidence that Paul had subjective visions which he believed to have been objective facts; but to those who, more rightly and reasonably, we think, recognise the subjective character of the vision, it must at once definitely settle the point that Paul could mistake subjective impressions for objective realities, and

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 1.

² 2 Cor. xii. 7.

³ Gal. ii. 2.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 2-5.

⁵ Hilgenfeld, *Zeitschr. wiss. Theol.*, 1864, p. 174 f.; Holsten, *Zum Ev. Paulus u. Petr.*, p. 21 f., p. 122 f. Hilgenfeld points out that the representation of such a separation from the body as Paul here contemplates is to be found in Philo (*De Somniis*, i., § 6).

consequently the argument for the similar subjectivity of the vision of Jesus becomes complete. The possibility of such a mistake is precisely what Apologists question. Here is an instance in which the mistake has clearly been made by Paul.

The Apostle's own statements show him to have been superlatively visionary and impressionable, with restless nervous energy, it is true, but, at the same time, with keen physical and mental susceptibility. Liable to be uplifted by "the excess of revelations," glorying in "visions and revelations of the Lord," possessing ecstatic powers more than all others, subjecting his very movements, his visits to Jerusalem, to the direction of impulses which he supposed to be revelations; there has never been a case in which both temperament and religious belief more thoroughly combined to ascribe, with perfect conviction, objective reality to subjective impressions connected with divine things then occupying his mind.

Paul, moreover, lived in a time when the Messianic longing of the Jews led them to be profoundly interested students of the later apocalyptic writings, which certainly made a deep impression upon the Apostle, and in which he must have been struck by the image of the promised Messiah, like the Son of Man, coming on the clouds of heaven (Dan. vii. 13, cf. 1 Cor. xv. 47). At no time was such a vision more likely to present itself to him than when his mind was fixed upon the Messianic idea with all the intensity of one who had been persecuting those who asserted that the Messiah had already come. Here was reason for all that concentration of thought upon the subject which produces such visions; and when doubt and hesitation entered into that eager intense spirit, the conflict must have been sharp and the nerves highly strung. The Jesus whom he saw with his mind's eye was the climax of conviction in such a nature; and the vision vividly brought to him his own self-reproachful thoughts for mistaken zeal, and the remorse of noble souls which bounds to reparation. He devoted himself as eagerly to Christianity as he had previously done to Judaism. He changed the contents but not the form of his mind. Paul the Christian was the same man as Paul the Jew; and, in abandoning the conception of a Messiah "according to the flesh," and placing his whole faith in one "according to the spirit," he displayed the same characteristics as before. The revolution in his mind, of which so much is said, was merely one affecting the Messianic idea. He did not at a bound become the complete Apostle of the Gentiles, but, accepting at first nothing more than belief in a Messiah according to the spirit, his comprehensive and peculiar system of theology was, of course, only the result of subsequent reflection. That his conviction should have been completed by a subjective vision is no more strange than that he

should believe in supernatural Charismata, miraculous speaking with tongues, and being actually caught up into the third heaven, into Paradise, and hearing there unutterable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Paul evidently never questioned the source of his visions. They were simply accepted as divine revelations, and they excited all the less of misgiving in his soul from the fact that, without doubt, they expressed the expected solution of problems which intensely occupied his mind, and reflected conclusions already practically formed by his own thoughts.¹

There remain two points to be briefly considered. The first of these is the assertion, constantly made in various shapes, that the cardinal miracles of the Resurrection and Ascension were proclaimed as unquestionable facts, without contradiction, at a time when such an assertion might have been easily refuted. The production of the body, the still occupied sepulchre, it is said, would have set such pretensions at rest. It is unnecessary to say that the proclamation of the Resurrection and Ascension as facts proved nothing beyond the belief, perhaps, of those who asserted them. So far as Paul is concerned, we may seek in vain for any assertion of a bodily Ascension. But there is not the slightest evidence to show when the Resurrection and Ascension were first publicly proclaimed as unquestionable facts. Even the Gospels do not state that they were mentioned beyond the circle of disciples. The second Synoptist, who does not state that Jesus himself was seen by anyone, makes the curious affirmation at the close of his Gospel as we have it, that the women, on receiving the announcement of the Resurrection from the angels, and the command for the disciples and Peter to go into Galilee, "went out and fled from the sepulchre; for trembling and astonishment seized them, and they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid."² In the fourth Gospel, although the "beloved disciple" went into the sepulchre, "and he saw and believed," it is related of him and Peter: "So the disciples went away again unto their own home."³ The Eleven, in fact, who all forsook their Master

