

## ARTICLE III.

CHRIST, A CREATION, OR THE CREATOR OF CHRISTIANITY.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REVEREND AVERY A. SHAW.

MODERN biblical criticism of the anti-supernatural kind, having finished its work on the Old Testament Scriptures and claimed its indemnity, now turns to the New Testament writings. It is natural to suppose that the logic of events would lead to this. If there is no supernatural revelation in the Old Testament, why should we expect to find one in the New? By the very necessity of the case we are called now to see these same principles rigidly applied to the church's most priceless possession. Men who can look calmly on while the surgeon amputates an arm or leg, begin to catch their breath and grow concerned when the knife, in a hand not too delicate, approaches the region of the heart.

We might with a degree of composure watch a readjustment of the books of the Old Testament, and even be willing to believe that Paul did not write all the epistles ascribed to him, or that Second Peter was not genuine. There is a different feeling, however, when we are told that the Gospels were not written by eye-witnesses, but are the production of a later age; that they were written for dogmatic purposes, and reflect as much the thought and tendencies of the age in which they were written as that of which they profess to speak. The forces of hostile criticism have hitherto confined their attacks to the outposts of our faith, and we have had but little fear, feeling secure from assault within the citadel. Whether the out-

posts have been taken or not, we need not pause to ask. One thing is sure: the assault is now concentrated upon the sacred head of Christ, and the attack is keen and fierce. The question now becomes not one of dates, or of authorship; not a question of a creed or even of a church; but whether we are any longer to believe in a Christ who is God as well as man, and the Redeemer of men.

This attack is being developed not by hostile forces from without who have enmity against Christ or the church, but by pastors of evangelical churches, and professors in evangelical schools, who still hold to a belief in Christ's goodness and the lofty character of his teachings; who believe they are building a more reasonable and substantial foundation for a Christian faith.

For the sake of our own faith, and for the faith of the church, these men must be met. And we cannot be too thankful that it is not a conflict into which only experts can enter. Otherwise but few of us would feel competent to engage in it. It is a conflict into which every one who has looked into the face of the living Christ, and heard his voice, is called.

There are but two lines along which we are to look for an explanation of the facts of Christianity: On the one hand, that the historic Christ had merely human stature, and his disciples magnified that figure into ideal, supernatural, divine proportions, until they created the Jesus of the Gospels and the object of the Christian faith; or, on the other hand, that Jesus was all that the Gospels claim for him,—a supernatural person, God manifest in the flesh, the author of the Christian faith, and the foundation of the Christian church. In other words, is the Christ portrayed in the Gospels a creation of Christianity or its Creator? It is difficult for the untutored mind to see why the first of these alternatives "should be considered more critical or free from historical difficulties!"

That it is a clear issue between these two alternatives is further attested by the many futile attempts of late to establish a *modus vivendi* between the two positions. A single illustration may suffice. In Harnack's "What is Christianity," rare as it is in ability, fervent in tone, and apparently honoring to our Lord, we have in the last analysis a Christianity without Christ. This is hinted in his definition of Christianity: "*Eternal Life in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God.*" It is frankly declared in a central passage in the chapter on Christology: "*It is no paradox, and neither is it rationalism, but the simple expression of the actual position as it lies before us in the Gospels; not the Son, but the Father only has a place in the Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it.*" If this is not a paradox, and if it is not rationalism, can we call it Christianity?

The extreme radicals are the quickest to notice the fallacy of such efforts at mediation. One of these men, Mackintosh, author of "The Natural History of the Christian Religion," makes short work of those who, while not denying the possibility of miracles, yet hold that only an overwhelming amount of evidence can support them; and these by their attitude toward evidence show that after all they are unwilling to believe in a miracle in any case.

One great value of such works as that of Mackintosh is to clarify the issue: Did Christianity produce Christ? or did Christ produce Christianity?

