

ARTICLE II.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

BY REV. E. F. BARROWS, D.D., LATELY PROFESSOR OF HEBREW LITERATURE
IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

No. V.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES.

THEY who in modern times refuse to acknowledge the credibility of the Gospel narratives as plain statements of facts stand, as a general rule, on the denial of the supernatural. The basis of all their reasoning is the assumption, openly or in a tacit way, that no supernatural event can happen, and, therefore, that no supernatural event can be authenticated. It is the old ground of Hume — “that a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion,” — only set forth with more show of scientific demonstration. How fully Renan stands on this basis will be evident from the following :

“It is an absolute rule of criticism to deny a place in history to narratives of miraculous circumstances; nor is this owing to a metaphysical system, for it is simply the dictation of observation. Such facts have never been really proved. All the pretended miracles near enough to be examined are referable to illusion or imposture. If a single miracle had ever been proved, we could not reject in a mass all those of ancient history; for, admitting that very many of these last were false, we might still believe that some of them were true. But it is not so. Discussion and examination are fatal to miracles. Are we not, then, authorized in believing that those miracles which date many centuries back, and regarding which there are no means of forming a contradictory debate, are also without reality? In other words, miracles only exist when people believe them. The supernatural is but another word for faith. A miracle never takes place before an incredulous and sceptical public,

the most in need of such a convincing proof. Credulity on the part of the witness is the essential condition of a miracle. There is not a solitary exception to the rule that miracles are never produced before those who are able or permitted to discuss and criticise them."¹

The very obvious objection to his position that, "if it is impossible to prove that there ever was any instance of supernatural power, it is equally impossible to prove that there was not," he meets by saying: "It is the duty of him who affirms a proposition to prove it; while he to whom the proposition is made has only to listen to the proof, and to decide whether it is satisfactory."² But how can any proof be satisfactory to him who has assumed beforehand that "it is an absolute rule of criticism" — the reader will please mark the expression, not a general rule, which may be modified upon sufficient evidence, but an "absolute rule" — "to deny a place in history to narratives of miraculous circumstances." With him, and all who stand on his ground, it is a foregone conclusion that whatever is miraculous in the Gospel narratives must be set aside as unreal. Then there arises, of necessity, the question in what way the miraculous element shall be eliminated from the evangelical narratives. Here three principles of elimination offer themselves. First, the assumption that the Gospel narratives are myths, that is, pure ideas embodied in the form of historic facts. They who adopt this theory do not deny to the several narratives of the life of Jesus a basis of true history. But they hold that the writers wrought up facts in themselves purely natural into a miraculous form, for the purpose of thus representing in a lively and poetic way the spiritual ideas contained in them. The miracles are only the symbolical dress of the ideas, and not intended to be received as veritable facts of history. Secondly, the assumption that the miracles of the Gospel narratives are purely subjective; in other words, that they existed only in

¹ The Apostles, p. 37. We quote from the New York edition of 1866.

² Ibid. p. 38.

the excited imagination of the early Christians; that, to give one example out of a multitude, "the glory of the resurrection belongs to Mary of Magdala," she having mistaken a "light vision" of Jesus for his veritable person.¹ Thirdly, the assumption that the miraculous stories of the Gospels are deliberate impositions. These three theories blend more or less with each other, like the colors of the rainbow. Between the second and third, especially, there is a strong natural affinity; fanaticism and hypocrisy being twin sisters. Hence it is not surprising that some writers, as Renan, should endeavor to ride both horses at once.

To begin with the last assumption, that the authors of the Gospel narratives were deliberate deceivers, — it is enough to say that it wants all reasonable ground of evidence, and that the positive proof of the truthfulness of these men is as strong as it can be. The sincerity of the writers themselves, and of the primitive Christians who received their narratives as true, shines forth, like the sun in the firmament, from every page. Here the Saviour's argument applies in its full force: "How can Satan cast out Satan? If Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end." Satan's kingdom is one of fraud and falsehood. But the life-long work of the evangelists and their associates was that of casting out of the human heart and the world at large all fraud and falsehood. Instead of being indifferent to truth, they inculcate its supreme importance in every conceivable way. They teach that men will be saved, not by sincerity of belief, but by knowing and obeying the truth. The scope of all their doctrine is to make men truthful inwardly and outwardly; and what they did and suffered in its behalf is to all reasonable men a sufficient pledge of the "simplicity and sincerity of truth" with which they held and propagated it.

But were they not enthusiasts, who mistook the dreams of their own fancy for facts? This second hypothesis is the favorite one of Renan. He does not scruple, indeed, to

¹ Renan, *Apostles*, p. 61.

impugn their truthfulness when it suits his purpose. Of Luke, whose writings he takes particular pains to disparage, he says: "It will readily be understood that a man who possesses such a disposition" — that is, as he has just affirmed, "too loyal to condemn Paul, too orthodox to place himself outside the pale of prevalent opinion" — "is of all others the least capable of representing things as they really are. Historic fidelity is to him a matter of indifference; he is only anxious to edify the reader."¹ And of Mary of Magdala:

"The female conscience, when under the influence of passionate love, is capable of the most extravagant illusions. Often it is the abettor of its own dreams. To introduce these kinds of incidents regarded as miraculous, deliberately deceives no one; but all the world, without thinking of it, is induced to connive at it. Mary of Magdala had been, according to the parlance of the age, 'possessed with seven devils.' In all this we must consider the want of precision in Eastern women, from their absolute defect of education and the particularly slight knowledge of their sincerity."²

This is but a decent way of saying that the element of hypocrisy mingled itself with that of enthusiasm in Mary's character. Renan's main endeavor, however, is to show how the crowning miracle of the Gospels, that of Christ's resurrection, was but a dream of the primitive Christians, having no objective reality. "A man of penetration," he says, "might have announced during the Saturday that Jesus would arise."³ He does not mean, of course, that he might have announced it as a veritable reality from an intelligent interpretation of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and of the Saviour's own words; but he might have announced it from the inability of the disciples "to acknowledge that death could have the victory over Jesus — over him who came to abolish the power of death." Accordingly, the little Christian society on Sunday "worked the veritable miracle; they resuscitated Jesus in their hearts

¹ The Apostles, p. 23

² *Ibid.* p. 81.

³ *Ibid.* p. 57.

by the intense love which they bore towards him. They decided that Jesus had not died.”¹ And he proceeds to tell exactly how this feat was accomplished. Mary, standing at the open sepulchre, her mind absorbed with the question where they had put the body, suddenly hears a light rustling behind her. She turns, and there is a man standing whom she addresses as the gardener.