¹ "If those appearances (to his disciples) were purely *subjective*," objects Dr. Farrar, "how can we account for their sudden, rapid, and total cessation?" (*Life of Christ*, ii., p. 432, note 1). We might reply that, if objective, such a cessation would be still more unaccountable. Being subjective, the appearances, of course, ceased when the conditions of excitement and expectancy which produced them passed away. But, in point of fact, they did not suddenly and totally cease. The appearance to Paul occurred after a considerable interval, and there is the tradition of more than one appearance to him; but throughout the history of the Church we hear of similar subjective visions whenever a fitting individual has been found in the state to receive them.

² Mark xvi. 8.

³ John xx. 10.

and fled—who are represented as meeting with closed doors “for fear of the Jews”—with closed doors after eight days, it is again said, although a week before ten of them are said to have seen Jesus—were not likely to expose themselves to the fate of Jesus by rushing into the highways and asserting the Resurrection. Beyond the statement of the Gospels, the value of which we have seen, and which is accompanied by so many confused circumstances, there is no evidence whatever that the sepulchre was found empty. There is no evidence that the sepulchre was really known to the disciples, none of whom, probably, was present at the crucifixion; and it might well be inferred that the women, who are represented as ignorant that the body had already been embalmed, yet who are the chief supposed witnesses for the empty sepulchre and the informants of the disciples, were equally ignorant of the sepulchre in which the body was laid. We might ask whether the 500 brethren who are said to have seen Jesus at the same time came from Galilee, or wherever they were, and examined the state of the sepulchre? We have already said, however, that, if the sepulchre had been shown to be empty, the very last thing which could be proved by that circumstance would be the correctness of the assertion that it had become so in consequence of a stupendous miracle. On the other hand, if it had been shown that it was occupied by a body, it is exceedingly doubtful whether the fact would have convinced anyone not previously sure that Jesus could not have risen from the dead, and he would not have required such evidence. When the Resurrection was publicly proclaimed as a fact, the body could no longer have been recognisable; and the idea that any of those in authority could have thought such demonstration necessary to refute a story whispered about amongst an obscure sect in Jerusalem, or even more courageously asserted, is a product of later times. When Jesus of Nazareth, the head of the nascent sect, was suppressed by a shameful death, his humble and timid followers were, obviously, for a time despised; and there is little reason to suppose that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews would have condescended to any public contradiction of their affirmations, if they had even felt indifference to the defilement of exposing, for such a purpose, a decaying body to the gaze of Jerusalem. This kind of refutation is possible only in the imagination of divines. Besides, what evidence is there that even a single indifferent person found the sepulchre empty? There is not an iota of proof.

On the contrary, there is the very strongest evidence that, when the assertion of the Resurrection and Ascension as “unquestionable facts” was made, it was contradicted in the only practical and practicable way conceivable: (1) by all but universal disbelief in

Jerusalem ; (2) by actual persecution of those who asserted it. It is a perfectly undeniable fact that the great mass of the Jews totally denied the truth of the statement by disbelieving it, and that the converts to Christianity, who soon swelled the numbers of the Church and spread its influence amongst the nations, were not the citizens of Jerusalem, who were capable of refuting such assertions, but strangers and Gentiles. The number of the community of Jerusalem after the forty days seems to be stated by the author of Acts as "about 120," and, although the numbers added to the Church, according to this document, are evidently fabulous, the converts at Pentecost are, apparently, chiefly from amongst the devout men of every nation upon earth congregated at Jerusalem. To this hour the Jews have retained as their inheritance the denial by their forefathers of the asserted facts. The assertion, secondly, was emphatically denied by the persecution, as soon as it became worth any one's while to persecute, of those who made it. It was in this way denied by Paul himself, at a time when verification was infinitely more possible than when he came to join in the assertion. Are we to suppose that the Apostle took no trouble to convince himself of the facts before he began to persecute? He was in the confidence of the high priests, it seems; can he ever have heard the slightest doubt from them on the subject? Is it not palpable that Paul and his party, by their very pursuit of those who maintained such allegations, stigmatised them as falsehoods, and perhaps as imposture? If it be said that Paul became convinced of his mistake, it is perfectly obvious that his conversion was not due to local and circumstantial evidence, but to dogmatic considerations and his supposed vision of Jesus. He disbelieved when the alleged occurrences were recent and, as it is said, capable of refutation; he believed when the time for such refutation had passed.