I. Let us consider the first of these alternatives, and, so far as possible, let its supporters speak for themselves.

One is naturally shocked, apparently to find Bruce in this school, and cannot but hope that there may be some explanation less creditable to his editors than to him, whom we have learned to honor for his devotion to Christ. There is, however, a tone in the article on "Jesus" in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* that is difficult of satisfactory ex-

planation. Dr. Bruce uses as the basis of his article only the synoptists, and of them only certain portions: "The narrative common to Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the discourses common to Matthew and Luke, may with a considerable measure of confidence be regarded as a trustworthy tradition concerning the ministry of Jesus." Of the alleged miracles he says: "There is one thing about which we may have comfortable certainty; whether miraculous or not, whether the works of a mere man or one who is a man and more, the healing acts are a revelation of the love of Jesus, a manifestation of his enthusiasm for humanity." Of the story of the passion he says: "Even in its most historic version, it is not pure truth, but truth mixed with doubtful legend." "The words of Jesus concerning *the future* show limitations of vision. In other directions we may discover indications that he was the child of his times and people." He closes his summary of the events of Jesus' life in these words: "And ended a brief but extraordinary career by suffering crucifixion."

As already intimated, by far the ablest and most thorough of this school is James Moffat,<sup>1</sup> a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. He starts out with the assertion that in historical writings there is a double reference, contemporary and retrospective. "The conception of Jesus in the Gospels represents not only the historical likeness so far as its traits have been preserved in the primitive evangelic tradition, but also the religious interests of the age in which and for which these narratives were originally drawn up." "In their present form the synoptic Gospels are not the work of men who were originally disciples of Jesus. They, with their Jewish habits and Christian hopes, were evidently ill adapted for a task which rightly fell to the activity and insight of a later generation, whose very position of remoteness turned out

<sup>1</sup>The Historical New Testament.

to be in some respects a vantage ground for the appraising of the past." The Gospels were written with a distinctly didactic aim. "This did not necessarily involve any deliberate looseness in reporting the facts of history; but it seemed to have fostered methods of adapting or creating narrative according to the predominating tendency of the oriental mind to cast argument and counsel in the form of stories." He mentions three influences at work in shaping the miraculous narratives: "(a) The influence of similar Old Testament stories, which naturally prompted the disciples to imitate them as they recorded the life and wonders of the Lord. (b) The translation of metaphor into fact, or parable into the clothing of external reality, as in the story of the cursing of the fig tree. And (c) the exaggeration into wonders of what were quite natural occurrences. However such phenomena be estimated, they are not intelligible unless the writings are set in their true place as influenced by the didactic and dogmatic aims of a later age."

In other words, according to Moffat, the writers of the Gospels saw Jesus through a mist, and in order to get back to the historic Jesus that mist must be dispelled.

Moffat's conclusions are not easily misunderstood: The Christ of the Gospels is the Jesus of history embellished into a superhuman person by devout and naïve (a favorite word of Moffat's) disciples for didactic ends.

According to Schmiedel,<sup>1</sup> the general fabric of the Gospels is utterly incredible. The stories of miracles are rejected with contempt. There is no room for the Incarnation, the Resurrection and Ascension. The existence of Jesus as a man is only admitted. That he was more than man, or was sinless, is flatly denied. There are, according to Schmiedel, nine absolutely credible passages,<sup>2</sup> such as

<sup>1</sup> Ency. Bib., art. "Gospels."

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 5; xii. 31 (Matt. xxvii. 46; Mark xv. 56); Mark iii. 21; vi. 5; viii. 12, 14-21; x. 17; xiii. 32.

Christ's words to the rich young ruler, "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God." "Whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him," and the passage which tells of his refusal to work signs. They are all such as may be construed into an emphasis mainly on the human side of Christ's being. Schmiedel's explanation of his choice of these passages is interesting. "These passages might be called the foundation pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus. Should the idea suggest itself that they have been sought out with partial intent, as proofs of the human against the divine character of Jesus, the fact at all events cannot be set aside, that they exist in the Bible and demand our attention. In reality, however, they prove not only that in the person of Jesus we have to do with a completely human being. They also prove that he really did exist and that the Gospels contain at least some absolutely trustworthy facts concerning him. If passages of this kind were wholly wanting, it would be impossible to convince the skeptic that any historical value whatever was to be assigned to the Gospels. He would be in a position to declare the picture of Jesus contained in them to be purely a work of fantasy, and could remove the person of Jesus from the field of history."