“ ‘Oh,’ she says, ‘if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, that I may take him away.’ For the only answer, she thinks that she hears herself called by her name: ‘Mary!’ It was the voice that had so often thrilled her before; it was the accent of Jesus. ‘Oh, my master!’ she cries. She is about to touch him. A sort of instinctive movement throws her at his feet to kiss them. The light vision gives way, and says to her: ‘Touch me not.’ Little by little the shadow disappears.

“ But the miracle of love is accomplished. That which Cephas could not do, Mary has done; she has been able to draw life, sweet and penetrating words, from the empty tomb. There is now no more talk of inferences to be deduced or of conjectures to be framed. Mary has seen and heard. The resurrection has its first direct witness. . . . The glory of the resurrection belongs, then, to Mary of Magdala. After Jesus, it is Mary who has done most for the foundation of Christianity. The shadow created by the delicate sensibility of Magdalene wanders still on the earth. Queen and patroness of idealists, Magdalene knew better than any one how to assert her dream, and impose on every one the vision of her passionate soul. Her great womanly affirmation, ‘He has risen,’ has been the basis of the faith of humanity. Away, impotent reason! Apply no cold analysis to this *chef d’oeuvre* of idealism and of love. If wisdom refuses to console this poor human race, betrayed by fate, let folly attempt the enterprise. Where is the sage who has given to the world as much joy as the possessed Mary of Magdala?”²

There, reader, you have the whole process of the resurrec-

¹ Apostles, p. 26.

² Ibid. pp. 60-62.

tion. It only remained that Mary of Magdala should propagate the story, which the disciples were prepared beforehand to believe. She is to be commended because her "folly," in imposing on the world her dream for a reality, has done for "this poor human race, betrayed by fate," what "wisdom" — the wisdom of reason and truth — refused to perform. It was a grand mistake of the Apostle Paul to affirm: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."¹

But Mary was only a single person. Could a like hallucination come over two of the disciples together? Very easily, according to Renan. Thus: Two of them, on their way to Emmaus on Sunday afternoon, are joined by a third person — not an apparition, but a veritable "pious man, well versed in the scriptures, quoting Moses and the prophets," — who holds with them the conversation recorded by Luke.² "At the evening meal with the stranger, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks, and gives to them. This act recalls so visibly to their minds the gestures and tones of Jesus in performing the same office, that, absorbed in the thought of him, they forget the stranger; it is Jesus whom they see holding the bread, and then breaking it and offering it to them. These remembrances took such a hold on them that they scarcely perceived that their companion, anxious to continue his journey, had left them. And when they had recovered from their reverie: 'Did we not perceive,' they said, 'something strange? Did you not recognize him at the breaking of the bread?' 'Yes, up to that time our eyes were closed; they were opened when he vanished.'³

There, reader, you have the process again. This "pious man, well versed in the scriptures," slipped out, "scarcely perceived, while the two disciples were in a reverie, saying one to another: "Is he not like the Master?" And the fact of his vanishing was to them a proof that he was the Master himself. Most satisfying explanation, is it not? Next, we have a like hallucination coming over the whole

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 14.

² Luke xxiv. 25 seq.

³ Apostles, pp. 66, 67.

company of the apostles. On that same evening of Sunday, when they were assembled in a room with closed doors,

“During a moment of silence, some slight breath passed over the face of the assembly. At the same time that the breath was perceived, they fancied that they heard sounds. Some of them said that they had discerned the word *shalom*, happiness or peace. This was the ordinary salutation of Jesus, and the word by which he signified his presence. No possibility of doubt; Jesus is present; he is in the assembly. That is his cherished voice; each one recognizes it. Some pretended to have observed on his hands and his feet the mark of the nails, and on his side the mark of the spear which pierced him.”¹

In a similar way the author disposes of the appearance of Jesus to seven of his disciples at the sea of Galilee.² It is obvious to ask: What is the use of offering evidence to one whose mind is thus made up beforehand to set aside all evidence? Has Renan a shadow of proof for the historic reality of his explanations? No; they are only baseless assumptions. But it is with him an “absolute rule of criticism to deny a place in history to narratives of miraculous circumstances,” and therefore they must be set aside by the best hypothesis that offers itself, however destitute it may be of any foundation. The difference between him and Hume is this: Hume decides that a miracle wrought in the interest of any new system of religion is a cheat; and directs us not only to “reject the fact, but even reject it without further examination.” Renan agrees with Hume that such an alleged miracle is a cheat, but calls for evidence,³ with the purpose of setting it aside as fast as it is offered. He assumes that the primitive Christians were a company of heated enthusiasts who mistook visions and dreams for realities, simply because the facts narrated are supernatural. For, aside from this circumstance, no proof whatever exists that they were visionary men, but abundant proof to the

¹ Apostles, pp. 67, 68.

² John xxi.

Apostles, p. 74 seq.

³ Apostles, pp. 37, 38.

contrary. Their narratives have the costume of sober realities. They are calm, unimpassioned, and straightforward, without expatiating on the greatness of Christ's character and works, and the wickedness of his enemies, as is the way of all excited enthusiasts. To show who was the calm narrator, and who is the visionary dreamer, we have only to place side by side one of John's simple and circumstantial narratives and Renan's account of the same transaction.

JOHN.

"They went forth and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat about him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from land, but, as it were, two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and, for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread and giveth them, and fish likewise."¹

RENAN.

"On one occasion they had toiled all the night without taking a single fish. All on a sudden the nets are filled; this was a miracle. It seemed to them that some one had told them from the shore, 'Cast your nets to the right.' Peter and John looked at each other. 'It is the Lord,' said John. Peter, who was naked, hastily covered himself with his tunic, and jumped into the sea, that he might go and rejoin the invisible counsellor. At other times Jesus came to share their simple repasts. One day, when they had done fishing, they were surprised to find the coals lighted, with a fish upon the fire and some bread beside it. A lively recollection of their feasts in times past took possession of their minds; for the bread and the fish had always been essential characteristics of them. Jesus was in the habit of offering portions to them. They were persuaded, after their meal, that Jesus was seated at their side, and had presented them with these victuals, which had already become in their view eucharistic and holy. It was John and Peter, more than all the others, who had been favored with these intimate conversations with the well-beloved phantom. One day Peter, dreaming, perhaps (but why do I say this? Was not their life on these shores a perpetual dream?), thought that he heard Jesus ask him, 'Lovest thou me?'² etc.

The mythical hypothesis need not long detain us; since it is manifestly an invention in the interest of pure naturalism.

¹ John xxi. 3-13.² Apostles, pp. 74, 75.