The second point to which we have referred is the vague and final objection of Apologists that, if the vision of Jesus was merely subjective, the fabric of the Church and even of Christianity is based upon unreality and self-deception. Is this possible? they ask. Is it possible that for eighteen centuries the Resurrection and Ascension have been proclaimed and believed by millions, with no other original foundation than self-delusion? The vagueness and apparent vastness of this objection, perhaps, make it a formidable *argumentum ad hominem*, but it vanishes into very small proportions as we approach it. Must we, then, understand that the dogmas of all religions which have been established must have been objective truths? and that this is a necessary inference from their wide adoption? If so, then all historical religions before Christianity, and after it, must take rank as substantially true. In that case the religion of the Veda, of Buddha, of Zoroaster, of

Mohammed, for instance, can as little be based on unreality and self-deception as Christianity. They have secured wide acceptance from mankind. Millions have for centuries devoutly held their tenets, and to this day the followers of Sâkya Muni are as numerous as the believers in the religion of Paul. If not, the objection at once falls to the ground as an argument, and the problem becomes a simple matter of evidence, which has been fully discussed and disposed of.

When we analyse the fact, it becomes apparent that, ultimately, belief in the Resurrection and Ascension resolves itself into the belief of a few or of one. It requires very little reflection to perceive that the Christian Church is founded much more upon belief in the Resurrection than on the reality of the fact itself. Nothing is more undeniable than the circumstance that not more than a very small number of men are even alleged to have seen the risen Jesus. The mass of those who have believed in the Resurrection have done so because of the assurance of these few men, and perhaps because they may have been led to think that the event was predicted in Scripture. Up to this day, converts to the dogma are made, if made at all, upon the assurance of Paul and the Gospels. The vast question at last dwindles down to the inquiry: Can a few men, can one man, draw erroneous inferences and be honestly deceived by something supposed to have been seen? We presume that there can be no hesitation in giving an affirmative reply. The rest follows as a matter of course. Others simply believe the report of those who have believed before them. In course of time, so many believe that it is considered almost outrageous to disbelieve or demand evidence. The number of those who have believed is viewed at last as an overwhelming proof of the truth of the creed.

It is a most striking and extraordinary fact that the life and teaching of Jesus have scarcely a place in the system of Paul. Had we been dependent upon him, we should have had no idea of the Great Master who preached the Sermon on the Mount, and embodied pure truths in parables of such luminous simplicity. His noble morality would have remained unknown, and his lessons of rare spiritual excellence have been lost to the world. Paul sees no significance in that life, but concentrates all interest in the death and Resurrection of his Messiah. The ecclesiastical Christianity which was mainly Paul's work has almost effaced the true work of Jesus. In the sepulchre hewn out of the rock are deposited the teaching and example of Jesus, and from it there rises a mystic Christ lost in a halo of theology.

CONCLUSIONS

WE have seen that Divine Revelation could only be necessary or conceivable for the purpose of communicating to us something which we could not otherwise discover, and that the truth of communications which are essentially beyond and undiscoverable by reason cannot be attested in any other way than by miraculous signs distinguishing them as divine. It is admitted that no other testimony could justify our believing the specific Revelation which we are considering, the very substance of which is supernatural and beyond the criticism of reason, and that its doctrines, if not proved to be miraculous truths, must inevitably be pronounced "the wildest delusions." "By no rational being could a just and benevolent life be accepted as proof of such astonishing announcements."

On examining the alleged miraculous evidence for Christianity as Divine Revelation, we find that, even if the actual occurrence of the supposed miracles could be substantiated, their value as evidence would be destroyed by the necessary admission that miracles are not limited to one source and are not exclusively associated with truth, but are performed by various spiritual Beings, Satanic as well as Divine, and are not always evidential, but are sometimes to be regarded as delusive and for the trial of faith. As the doctrines supposed to be revealed are beyond Reason, and cannot in any sense be intelligently approved by the human intellect, no evidence which is of so doubtful and inconclusive a nature could sufficiently attest them. This alone would disqualify the Christian miracles for the duty which only miracles are capable of performing.