In a word, Schmiedel's position is that of the most thoroughgoing rationalism. He starts out on the ground that a supernatural revelation is incredible, if not impossible. Any alleged miracle that cannot be explained by the latest research of science is fiction. He applies this principle to the Gospels. His mind is made up as to what he can accept and what he must reject; and it does not astonish us that he reaches his conclusions. A man may reach any conclusion he wishes, provided only that he may have a free hand in constructing his premises.

There has probably not been a more exhaustive and

careful application of these principles to the Gospels in recent times, than that of William Mackintosh in the work already referred to, "The Natural History of the Christian Religion" (1894).

His argument may be summarized thus: Modern thought holds in the form of scientific conviction that the universe is governed by inscrutable laws inherent in nature and the constitution of things, which can never be reversed, never suspended, and never supplemented in the interests of any special object whatever. "God's control over human affairs is exercised solely through law, and that law itself acknowledges no control." The supernatural element did not enter into the development of Christianity, but faith in the supernatural grew up side by side with Christianity as its easiest explanation, and was introduced into the record. Hence the New Testament, which tells of the supernatural origin of Christianity, cannot be accepted as an authentic, but only as a symbolic or ideal, record of its origin. We are to get at the facts of the life and words of Jesus (and here we see not only Schmiedel's, but Moffat's, method) much as the literature of the Egyptians and Assyrians is recalled, i. e., by removing the accumulated dust and rubbish of ages. "In a short period of exceptionally active religious excitement, partly the cause and partly the effect of the report of the resurrection of Jesus, his sayings were vermicularly overlaid by pious credulities and mythicizing fancies more effectually than were those ancient remains [i. e., of Assyria and Egypt] by the dust of ages."

Evidently, then, when we begin to explain Christianity as a purely natural product, we must accustom ourselves, as Mackintosh puts it, "to a somewhat free treatment of the records."

Mackintosh and Schmiedel are frank and outspoken, and find Christ a creation of Christianity. They are

rationalists through and through. And though less frank in expression, and following a different method, Moffat reaches the same conclusion. In considering these positions, several thoughts suggest themselves.

1. These men have discovered nothing new: they are reproducing for a later age the conclusions of Strauss, Baur, and Renan. In the works of those earlier critics there is the underlying presumption against the supernatural,—the exclusion of all portions of the Gospel narrative which cannot be explained on purely natural grounds; the evangelic Christ, a creation of the church for dogmatic purposes; and the historic Christ, a purely human person, the consummate flower of his race, but a child of his times, and not free from common stain of humanity. As a writer in the *Expositor* has expressed it: "They have reverted to positions abandoned a generation ago, and it is surely less than fair that we should be challenged to fight over again a battle which has already been fought and won."

2. Their method is one that in other lines of research could end only in failure. The spirit is not promising. They are "naïve" in their assumption of being the embodiment of "*modern scientific thought*," of "*the latest results of criticism*." Moffat applies the words "leprosy of incompetence" to such men as Sanday. They are philosophers rather than scientists, advocates rather than judges, and are not free from the ordinary tendencies and indiscretions of philosophers and advocates. They evidently lack entirely the poise of mind and calmness of judgment which are absolutely necessary to such a task. They not only cannot free their own minds from bias against the supernatural, but they make this bias a measure of what is to be accepted and what rejected. The case is closed before it is opened. We see this in Schmiedel's choice of his nine absolutely credible passages, as also in the whole

course of his argument. Moffat rules out the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel without a shred of evidence against them, solely on the ground that they cannot be primitive, and he is judge of what is primitive.

This *a priori* rejection of the supernatural, and the arbitrary selection of certain phases of Christ's life as genuine, can only cast us adrift on the broad sea of speculation, where every man may make his own choice. Mackintosh is frank enough to see this, but comforts himself with the hope that he may be able to prove his conjecture to be more plausible than any other. However we may characterize this method, one would feel hardly warranted in calling it scientific.