The first thing that strikes us on hearing it propounded is its unnaturalness. Why, we ask, call these narratives myths? Have they not, in all respects, the dress and appearance of veritable history? Certainly they have; and men of plain, unsophisticated good sense have received them as such century after century. But then they record miraculous events, and it "is an absolute rule of criticism" — that is, rationalistic criticism — "to deny a place in history to narratives of miraculous circumstances." The mythical theory is accordingly propounded, because it is one way of eliminating from the Gospels their supernatural element. This is its only recommendation; while the objections to it are weighty and decisive. We will specify two of them:

It wholly fails to account for the mighty movement of the human mind connected with the introduction of Christianity; the most intense and persistent which history records. Myths, received as myths,—and, if the primitive disciples to whom they were propounded did not receive them as myths, but as true historic narratives, then their authors were impostors and deceivers,—myths, we say, received as myths, do not turn the world upside down, as did the preaching of Christ and his apostles. Myths do not inspire the souls of men and women by tens of thousands with heroic zeal and courage, enabling them steadfastly to endure persecution, torture, and death in defence of them. If the facts recorded in the Gospels are realities, we have an adequate explanation of the intense excitement which they produced, and which shook not only Judea, but the whole Roman empire to its centre. It was not love towards the mythical idea of a Saviour, but towards the veritable Son of God, crucified and risen in deed and in truth, that made the primitive Christians victorious alike over inward sinful affection and outward persecution. It would be too much to affirm that a belief must be in all cases well grounded that it may be powerful. What we are now insisting upon is its reality, not its reasonableness. The followers of Mohammed believed in his divine mission and in the sensuous

paradise which he promised to all the faithful. Philosophers, like Socrates, may die in the interest of a pure idea. But historic facts alone, with the eternal verities embodied in them in a comprehensible form, can warm the souls and elicit the energies of the masses.

Another objection to the mythical theory, as direct as it is fatal, is found in the position of the apostles in respect to our Lord's resurrection. In writing to the Corinthians on this very subject Paul affirms its historic reality in the strongest possible terms, and to crown all adds: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not."¹ Can any sane man doubt whether Paul believed in the historic reality of Christ's resurrection, or whether, in this particular, he represented the general belief of the apostles and primitive churches? But if the apostles taught the doctrine of our Lord's resurrection not as a myth, but as an objective fact — as in truth the great objective fact of the gospel — what becomes of the mythical hypothesis? It goes to its own place, to that "limbo of vanity" whither so many crude notions have already gone, or are on the way thither:

"Cows, hoods, and habits, with their wearers, tossed
And fluttered into rags; then relics, beads,
Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls,
The sport of winds."

Thus far we have been occupied with the character of the Gospel narratives and their authors. We have shown that they are not myths but veritable histories, written by honest and sober-minded men. But two important questions still remain: Were the circumstances of these authors and their relations to the facts which they record such as to enable them to give a correct account of them? and, Were the facts themselves of such a nature as to admit of full authentication?

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 14, 15.

The first of these questions, that which concerns the *competency* of these writers *as witnesses* to the facts recorded by them, has been mainly answered in our previous Article establishing the genuineness of the Gospel narratives.¹ If the authors of our four Gospels, instead of being apostles or associates of apostles, had lived and written after the apostolic age, they would not have been worthy of our full credence. But the genuineness of these records having been established, we have a strong presumption in favor of their credibility; for then the writers were in circumstances to know the certainty respecting the facts recorded by them. With regard to the apostles Matthew and John this matter need not be argued. Renan does indeed affirm that the Gospel of John "cannot be accepted as the echo of the thought of Jesus."

"The discourses which the fourth Gospel attributes to Jesus already contain a germ of theology. But these discourses being in contradiction with the synoptic Gospels, which represent without any doubt the primitive *logia*, they should be considered as elements of apostolic history, and not as material for the life of Jesus."²

"It is John the evangelist, or his school, who afterwards sought to prove that Jesus is the Word, and who created from this point of view an entirely new theology, very different from that of the kingdom of God."³

All baseless assumption; as if the discourses of our Lord recorded in the fourth Gospel, which bear in a pre-eminent degree the marks of historic truthfulness, as we propose to show presently, must be regarded as "in contradiction with the synoptic gospels" simply because the former goes further than the latter in unfolding the divinity of our Lord's person. It was in entire harmony with the character of the bosom-disciple, and his relations to Jesus, that he should remember and record those wonderful discourses of the Saviour which could not be so easily and naturally embodied in "the

¹ Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. xxvi (1869), p. 79 seq.

² Life of Jesus, p. 104, note.

³ Ibid. p. 225

primitive *logia*” as his miracles and discourses to the multitude.

As to the other two evangelists, Mark and Luke, the latter states very fairly the position which he occupied: “It seemed good to me also, having accurately traced out all things” (as the original signifies) “from the beginning, to write to thee in order,” etc.¹ Luke had in abundance the means of accurately tracing out all things relating to our Lord’s life and works; and he tells us that he made a good use of these means, obtaining his information from those who “from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.” The same is true of Mark also, whose relations to Paul as well as Peter are well known. No man, then, can reasonably disparage the testimony of the four evangelists on the ground that they were not in circumstances to know the truth respecting the facts which they record. As witnesses they were thoroughly competent.

We will next turn our attention to the character of the *facts themselves*, and the circumstances connected with them. Here we remark at the outset that it would be superfluous to examine in detail all the miracles recorded in the Gospels. Though they all proceeded alike from the divine agency, they are not all alike open to human inspection. Even Renan concedes that “if a single miracle had ever been proved, we could not reject in a mass all those of ancient history.”² If, then, we find, upon candid examination, that the supernatural origin of many of them is raised above all reasonable doubt, it is a reasonable inference that the rest of them had the same divine origin. We might with reason insist upon the miracles ascribed to our Lord within the sphere of inanimate nature; such as the conversion of water into wine, the feeding of many thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and walking upon the sea. But passing by these, let us consider some that were performed on the persons of men. Palsy, dropsy, withered limbs, blindness, the want of hearing and speech, leprosy, confirmed lunacy — all these

¹ Luke i. 1 seq.