The supposed miraculous evidence for the Divine Revelation, moreover, is not only without any special divine character, being avowedly common also to Satanic agency, but it is not original either in conception or details. Similar miracles are reported long antecedently to the first promulgation of Christianity, and continued to be performed for centuries after it. A stream of miraculous pretension, in fact, has flowed through all human history, deep and broad as it has passed through the darker ages, but dwindling down to a thread as it has entered days of enlightenment. The evidence was too hackneyed and commonplace to make any impression upon those before whom the Christian miracles are said to have been performed, and it altogether failed to convince the people to whom the Revelation was primarily

addressed. The selection of such evidence for such a purpose is much more characteristic of human weakness than of divine power.

The true character of miracles is at once betrayed by the fact that their supposed occurrence has thus been confined to ages of ignorance and superstition, and that they are absolutely unknown in any time or place where science has provided witnesses fitted to appreciate and ascertain the nature of such exhibitions of supernatural power. There is not the slightest evidence that any attempt was made to investigate the supposed miraculous occurrences, or to justify the inferences so freely drawn from them, nor is there any reason to believe that the witnesses possessed, in any considerable degree, the fulness of knowledge and sobriety of judgment requisite for the purpose. No miracle has yet established its claim to the rank even of apparent reality, and all such phenomena must remain in the dim region of imagination. The test applied to the largest class of miracles, connected with demoniacal possession, discloses the falsity of all miraculous pretension.

There is no uncertainty as to the origin of belief in supernatural interference with nature. The assertion that spurious miracles have sprung up round a few instances of genuine miraculous power has not a single valid argument to support it. History clearly demonstrates that, wherever ignorance and superstition have prevailed, every obscure occurrence has been attributed to supernatural agency, and it is freely acknowledged that, under their influence, inexplicable and miraculous are convertible terms. On the other hand, in proportion as knowledge of natural laws has increased, the theory of supernatural interference with the order of nature has been dispelled, and miracles have ceased. The effect of science, however, is not limited to the present and future, but its action is equally retrospective, and phenomena which were once ignorantly isolated from the sequence of natural cause and effect are now restored to their place in the unbroken order. Ignorance and superstition created miracles ; knowledge has for ever annihilated them.

To justify miracles two assumptions are made : first, an Infinite Personal God ; and second, a Divine design of Revelation, the execution of which necessarily involves supernatural action. Miracles, it is argued, are not contrary to nature, or effects produced without adequate causes, but, on the contrary, are caused by the intervention of this Infinite Personal God for the purpose of attesting and carrying out the Divine design. Neither of the assumptions, however, can be reasonably maintained.

The assumption of an Infinite Personal God, a Being at once limited and unlimited, is a use of language to which no mode of

human thought can possibly attach itself. Moreover, the assumption of a God working miracles is emphatically excluded by universal experience of the order of nature. The allegation of a specific Divine cause of miracles is further inadequate from the fact that the power of working miracles is avowedly not limited to a Personal God, but is also ascribed to other spiritual Beings; and it must, consequently, always be impossible to prove that the supposed miraculous phenomena originate with one and not with another. On the other hand, the assumption of a Divine design of Revelation is not suggested by antecedent probability, but is derived from the very Revelation which it is intended to justify, as is likewise the assumption of a Personal God, and both are equally vicious as arguments. The circumstances which are supposed to require this Divine design, and the details of the scheme, are absolutely incredible, and opposed to all the results of science. Nature does not countenance any theory of the original perfection and subsequent degradation of the human race; and the supposition of a frustrated original plan of creation, and of later impotent endeavours to correct it, is as inconsistent with Divine omnipotence and wisdom as the proposed punishment of the human race, and the mode devised to save some of them, are opposed to justice and morality. Such assumptions are essentially inadmissible, and totally fail to explain and justify miracles.