The cry is, "Treat the Bible like any other book"; but we must remember, as Principal Forsyth has expressed it, that we are not treating the Bible as any other book unless we are treating it from the standpoint of its avowed purpose. And the purpose of the Bible is not to lay down a better code of ethics. It is revelation, and not a mere disclosure—a mere manifestation either of a truth or of a person. "The end of the Bible is redemption." "It is an act to be performed, not before us, but *upon* us." The peculiar inspiration of the Bible is prescribed by its purpose; and we do not treat it as any other book until we come into sympathy with its aim; and we can find that sympathy only by a surrender of the whole man to the Redeemer,—that is, by faith.

Darwin described his mind as having become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, resulting in "atrophy of that part of the brain on which the higher tastes depend." Is it not possible, that, if these critics have not "the leprosy of incompetence," they may be afflicted with the atrophy of a too exclusively intellectual competence?

3. These writers, while declaring their methods to be

constructive, destroy that which the Christian church has always held to be the foundation of faith and morality, and yet have not told us how, without that foundation, faith and morality may be conserved. They have not followed their principles to their logical conclusions, and we would not wish them to do so. Their evangelical training, or recollections of early piety, may keep them in an inconsistent position; and we can only wish that when they turn, it may be backward, rather than forward. Still, we have a right to ask them to show us how we may accept their conclusions and still hold to faith. They tell us that the faith of nineteen centuries has been a gross superstition, and they are now releasing a captive world from its thralldom and preparing the way for a purer and loftier faith. We ask them how this faith is to be built, and how morality is to be insured, and they have no answer. They know the history of such criticism. They cannot but recall its sad results in the case of Strauss. They know that these writers have formed the bulwarks of unbelief, and indirectly of immorality, ever since their day; and we have a right to demand that they either show us a better way, or relinquish their claims as constructive critics.

The Christian church is not founded on the fog of myth-making tendencies nor on the rottenness of deception and fraud. It is founded on a great historic fact,—that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, rose again from the grave. Destroy the foundation, and you destroy the building: the whole fabric falls in ruin. Men may lay another foundation, and, selecting certain material of their own choice, may seek to reconstruct the building on another plan; but it is not Christianity. To quote Dean Church, "A so-called Christianity, ignoring or playing with Christ's resurrection and using the Bible as a part of Homer, may satisfy a class of clever and cultivated persons; . . . but it

is well in so serious a matter not to confuse things. This new religion may borrow from Christianity as it may borrow from Plato, or from Buddhism, or from Confucianism, or even from Islam, but it is not Christianity. . . . A Christianity which tells us to think of Christ doing good, but to forget and put out of sight Christ risen from the dead, is not true to life. It is as delusive to the conscience and the soul as it is illogical to the reason.”<sup>1</sup>

4. A still more serious objection to the position of these men remains to be offered: While denying the probability, and even possibility, of the Gospel miracles, they quietly assume, and expect us to accept, two far greater miracles than any recorded in the Gospels.

(a) The first of these miracles is the producing of Christianity without a producer. Bear in mind what Christianity has been in the world during the centuries, what it has accomplished. It has been self-preserving, self-perpetuating, self-purifying. It has reached out and shaped, and continues to shape, the character of all the nations of the earth. It has been the only religion of earth that men have thought it worth their while to counterfeit. In Christianity alone all “the powers that prey” have found a foe which they have thought it worth their while seriously to combat. In its essentials it is in direct contrast to the religions of the time of its birth and all the religions that have arisen since. It is not willing to be considered among comparative religions. It is supreme, *the* religion of earth. And it is the product, not of ages, but of a single generation. It not only stood out in vivid contrast to the Judaism of its time, but no improvements have been made in its essentials since that time. All efforts at improvement have been as efforts to paint the lily or to gild refined gold. It has shown itself adaptable to every age and people, its drapery has changed with the changing

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Nicol, *The Church's One Foundation*.

conditions and times; but essential Christianity has remained the same from the beginning. We are asked to believe that this great tree whose branches shelter the nations, is a growth from a seed whose germ was dead, in an alien soil and a hostile atmosphere. We are told of the sad degradation of the Gentile nations; and of the dead formalism of the Jews,—lightened by the hope of a Messiah, it is true, yet of a Messiah as formal and earthly as themselves. There was on the Jewish side what Harnack calls "a miserabilism, which clings to the expectation of miraculous interference on God's part, and in the meantime, as it were, wallows in its wretchedness"; and on the Gentile side, an unparalleled moral putridity, with here and there a grain of saving salt, itself of the earth earthy, and utterly unable to purify the mass.