² Apostles, p. 37.

maladies were as well known in their outward symptoms eighteen hundred years ago as they are to-day. Persons could not be afflicted with such evils for months and years in a corner. The neighbors must have known then, as certainly as neighbors do now, the particulars of such cases, and have been unexceptionable witnesses to their reality. When persons feign blindness or other infirmities, they go among strangers. No man can pass himself off as palsied, deaf and dumb, blind — especially as blind from birth — halt, or withered, in his own neighborhood. In all our communities we have more or less of such cases, and the reality of the maladies is beyond all question. Just so it was in the Saviour's day. If a man had been lying for months or years in a palsied condition, or had a withered arm, or was lame or blind from birth, the fact was known, not to one or two persons, but to the neighbors generally, and when they saw him instantaneously and perfectly restored at the Saviour's word, what room was there for doubt or delusion? Undoubtedly a case of feigned blindness or paralysis might be cleverly contrived in secret, and then the pretended patient exhibited in carefully arranged circumstances and suddenly healed. We may concede also that certain affections might be healed through the power of excited expectation. But when every kind of disease throughout a whole region is instantaneously and perfectly removed at the word of one man, no ground is left for denying the reality of the miracles. Now this is precisely what the Gospel narratives record of our Saviour: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sicknesses, and all manner of diseases among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them."¹ "And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they

¹ Matt. iv. 23, 24.

knew him ; and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch, if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him, were made whole.”¹ The immense number of our Lord’s miracles, their diversified character, and the fact that they were performed everywhere, as well without as with previous notice, very many of them too in the presence of the multitude in the most open and public manner — all these characteristics separate them wholly from the pretended feats of some who in modern times lay claim to miraculous power. These latter have always a select circle of wonders, the exhibition of which is restricted to particular places. No one of them would venture to undertake the cure of a man born blind, or that had a withered limb, or that had been a paralytic for scores of years ; much less to heal every diseased or disabled person that might be brought to him. But with Jesus of Nazareth there was no distinction of easy and difficult, since to his divine power nothing was hard.

It is with good reason that we lay special stress upon the fact that the Saviour performed many of his greatest miracles in the presence of his enemies, who had both the means and the will to institute a searching investigation concerning them, and who would have denied their reality had it been in their power to do so. “A miracle,” says Renan, “never takes place before an incredulous and sceptical public, the most in need of such a convincing proof. There is not a solitary exception to the rule that miracles are never produced before those who are able or permitted to discuss and criticise them.”² This is but an indirect way of saying that the authors of the Gospels were wilful deceivers ; for if we admit simply their honesty, Renan’s assertion is as far from the truth as it can possibly be. How was it in the case of the man with a withered hand, who was healed on the Sabbath

¹ Mark vi. 54-56.

² Apostles, pp. 37, 38.

day in the synagogue in the presence of the Pharisees, who, unable to deny the miracle, went out and held a council against Jesus how they might destroy him?¹ or of the woman who had been for eighteen years bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself; who was also healed in the synagogue on the Sabbath, when the ruler of the synagogue "answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, there are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day"??² or when "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them," and the chief priests and scribes, seeing the wonderful things that he did, were sore displeased?³ Sad indeed is the record of the perverse opposition and calumny of the Jewish rulers. But even this has its bright side. It shows us that the Saviour's miracles were "produced before those who" were both able and permitted "to discuss and criticise them," and that they could endure the severest scrutiny; that after every means which power, wealth, patronage, and official influence could command had been used for their disparagement, their divine origin still shone forth like the unclouded sun at noon-day. Let any one read attentively the ninth chapter of John's Gospel, which records the investigation instituted by the Jewish rulers respecting the healing of a man born blind, and he must be satisfied that in no modern court of justice was a question of fact ever subjected to a severer scrutiny. And the result was that they could not deny the miracle, but could only say: "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner." Nicodemus expressed the judgment of every fair-minded man when he said: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."⁴

An independent argument of transcendent power lies in the character and life of Jesus of Nazareth. The portraiture

¹ Matt. xii. 10 seq.

² Luke xiii. 11 seq.

³ Matt. xxi. 14, 15.

⁴ John iii. 2.

drawn of him by the four evangelists verifies itself. Of this a modern writer has said with equal beauty and force: "The character is possible to be conceived, because it was actualized in a living example."¹ Of the childhood of Jesus the same author says:

"If any writer, of almost any age, will undertake to describe, not merely a spotless, but a superhuman or celestial childhood, not having the reality before him, he must be somewhat more than human himself, if he does not pile together a mass of clumsy exaggerations, and draw and overdraw, till neither heaven nor earth can find any verisimilitude in the picture."²

Dr. Bushnell confirms his position by pertinent illustrations from the Rabbinical and apocryphal ideas of a superhuman childhood. All that he says holds good of the Saviour's manhood also. The portraiture proves the historic reality of the personage described. The character of Jesus is perfectly original. Nothing like it was ever conceived by the loftiest minds of antiquity. Nothing like it has appeared since his day. Far be it from us to attempt a eulogy of that which is so high above all human excellence. The sun shining in his strength needs no encomiums, and so it is with this glorious Sun of Righteousness. What is now to be said is not eulogy. It is part of an argument for the reality of the events recorded in the Gospel history. We propose to consider the evangelic portraiture in three particulars — the perfect humanity which it exhibits in Jesus of Nazareth, his originality and perfection as a teacher, and the originality of the ways in which he manifested his divine nature; to all which may well be added the manner itself of the portraiture.

First of all, let us look at our Lord's *perfect humanity* as presented by the evangelists. We are concerned now with

¹ Bushnell, "Nature and the Supernatural," p. 324.

² Bushnell, pp. 280, 281. The whole chapter on the character of Jesus contains a most convincing argument for the reality of the evangelic portraiture. Starting from the same fundamental position, that "the character is possible to be conceived because it was actualized in a living example," we propose to carry out the argument in several different lines of thought.

the human element in the Saviour's character ; but we must not forget that this can never be separated from the divine element, In him the human and the divine interpenetrate each other, so as to constitute together one indivisible and glorious whole. Jesus could not be, even in idea what he is as man, unless he were God also. And what he is as God, he is as God made flesh and dwelling as a man among men. It is the *God-man* which the Gospel narratives present to us. The true echo of "Ecce homo" is "Ecce Deus"; and of "Ecce Deus" is "Ecce homo." Nevertheless we can, for convenience of argument, speak now of the human, and now of the divine side ; although we are assured that the two belong inseparably and forever to one and the same Son of God. The perfection of our Lord, as a man, lies in the union in just proportion as well as in full measure, of all the qualities which constitute humanity ; so that the possession in perfect fulness of one attribute implies no deficiency in other attributes, and thus no one-sidedness of character. He has each and all the attributes of humanity in perfect harmony with each other.