Whatever definition may be given of miracles, such exceptional phenomena must at least be antecedently incredible. In the absence of absolute knowledge, human belief must be guided by the balance of evidence, and it is obvious that the evidence for the uniformity of the order of nature, which is derived from universal experience, must be enormously greater than can be the testimony for any alleged exception to it. On the other hand, universal experience prepares us to consider mistakes of the senses, imperfect observation, and erroneous inference as not only possible, but eminently probable on the part of the witnesses of phenomena, even when they are perfectly honest and truthful, and more especially so when such disturbing causes as religious excitement and superstition are present. When the report of the original witnesses only reaches us indirectly and through the medium of tradition, the probability of error is further increased. Thus the allegation of miracles is discredited, both positively by the invariability of the order of nature, and negatively by the fallibility of human observation and testimony. The history of miraculous pretension in the world, and the circumstances attending the special exhibition of it which we are examining, suggest natural explanations of the reported facts which wholly remove them from the region of the supernatural.

When we proceed to examine the direct witnesses for the

Christian miracles, we do not discover any exceptional circumstances neutralising the preceding considerations. On the contrary, we find that the case turns not upon miracles substantially before us, but upon the mere narratives of miracles said to have occurred over eighteen hundred years ago. It is obvious that, for such narratives to possess any real force and validity, it is essential that their character and authorship should be placed beyond all doubt. They must proceed from eye-witnesses capable of estimating aright the nature of the phenomena. Our four Gospels, however, are strictly anonymous works. The superscriptions which now distinguish them are undeniably of later origin than the works themselves, and do not proceed from the composers of the Gospels. Of the writers to whom these narratives are traditionally ascribed, only two are even said to have been Apostles, the alleged authors of the second and third Synoptics neither having been personal followers of Jesus nor eye-witnesses of the events they describe. Under these circumstances, we are wholly dependent upon external evidence for information regarding the authorship and trustworthiness of the four canonical Gospels.

In examining this evidence we proceeded upon clear and definite principles. Without forming or adopting any theory whatever as to the date or origin of our Gospels, we simply searched the writings of the Fathers, during a century and a half after the events in question, for information regarding the composition and character of these works, and even for any certain traces of their use, although, if discovered, these could prove little beyond the mere existence of the Gospels used at the date of the writer. In the latter and minor investigation we were guided by canons of criticism previously laid down, and which are based upon the simplest laws of evidence. We found that the writings of the Fathers, during a century and a half after the death of Jesus, are a complete blank so far as any evidence regarding the composition and character of our Gospels is concerned, unless we except the tradition preserved by Papias, after the middle of the second century, the details of which fully justify the conclusion that our first and second Synoptics, in their present form, cannot be the works said to have been composed by Matthew and Mark. There is thus no evidence whatever directly connecting any of the canonical Gospels with the writers to whom they are popularly attributed, and later tradition, of little or no value in itself, is separated by a long interval of profound silence from the epoch at which they are supposed to have been composed. With one exception, moreover, we found that, during the same century and a half, there is no certain and unmistakable trace even of the anonymous use of any of our Gospels in the early Church. This fact, of course, does not justify the conclusion that none of these

Gospels was actually in existence during any part of that time, nor have we anywhere suggested such an inference; but strict examination of the evidence shows that there is no positive proof that they were. The exception to which we refer is Marcion's Gospel, which was, we think, based upon our third Synoptic, and consequently must be accepted as evidence of the existence of that work. Marcion, however, does not give the slightest information as to the authorship of the Gospel, and his charges against it of adulteration cannot be considered very favourable testimony as to its infallible character. If it be received that Tatian's Diatessaron is based upon our four Gospels, nothing further than their mere existence at that period is proved. The canonical Gospels continue to the end anonymous documents of no evidential value for miracles. They do not themselves pretend to be inspired histories, and they cannot escape from the ordinary rules of criticism. Internal evidence does not modify the inferences from external testimony. Apart from continual minor contradictions throughout the first three Gospels, it is impossible to reconcile the representations of the Synoptics with those of the fourth Gospel. They mutually destroy each other as evidence. They must be pronounced mere narratives, compiled long after the events recorded, by unknown persons who were neither eye-witnesses of the alleged miraculous occurrences, nor hearers of the statements they profess to report. They cannot be accepted as adequate testimony for miracles and the reality of Divine Revelation.