Our Lord's *tranquillity* shines forth through the whole course of his ministry, and manifests itself alike in things great and small. He performs his mightiest works as one conscious that divine power belongs to him of right, and that the exercise of it in its very highest forms is nothing new or strange. In connection with his most stupendous miracles he calmly gives directions as respecting ordinary occurrences. When he has fed many thousands with a few loaves and fishes, he says : "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." When he has raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus, he commands "that something should be given her to eat." When he has called from the sepulchre one who had been dead four days, he directs that they should "loose him, and let him go." Even in Gethsemane, when oppressed with insupportable agony, his self-possession remains as perfect as his submission to his Father's will. That his serenity never left him for a moment during the process of

his arrest, trial, sentence, and crucifixion, is a truth which shines forth from the pages of the sacred narrative, like his own raiment on the mount of transfiguration, "white and glistening." Yet this deep composure of spirit is not that of stoicism or a cold temperament. It is the composure of an ardent soul, burning always with an intense flame of zeal for the glory of God and good will towards men; of a spirit moved with womanly tenderness in view of human suffering. It unites in full measure *tranquillity and fervor*.

This leads us naturally to notice the combination in our Lord's character of *tenderness and severity*. He opened his ministry at Nazareth, by reading from the prophecy of Isaiah the portraiture of his own character: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."¹ For penitents he had only words of kindness and comfort. Towards the infirmities and mistakes of his sincere disciples he was wonderfully forbearing. Yet this tender and compassionate man, who took little children in his arms and blessed them; who said to the widow of Nain: Weep not, and wept himself at the grave of Lazarus; this same Jesus of Nazareth could denounce with withering severity the scribes and Pharisees in the presence of all the people. He who said: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," said also in the self-same hour: "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell."² There are some in these modern days who write and preach as if the gospel were all good nature, and had no stern side. Such teachers strangely forget that the most severe denunciations of hypocrisy and wickedness contained in the New Testament, and the most awful descriptions of the future punishment of the impenitent fell from the Saviour's own lips. In the tenderness of Christ, as in the

¹ Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

² Matt. xi. 20 seq.

love of the gospel which he preached, there is no element of weakness.

Of the Saviour's perfect *wisdom* it would be superfluous to speak. There shines through it a superhuman element, a capacity to discern at once men's inmost thoughts. Yet, it is, in its manifestations, pre-eminently human; a wisdom that adapts itself instantly to the circumstances in which it is placed, and speaks and acts accordingly. Our Lord was surrounded by crafty adversaries, who contrived all manner of plans "how they might entangle him in his talk." Yet his wisdom was never for a moment at fault. In the twinkling of an eye he turned their stratagems against themselves, and put them to shame before the multitude. The point to be especially insisted on here is the union of this wisdom with perfect *sincerity and truthfulness*. Not the slightest trace of deceit or cunning artifice appears in his ministry from first to last. No stain of hypocrisy could possibly be fastened on his spotless character. Were a man found perverse enough to make the attempt,

" The ethereal mould,
Incapable of stain, would soon expel
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire
Victorious."

Wisdom in the sphere of practical life takes the form of *prudence*. In our Lord's character this quality was harmoniously blended with *boldness*. Though he feared no man and shrunk from no peril, he never needlessly encountered opposition and danger. He was never bold for the purpose of making a display of boldness. Again and again he withdrew himself from his enemies. Not until the time had come that he should die for the sins of the world did he expose himself to their rage. Then he went boldly into Jerusalem at the head of his disciples. Throughout his ministry he perfectly exemplified his own precept: "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

Our Lord described himself as "meek and lowly in heart,"¹

¹ Matt. xi. 29.

and his *meekness and humility* shine forth with serene brightness through all his words and actions. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."¹ Certainly no one could have conceived beforehand that if a messenger from God should come making loftier claims than were ever advanced by man or angel, he would appear as one "meek and lowly in heart." How can one, he would ask, who claims not only outward power over nature, but inward power over the human spirit here and hereafter, come to men with childlike meekness and humility? But in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth the great problem was solved. He asserted, in a way as steadfast and persistent as it was calm, his absolute control over the destinies of all men. On the way to the grave of Lazarus he affirmed: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he die yet shall he live:² and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me shall never die."³ Yet when we read the account of such amazing claims, which no archangel would dare to lisp, we have no feeling that they were incongruous or presumptuous. The only possible explanation is, that this meek and lowly Jesus made good his claim to be the Son of God by what he was and by what he did. Invent such a blending of perfect meekness with the quiet assumption of all power in heaven and earth! Away with the absurd supposition! To have been described it must have been seen in actual life.

Another very conspicuous quality in our Lord's character is his perfect *elevation above this world*. His own precept to his disciples: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," was the law of his inner life. He had no treasures here below but the souls of men; and these are not earthly, but heavenly treasures. In him "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" could find no place for a single moment. He kept the world always and perfectly under

¹ 1 Peter ii. 23.² Gr. *καὶ ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται*.³ John xi. 25, 26.

his feet. Yet his heavenly mind was free from every *tinge of asceticism*; and this is the point that deserves special attention. Many attempts have been made to portray the idea of a perfect man. The perfect man of heathen writers lived and moved wholly in the sphere of worldly interests. He wanted, to say nothing of other defects, the element of a heavenly temper of mind. He had, in truth, no conception of the scriptural precept: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." The perfect man of the Mediæval ages, on the other hand, sought to rise above the world by running away from it into some desert or monastery. He wanted the true scriptural conception of overcoming the world while we stay in it, and meet its responsibilities. He knew no better way than to take an austere and frowning attitude towards all worldly enjoyments. Coarse fare, hair shirts, and other penances of human invention, were his way to "mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts." But the heavenly mind of Jesus was free from all stoicism or asceticism. He made no war upon the genuine passions and affections of humanity, but subjected them all to his higher spiritual nature; in other words, to the divine law. Except temporarily for meditation and prayer, he never withdrew himself, nor encouraged his disciples to withdraw themselves, from the cares and temptations of active life. He fasted on certain emergencies, but not systematically like the scribes and Pharisees, nor did he enjoin systematic fasting upon his disciples. He lived among men, ate and drank with them, and made no show of austerity. His heavenly mind lay not in the renunciation of God's gifts, but in maintaining his affections constantly raised above the gifts themselves to the divine Giver. His heavenly mind, therefore, like all his other human qualities, was imitable, and is propounded to all for imitation. His virtues are not the virtues of a king on his throne, or a philosopher in his school, or a monk in his cell; but of a man moving among men in the sphere of common life, and filling out common life with all the duties appropriate to it. They are therefore available for the imi-

tation of all classes of men. We may boldly affirm that such a character as that of Jesus of Nazareth could never have been conceived of had it not actually existed.

Looking next at our Lord's *character as a teacher*, the first fact that strikes us is his perfect elevation above the errors and prejudices not only of his own age and nation, but of all ages and all nations. He saw intuitively and perfectly what God is, what man is, and what are man's relations to God and to his fellow-men. He was therefore able to establish a religion for men, as men, that needs no change for any age, nation, or condition of life. Educated among the common people, he had no special human training. He lived in an age of narrowness and formalism. The scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses's seat, had covered up the true meaning and spirit of the Old Testament beneath a mass of human traditions. Yet, in such an age, Jesus is described to us as coming forth a perfect Teacher of divine truth; as sweeping away at once the glosses of the Jewish doctors, unfolding to the people the true meaning of the law and the prophets, and giving to the world a religion that meets the wants of all classes and conditions of men in all ages and nations; a religion that needs no amendment or change, but remains from century to century adequate to the wants of all men, adapted to humanity as the air is to the lungs and the light to the eyes. Here is a mighty fact that must have some basis of reality. If we accept the Saviour's own explanation, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me,"¹ we have an adequate account of it; and no other account is possible. The primitive Christians, with their narrow Jewish prejudices — the unmistakable manifestations of which appear all along the line of the evangelic narratives — could never have conceived of such a universal religion as that described in the Gospels unless it had actually existed; and it could not have existed without God for its Author. Gifted men may be in advance of their own age; that is, they may see before

¹ John vii. 16.

others what is the next thing indicated by the progress of society. But no gifts, short of true objective inspiration, will lift a man at once and perfectly above all the errors and prejudices of the age in which he has been born and educated into the region of absolute light and truth. All the work that men do is imperfect, and needs emendation at the hand of those who come after them. But the religion of Christ, when freed from human additions, and received in its original purity, is all that our fallen humanity needs. Considered as the good leaven which God has cast into the lump of this world, the gospel has continual progress;¹ but, considered as a system of doctrines and duties revealed for our salvation, it can have no progress, for it is perfect. A religion that thus remains from age to age adapted to the wants of man, as man, must be from God.

Thus far we have considered the *matter* of our Lord's teaching. If we look to the *manner*, that is perfectly original, and has all the marks of a historic reality that could be described because it had been witnessed. Perhaps the most striking fact concerning it is that the Saviour saw through the world of nature and of mind at a glance, apprehended it perfectly in its relations to God and man, and therefore had it always ready at hand to furnish him with illustrations and arguments—illustrations and arguments as simple and natural as they were profound and comprehensive, and by means of which he unfolded the deepest truths in the plainest and most intelligible forms. Teaching by parables, without any false analogies, and in a way that interested and instructed alike the learned and the ignorant, this was a wonderful characteristic of his ministry. It is a very noticeable fact that no one of his apostles, not even the bosom-disciple, attempted to imitate him in this particular. They who heard him open his mouth in parables felt instinctively that here he was inimitable; and they manifested true reverence in refraining from a work which they could only have travestied. The more we study our Lord's manner

¹ Matt. xiii. 33.

of teaching, so fresh and varied, and yet so like itself from beginning to end, so interwoven with the daily incidents and surroundings of his life, so full of minute, characteristic touches growing immediately out of present occasions, the more must we be satisfied that the possibility of the description has for its basis the reality of the thing described.

Let us now turn our attention to the *divine side* of our Lord's character. On the fact that his mission was from God we need not dwell. If there is one truth asserted by him more fully than any other, it is this. "The works," said he, "which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."¹ "I am not come of myself; but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him; for I am from him, and he hath sent me."² "If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me."³ But it is not on the divine mission of Jesus that we now propose to dwell, but upon the manifestations which he made of his divine personality. We assert that these are, if possible, more original than anything else in his history, and bear in themselves the impress of reality. Let us suppose that a company of men — and here it is a company of illiterate Jews — have formed the conception of a Divine Being uniting Deity with humanity, and that they sit down, whether together or separately, to draw the portraiture. Doubtless they would put into his lips many direct assertions of his divinity, and make his life abound with stupendous miracles. These would constitute the staple materials of their proof. It is not likely that they would introduce in a pure and simple way incidents apparently inconsistent with his Deity. If they brought them in at all, it would be with a superabundance of explanations. But it is in no such crude way that our Saviour's divinity manifests itself in the Gospel narratives. It is true, indeed, that in the manner of his miracles he makes everywhere the impression that he performs them

¹ John v. 36.

² John vii. 28, 29.

³ John viii. 42.

by virtue of a power residing in himself. In this respect there is a sharp contrast between his manner and that of the prophets before him and the apostles after him. In the case of these men the power, as well as the commission, came from God, and they were careful to impress this fact upon the beholders: "O Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again"¹; "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk"²; "Encas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole."³ Yet, even here, it is worthy of particular notice that, when the authors of the Gospels introduce any incident or remark implying our Lord's subordination to the Father, such as his prayer at the grave of Lazarus,⁴ or his declaration: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"⁵; or this: "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I,"⁶ they add not a word of explanation; a convincing proof that they are not prepossessed with any favorite idea, but are seeking simply to tell what our Lord said and did. Meanwhile the divine nature of our Lord's person shines forth from the Gospel narratives in ways as original as they are indirect, and which transcend all power of human invention.

He calls *God his Father* in a peculiar and incommunicable sense. In the form of prayer given for the use of his disciples, he said: "Our Father"; but he never classes himself with other men in such a way that he can say "Our Father," as one of them. His words are always "My Father," showing that he stands alone in this relation to God, and is the "Son of God," also, in the same peculiar and incommunicable sense. And the divine fulness of meaning that dwells in these two correlative terms, "my Father" and "the Son of God," he himself brings out in his discussions with the unbelieving Jews. As the Son of God, he has the same nature with the Father, and, though

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 21.² Acts iii. 6.³ Acts ix. 34.⁴ John xi. 41, 42.⁵ John xiv. 10.⁶ John xiv. 28.

acting, as he is everywhere careful to state, under his commission and authority, the same prerogatives also. As the Son of God, he claims the right and power to do whatever the Father does, and to receive the same honor as the Father. His vindication of himself for exercising divine power on the Sabbath-day is simply this: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The Jews rightly understood this to be an assertion of his equality with the Father; for they "sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father,¹ making himself equal with God." To this the Saviour answers: "The Son can do nothing of himself" — acting in his own name and without the concurrence of the Father's will, — "but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth; and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who sent him."² Through these wonderful words two great truths run side by side. The first is that Jesus does nothing of himself, that is, acting in his own name. He comes to men under the Father's commission to do the work which the Father has committed to him. What this work is he knows with absolute certainty; for the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth." This is manifestly a representation, under human modes of conception, of the high truth elsewhere stated, that the Son dwells from eternity in the Father's bosom, and therefore knows all his counsels³ — a truth on which our Lord insists very earnestly and fully, lest any one should think that his actions could be at variance with the will of God. The second

¹ Gr. *πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ*.² John v. 17-23.³ John i. 1, 18; xvii. 5-24.

truth is that, though subordinate to the Father in office, he is *equal to the Father in power and glory*. He shares all the Father's counsels, and does all the Father's works—two things that imply omniscience and omnipotence. He is thus qualified to judge the world; and the Father has accordingly committed all judgment to the Son. And because the Son is equal to the Father in power and glory, and has the destinies of all men in his hands, all men are required to honor the Son as they honor the Father. If these words do not contain an assumption of divinity, it cannot be made in human language. The point, however, on which we are now insisting, is not so much the claim of divinity, as the unique character of the way in which the claim is made good. Where, we ask, in the whole compass of human literature, can a passage be found more grandly original, and bearing more fully in every part the impress of historic reality? It could be written by the evangelist, because it is a plain, unvarnished record of what took place in his hearing; but it is far above the reach of one writing from his own invention.