Applying these tests to the Acts of the Apostles, we arrived at the same results. Acknowledged to be composed by the same author who produced the third Synoptic that author's identity is not thereby made more clear. There is no evidence of the slightest value regarding its character, but, on the other hand, the work itself teems to such an extent with miraculous incidents and supernatural agency that the credibility of the narrative requires an extraordinary amount of attestation to secure for it any serious consideration. When the statements of the author are compared with the emphatic declarations of the Apostle Paul, and with authentic accounts of the development of the early Christian Church, it becomes evident that the Acts of the Apostles, as might have been supposed, is a legendary composition of a later day, which cannot be regarded as sober and credible history, and rather discredits than tends to establish the reality of the miracles with which its pages so suspiciously abound.

The remaining books of the New Testament Canon required no separate examination, because, even if genuine, they contain no additional testimony to the reality of Divine Revelation, beyond

the implied belief in such doctrines as the Incarnation and Resurrection. It is unquestionable, we suppose, that in some form or other the Apostles believed in these miracles, and the assumption that they did so supersedes the necessity for examining the authenticity of the Catholic Epistles and Apocalypse. In like manner, the recognition as genuine of four Epistles of Paul, which contain his testimony to miracles, renders it superfluous to discuss the authenticity of the other letters attributed to him.

The general belief in miraculous power and its possession by the Church is brought to a practical test in the case of the Apostle Paul. After elaborate consideration of his letters, we came to the unhesitating conclusion that, instead of establishing the reality of miracles, the unconscious testimony of Paul clearly demonstrates the facility with which erroneous inferences convert the most natural phenomena into supernatural occurrences.

As a final test, we carefully examined the whole of the evidence for the cardinal dogmas of Christianity: the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. First taking the four Gospels, we found that their accounts of these events are not only full of legendary matter, but that they even contradict and exclude each other; and so far from establishing the reality of such stupendous miracles, they show that no reliance is to be placed on the statements of the unknown authors. Taking next the testimony of Paul, which is more important as at least authentic and proceeding from an Apostle of whom we know more than of any other of the early missionaries of Christianity, we saw that it was indefinite and utterly insufficient. His so-called "circumstantial account of the testimony upon which the belief in the Resurrection rested" consists merely of vague and undetailed hearsay, differing, so far as it can be compared, from the statements in the Gospels, and without other attestation than the bare fact that it is repeated by Paul, who doubtless believed it, although he had not himself been a witness of any of the supposed appearances of the risen Jesus which he so briefly catalogues. Paul's own personal testimony to the Resurrection is limited to a vision of Jesus, of which we have no authentic details, seen many years after the alleged miracle. Considering the peculiar and highly nervous temperament of Paul, of which he himself supplies abundant evidence, there can be no hesitation in deciding that this vision was purely subjective, as were likewise, in all probability, the appearances to the excited disciples of Jesus, if they ever really occurred. The testimony of Paul himself, before his imagination was stimulated to ecstatic fervour by the beauty of a spiritualised religion, was an earnest denial of the great Christian dogma emphasised by the active persecution of those who affirmed it; and a vision, especially in the case of one so constituted, supposed to be seen many years

after the fact of the Resurrection had ceased to be capable of verification, is not an argument of convincing force. We were compelled to pronounce the evidence for the Resurrection and Ascension absolutely and hopelessly inadequate to prove the reality of such stupendous miracles, which must consequently be unhesitatingly rejected. There is no reason given, or even conceivable, why allegations such as these, and dogmas affecting the religion and even the salvation of the human race, should be accepted upon evidence which would be declared totally insufficient in the case of any common question of property or title before a legal tribunal. On the contrary, the more momentous the point to be established, the more complete must be the proof required.

If we test the results at which we have arrived by general considerations, we find them everywhere confirmed and established. There is nothing original in the claim of Christianity to be regarded as Divine Revelation, and nothing new either in the doctrines said to have been revealed, or in the miracles by which it is alleged to have been distinguished. There has not been a single historical religion largely held amongst men which has not pretended to be divinely revealed, and the written books of which have not been represented as directly inspired. There is not a doctrine, sacrament, or rite of Christianity which has not substantially formed part of earlier religions; and not a single phase of the supernatural history of the Christ, from his miraculous conception, birth, and incarnation, to his death, resurrection, and ascension, which has not had its counterpart in earlier mythologies. Heaven and hell, with characteristic variation of details, have held an important place in the eschatology of many creeds and races. The same may be said even of the moral teaching of Christianity, the elevated precepts of which, although in a less perfect and connected form, had already suggested themselves to many noble minds and been promulgated by ancient sages and philosophers. That this Inquiry into the reality of Divine Revelation has been limited to the claim of Christianity has arisen solely from a desire to condense it within reasonable bounds, and confine it to the only religion in connection with which it could practically interest us now.

There is nothing in the history and achievements of Christianity which can be considered characteristic of a religion divinely revealed for the salvation of mankind. Originally said to have been communicated to a single nation, specially selected as the peculiar people of God, and for whom distinguished privileges were said to be reserved, it was almost unanimously rejected by that nation at the time, and it has continued to be repudiated by its descendants with singular unanimity to the present day. After more than nineteen centuries, this Divine scheme of salvation has

not obtained even the nominal adhesion of more than a third of the human race, and if, in a census of Christendom, distinction could now be made of those who no longer seriously believe in it as Supernatural Religion, Christianity would take a much lower numerical position. Sâkya Muni, a teacher only second in nobility of character to Jesus, and who, like him, proclaimed a system of elevated morality, has even now almost twice the number of followers, although his missionaries never sought converts in the West. Considered as a scheme Divinely devised as the best, if not only, mode of redeeming the human race and saving them from eternal damnation, promulgated by God himself incarnate in human form, and completed by his own actual death upon the cross for the sins of the world, such results as these can only be regarded as practical failure, although they may not be disproportionate for a system of elevated morality.

We shall probably never be able to determine how far the great Teacher may, through his own speculations or misunderstood spiritual utterances, have suggested the supernatural doctrines subsequently attributed to him, and by which his whole history and system soon became transformed; but no one who attentively studies the subject can fail to be struck by the absence of such dogmas from the earlier records of his teaching. It is to the excited veneration of the followers of Jesus that we owe most of the supernatural elements so characteristic of the age and people. We may look in vain, even in the synoptic Gospels, for the doctrines elaborated in the Pauline Epistles and the Gospel of Ephesus. The great transformation of Christianity was effected by men who had never seen Jesus, and who were only acquainted with his teaching after it had become transmuted by tradition. The fervid imagination of the East constructed Christian theology. It is not difficult to follow the development of the creeds of the Church, and it is certainly most instructive to observe the progressive boldness with which its dogmas were expanded by pious enthusiasm. The New Testament alone represents several stages of dogmatic evolution. Before his first followers had passed away the process of transformation had commenced. The disciples, who had so often misunderstood the teaching of Jesus during his life, piously distorted it after his death. His simple lessons of meekness and humility were soon forgotten. With lamentable rapidity, the elaborate structure of ecclesiastical Christianity, following stereotyped lines of human superstition, and deeply coloured by Alexandrian philosophy, displaced the simple morality of Jesus. Doctrinal controversy, which commenced amongst the very Apostles, has ever since divided the unity of the Christian body. The perverted ingenuity of successive generations of Churchmen has filled the world with theological quibbles, which

naturally enough culminated in doctrines of Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility.

It is sometimes affirmed, however, that those who proclaim such conclusions not only wantonly destroy the dearest hopes of humanity, but remove the only solid basis of morality; and it is alleged that, before existing belief is disturbed, the iconoclast is bound to provide a substitute for the shattered idol. To this we may reply that speech or silence does not alter the reality of things. The recognition of Truth cannot be made dependent on consequences, or be trammelled by considerations of spurious expediency. Its declaration in a serious and suitable manner to those who are capable of judging can never be premature. Its suppression cannot be effectual, and is only a humiliating compromise with conscious imposture. In so far as morality is concerned, belief in a system of future rewards and punishments, although of an intensely degraded character, may, to a certain extent, have promoted observance of the letter of the law in darker ages and even in our own; but it may, we think, be shown that education and civilisation have done infinitely more to enforce its spirit. How far Christianity has promoted education and civilisation we shall not here venture adequately to discuss. We may emphatically assert, however, that whatever beneficial effect Christianity has produced has been due, not to its supernatural dogmas, but to its simple morality. Dogmatic theology, on the contrary, has retarded education and impeded science. Wherever it has been dominant civilisation has stood still. Science has been judged and suppressed by the light of a text or a chapter of Genesis. Almost every great advance which has been made towards enlightenment has been achieved in spite of the protest or the anathema of the Church. Submissive ignorance, absolute or comparative, has been tacitly fostered as the most desirable condition of the popular mind. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," has been the favourite text of Doctors of Divinity with a stock of incredible dogmas difficult of assimilation by the virile mind. Even now the friction of theological resistance is a constant waste of intellectual power. The early enunciation of so pure a system of morality, and one so intelligible to the simple as well as profound to the wise, was of great value to the world; but, experience being once systematised and codified, if higher principles do not constrain us, society may safely be left to see morals sufficiently observed. It is true that, notwithstanding its fluctuating rules, morality has hitherto assumed the character of a Divine institution; but its sway has not, in consequence, been more real than it must be as the simple result of human wisdom and the outcome of