Again: the Saviour represents himself as the *Light and Life* of all mankind. "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."¹ "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."² "I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."³ "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."⁴ In comparison with what he here claims for himself, the outward work of giving sight to the physically blind and raising to life the physically dead, dwindles into nothing. Our Lord's miracles were only the seals of his divine mission. But the giving of light and life, light and life spiritual and eternal, is the work itself of his mission. The resurrection of Lazarus,

¹ John viii. 12.² John xii. 46.³ John vi. 51.⁴ John viii. 51.

stupendous as was that exercise of divine power, does not fill us with such awe and amazement as the mighty words addressed to Martha on the way to the sepulchre: "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."¹ In this and other like declarations, he does, as it were, draw aside the veil of his humanity, and give us a bright glimpse of the Godhead that dwells within him. In his spiritual character, as the Redeemer of the world, he is transfigured to the eyes of our understanding, even as his body was transfigured to the natural eyes of the disciples on the holy mount. Utterances like these, so calm, so lofty, so original, do not sound like the inventions of idealists. They wear the costume of heavenly realities. When we read them, we feel assured that the only explanation of their existence in the Gospel narratives is their historic truth. The bosom disciple could record them because he had heard them.

In another kindred class of passages the Saviour asserts his *inward dominion over the human spirit*. "Come unto me," he stands and proclaims to weary, suffering humanity, "all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."² "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you."³ The world gives rest and peace at the best outwardly, and too often only in empty words. But Jesus of Nazareth lays claim to the power of giving rest and peace inwardly and directly. A part of this work lies in the forgiveness of sin, which he claims as his prerogative, because "what things soever" the Father "doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." Another part of this work lies in revealing himself inwardly to his disciples as an all-sufficient Saviour, and thus shedding abroad in their hearts "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." This he does because he has direct access to the inmost fountains of feeling, and can give rest and peace inwardly and efficaciously. Before his outward presence

¹ John xi. 25.

² Matt. xi. 28.

³ John xiv. 27.

in this world sorrow fled away. He turned into songs of joy the tears of the widow of Nain, by raising her son to life. But far more glorious is his inward presence, by which he says to the troubled spirit: "Weep not," and makes it victorious over all "the sufferings of this present time." "These things," said he, "I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."¹ He overcomes the world, not outwardly alone, but within the hearts of believers; and this is the office of Deity. The apostles, in the name of their Master, raised the dead to life. But no apostle could have ventured to say: "In me ye shall have peace." The words contain in themselves an assumption of divinity which is perfectly original; and they verify themselves as a true historic record.

The idea of the *mutual indwelling* of our Lord and his disciples is peculiar to the gospel. The Saviour himself introduced it, and from his lips it passed to the church. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me" — *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ*, in a state of separation from me, like a branch cut off from the vine — "ye can do nothing."² Here we have in all its fulness the idea, so perfectly original with the Saviour, of a *vital union* between himself and the soul of each believer, through which the latter receives strength and growth and fruitfulness in the Christian life. Hence comes the expression, so frequent in the Pauline Epistles, of being "in Christ Jesus," and the favorite form of speech used by the beloved disciple, "dwelling in God, or in Christ, and he in us." The very idea implies Deity. The Jews regarded Moses with the highest reverence; but no one of them ever spoke, or could have spoken, of dwelling in Moses and having Moses dwelling in himself. Had any Christian disciple represented himself

¹ John xvi. 33.

² John xv. 4, 5, and the context.

as dwelling in Paul or Peter, and the apostle in himself, the language would have been justly regarded as blasphemous.

Let, now, any candid man consider these indirect, but efficacious, ways in which our Lord manifested his divinity, and other like ways that might be specified — all of them so original, so majestic, and so simple, and yet all of them so far removed from anything that could have occurred to one sitting down to draw from his own imagination the portraiture of a divine person — and he must be convinced that such a record as that contained in our four canonical Gospels was possible only because it is a simple and truthful record of what Jesus said and did. Plain men can give a straightforward account of what they have themselves witnessed or learned from eye-witnesses. But it transcends the genius of any man to invent such narratives of such a character.

We say such narratives, for *the manner of the portraiture* should be taken into account, as well as the picture itself. The Gospel narratives are marked throughout by artless simplicity. It is not by labored attempts to give a high ideal of perfect humanity in union with Deity that the evangelists have been so successful in presenting to us the wondrous portraiture, but by simply stating the facts in the sincerity of truth. Each writer goes straight forward with his story, never thinking for a moment of what his own genius is to accomplish, intent only on exhibiting to the world his Lord and Master as he was in his daily intercourse with men. The character described possesses supreme excellence and loveliness, not through the author's consummate genius, but because of his faithful adherence to historic truth; and because this divine person is a living and glorious reality he possesses from age to age an undying power over every heart that receives him. Love towards him is the mightiest principle on earth, for suffering, as well as for doing. It makes the soul of which it has taken full possession invincible. When Jesus of Nazareth is enthroned in

the human heart, not all the powers of earth and hell can overcome it.

Standing, now, upon the position that the Gospel narratives are an authentic record of facts, it follows that in the person and life of our Saviour we have a *supernatural revelation* from God to man, in the fullest sense of the words. That his origin was supernatural the Gospels teach in explicit terms, and that in two respects. He existed from eternity with the Father, before his appearance on earth in human nature, and his human nature was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary. If one admits the former of these propositions, it would seem as if he could have no interest in denying the second, which is in such harmony with it; and he can deny neither, without falsifying the record or rejecting it as untrue. "I came forth from the Father," he says, "and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father";¹ "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."² The account of his supernatural conception and birth is given us by two of the evangelists. And because he was a divine person — God manifest in the flesh — his supernatural power manifested itself wherever he went. His pre-existence with the Father from eternity, his incarnation through the miraculous power of God, and his divine works — all these cohere as parts of one self-consistent whole. The miraculous element is so wrought into the very substance of the Gospel history that it can never be separated from it. The Gospel is, in truth, a supernatural warp into which is woven a woof of human history. The attempt to eliminate from it the miraculous element is simply an attempt to take out of the web the entire warp without destroying it. Far more logical would it be to cast the web aside in its entirety. And why all this persistent endeavor to set aside the supernatural from human history? If there is a personal God, who is before nature, above nature, and the free author of nature, he can,

¹ John xvi. 28.

² John xvii. 5.

if he chooses, manifest himself immediately in supernatural ways within the sphere of nature. And why should men affirm so stoutly, without the ability to prove their affirmation, that it can never be consistent with his infinite wisdom and goodness to do so? If our Father in heaven cares for us, why should it seem to any one incredible that he may reveal himself to us in supernatural forms, when the end is our deliverance from the bondage of sin, and our preparation for an eternity of holiness and happiness. To deny this is to make nature the highest end of God — to put the world of God's intelligent moral subjects under nature, instead of making nature their servant and minister. We do not assume *a priori* that God must have made a supernatural revelation to men; but we take the Gospel narratives as proof of the fact that he has made such a revelation; and we say to the philosopher of Renan's school: How came you to know that miracles, in the proper sense of the word, are incredible? You do not know it. You only put assertion for proof; and it is too much to ask us, on the strength of your unfounded assumption, to reject these Gospel narratives that come to us with all the marks of historic verities.

Aside from the supernatural character of the events recorded in the Gospels, the *objections* that can be urged against them are reduced to a very small residuum coming under the two heads of *dogmatic* and *historic*. Those of the first class relate to *doctrines*: those, for example, concerning demons and demoniacal possessions, eternal punishment, etc. Here the only reasonable rule is to argue from the certainty of the record to the truth of the doctrines, and not the reverse. He who first assumes that a certain doctrine cannot be true, and then sets himself to the work of invalidating the record which contains it, exalts his own finite understanding to be the supreme arbiter of truth, and to him an authoritative revelation becomes an impossibility. We have, indeed, certain primitive intuitions which lie at the foundation of all knowledge; such, for example, as the immutable obligation that rests on all men to be just, benevolent, and truthful.

There are certain moral axioms, also, which shine by their own light ; like the fundamental truth of theology announced by the apostle : " God is light ; and in him is no darkness at all." We are sure that no revelation from God, when properly interpreted, can contradict any such necessary and universal conviction. But there are many weighty truths that lie altogether above the sphere of our finite understandings, respecting which we are dependent upon God's judgment, in whatever way made manifest to us. Unless we take the Sadducean ground of denying the existence of all created spiritual being that lies beyond the apprehension of our material senses, and therefore say " that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit,"¹ we cannot, with any show of reason, reject the scriptural doctrine that there are myriads of finite intelligences invisible to our bodily eyes, yet having in some way access to our spirits, and power to exert upon them influences good or evil. Nor until we know not only the inmost essence of man's material-spiritual nature in all the interactions of its composite parts, but also the inmost essence of the nature belonging to these invisible spiritual beings, can we deny that, under certain conditions of the human subject, bodily and mental, they may gain an overmastering control of his spirit ; or, in scriptural phraseology, take possession of it, and bring it into a state analogous to that of lunacy, if not identical with it. That God should allow to these impure spirits such liberty is a mystery. But it has its parallel in what we see among men, where the wicked deceive and corrupt the ignorant and unwary. Doubtless God is infinitely wise, powerful, and good. Yet under his administration of human affairs, wicked men are allowed great power and scope, at least for a season. The expostulation of the Psalmist : " Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph ? How long shall they utter and speak hard things, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves ? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and

¹ Acts xxiii. 8.

the stranger, and murder the fatherless,"¹ has not become obsolete in this world, nor even in some parts of these United States. Why deny the extension of the same broad principle of liberty to the world of unseen intelligences? An endless development awaits God's moral government. Its issues run on into eternity, and it will require eternity that we finite beings may intelligibly comprehend them.

These suggestions are pre-eminently applicable to the doctrine of endless rewards and penalties. When we read the awful declaration: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life,"² we find it exceedingly difficult for us to think of anything but the woe of the lost spirit down the long line of eternity. The infinite interests of God's moral government are so above our comprehension that we practically lose sight of them. But God, who dwells in eternity, and comprehends eternity, and has established his moral government for eternity, understands what are the right principles for such an everlasting government—a government, let it be remembered over free responsible beings; and he will administer this moral government in accordance with these principles, even though it should involve the endless sinfulness and misery of some. We invert the right process of judgment, when we decide beforehand that God cannot sentence the wicked to endless punishment, and then set ourselves at work to eliminate this doctrine from the New Testament. The only reasonable mode of procedure is to inquire what Christ and his apostles taught on this momentous question.

The *historic* objections alleged against the Gospel narratives rest largely on false assumptions respecting their true character. If each of them professed to give a full history of our Lord's life and works arranged in chronological order, we might with more show of reason array them against each other. But now that each of the evangelists has given us

¹ Psalm xciv. 3-5.

² Gr. *eis κόλασιν αἰώνιον* and *eis ζωὴν αἰώνιον*, Matt. xxv. 46. The two expressions are the exact counterparts of each other in form as well as in meaning.

only a selection from the incidents of the Saviour's life and teachings, often without regard — certainly without strict regard — to the chronological order of events, they cannot be reasonably held responsible for a work which they never attempted. How far circumstantial variations are admissible in narratives of the same transaction is a question intimately connected with that of inspiration, and which will, therefore, be discussed in another place. At present we stand not on the ground of the inspiration of the record, but simply on that of the credibility of the evangelic narratives, judging them as we do any other writings. Viewing them from this position we find in them no discrepancies that affect a single doctrine or duty of Christianity. The disagreements, whether real or alleged, relate, not to the substance of the things recorded, but to incidental matters, such as the time and order of the events, the accompanying circumstances, etc. Had we all the missing links of the evangelic history, we might be able to reconcile these differences. But without them it is, in some cases at least, impossible. Nor is it necessary; since, where different writers record the same transactions, substantial agreement with diversity in respect to details is everywhere the characteristic mark of authentic history.

We propose to devote another Article to the consideration of the *Sequel to the Gospel Narratives*; that is, to the writings which naturally grew out of the facts recorded in them. The way will then be prepared to discuss the momentous question of the *Inspiration of the Record*.