social experience. The choice of a noble life is no longer a theological question, and ecclesiastical patents of truth and uprightness have finally expired. Morality, which has ever changed its complexion and modified its injunctions according to social requirements, will necessarily be enforced as part of human evolution, and is not dependent on religious terrorism or superstitious persuasion. If we are supposed to say, *Cui bono?* and only practise morality, or be ruled by right principles, to gain a heaven or escape a hell, there is nothing lost; for such grudging and calculated morality is merely a spurious imitation which can as well be produced by social compulsion. But if we have ever been really penetrated by the pure spirit of morality, if we have in any degree attained that elevation of mind which instinctively turns to the true and noble and shrinks from the baser level of thought and action, we shall feel no need of the stimulus of a system of rewards and punishments in a future state which has for so long been represented as essential to Christianity.

The argument so often employed by theologians, that Divine Revelation is necessary for man, and that certain views contained in that Revelation are required by our moral consciousness, is purely imaginary and derived from the Revelation which it seeks to maintain. The only thing absolutely necessary for man is Truth; and to that, and that alone, must our moral consciousness adapt itself. Reason and experience forbid the expectation that we can acquire any knowledge otherwise than through natural channels. We might as well expect to be supernaturally nourished as supernaturally informed. To complain that we do not know all that we desire to know is foolish and unreasonable. It is tantamount to complaining that the mind of man is not differently constituted. To attain the full altitude of the Knowable, whatever that may be, should be our earnest aim, and more than this is not for humanity.

We gain more than we lose by awaking to find that our theology is human invention, and our eschatology an unhealthy dream. We are freed from the incubus of base Hebrew mythology, and from doctrines of Divine government which outrage morality and set cruelty and injustice in the place of holiness. If we have to abandon cherished anthropomorphic visions of future blessedness, the details of which are either of unseizable dimness or of questionable joy, we are at least delivered from quibbling discussions of the meaning of *αἰώνιος*, and our eternal hope is unclouded by the doubt whether mankind is to be tortured in hell for ever and a day, or for a day without the ever. At the end of life there may be no definite vista of a Heaven glowing with the light of apocalyptic imagination, but neither will there be the unutterable horror of a Purgatory or a Hell, lurid with flames, for the helpless victims of

an unjust but omnipotent Creator. To entertain such libellous representations at all as part of the contents of "Divine Revelation," it was necessary to assert that man was incompetent to judge of the ways of the God of Revelation, and must not suppose him endowed with the perfection of human conceptions of justice and mercy, but submit to call wrong right and right wrong at the foot of an almighty Despot. But now the reproach of such reasoning is shaken from our shoulders, and returns to the Jewish superstition from which it sprang.

Let us ask what has actually been destroyed by such an inquiry pressed to its logical conclusion. Can Truth by any means be made less true? Can reality be melted into thin air? The supposed Revelation not being a reality, that which has been destroyed is only an illusion, and that which is left is the truth. Losing belief in it and its contents, we have lost nothing but that which the traveller loses when the mirage, which has displayed cool waters and green shades before him, melts swiftly away. There were no cool fountains really there to allay his thirst; no flowery meadows for his wearied limbs; his pleasure was delusion, and the wilderness is blank. Rather the mirage, with its pleasant illusion, is the human cry, than the desert with its barrenness. Not so, is the friendly warning; seek not vainly in the desert that which is not there, but turn rather to other horizons and to surer hopes. Do not waste life clinging to ecclesiastical dogmas which represent no eternal verities, but search elsewhere for truth which may haply be found.

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