One writer sees these elements ground together in the mortar of history by the hand of destiny, and presently there emerges Christianity. Another sees the germ of Christianity in Judaism, and the germ of Judaism in Egypt, and I suppose can trace it back to that historic and much overworked bit of protoplasm of which we read so much. This germ incubated in "the meditative and brooding mind of Jesus," who had a "genius for religion." The higher life revealed in Christianity was but a continuous development of a consciousness of the evils of the times. This consciousness was an indication of the "latent good" which was struggling to assert itself. Jesus embodied this struggle, and in his unique personality gave it the upward impulse necessary.

But such persons should remember that evolution is a process of development, and not a dynamic. Human misery, the last despair of moral depravity, may lead men to cry out for deliverance, but it has in it no power to deliver. And one who was nothing more than a child of the times could have no standing ground for lifting the race. "Man

cannot lift himself by his boot-straps." To account for Christianity, we need to consider also the state of the disciples after the crucifixion. In spite of Christ's persistent teaching, they were totally unprepared for the catastrophe of his death. They would not consider the cross; they persistently put aside any but a triumphant issue to his life. They still hoped some great manifestation would be made. Almost at the last they strove among themselves for places of prominence in the new kingdom. When, therefore, Christ remained passive in his enemies' hands, and meekly surrendered himself to the cross, and had yielded up his soul in death, their dejection was complete. "No dream was ever more completely dissipated, no awakening to reality was ever so painful, no fabric of a fond imagination was ever, to all appearances, more suddenly and totally laid prostrate, past all hope of restoration." Only love remained,—love stronger than death,—but it was love for his memory. We hear the two going to Emmaus saying to him, "We had hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel."

But a few weeks after this we find them completely rallied from their dejection, triumphant, bold, courageous even unto death. They go out and proclaim everywhere, that in spite of that death, rather in virtue of it, Jesus is the Christ, and the only Redeemer of men. We find them forming "a society for which they had neither model nor program, which yet, in the midst of a hostile world, constituted itself, took shape and organization, and changed the face of human affairs."

What stands between to account for this change? Our critics put themselves the question, "whether it was not possible that they might, on rational ground, and in obedience to the higher instincts which had been awakened in them, resume their faith in their Master, and regain their courage, after the shattering blow had fallen." The

Apostles said, Christ has risen and appeared unto us, and verified his resurrection by many infallible proofs. Paul preached everywhere "Christ risen from the dead" while there were yet alive those who would refute him if he were not speaking truth. Here is our choice: Christianity founded on the Risen and Living Christ, or on fog and rottenness. After all, as one has put it, "It is better to believe in the supernatural than the ridiculous."

(*b*) A second miracle we are asked to accept is the creation of the Christ of the Gospels by a self-created Christianity.

The historic Jesus, a representative Jew, of loftier character and nobler impulses, but sharing the imperfections of his race, is the background of the picture. This the disciples, in the course of three generations, overlaid with colors gathered from their own brooding and creative fancies, until we have the portrait of the Christ we see in the Gospels.

No artist can paint without at least a mental image of the object he wishes to produce. That there was no external model for the Christ, on this theory, is at once evident. And how could they form a mental image of him? Who can imagine the sinless? Who can picture to himself the morally perfect? Who, even if he could conceive it, could reproduce that conception? Who in any age has been able to imprison on his canvas the glories of the sunset?

They had no model, and here in the Gospels we find rare tints, seen nowhere else. From what source did they procure the colors we see, as we read the words "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am *meeek* and *lowly* in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls"; where the colors to paint the Friend and Saviour of sinners—where to portray the suffering Messiah,

the very acme of paradox to them? If they could do this, why is it that others of vastly greater ability and in times much more propitious, could produce only the merest daubs in comparison with the portrait of the Gospels? We are reminded of the second-century rivals to Christ,—Demonax of Cypress as portrayed by Lucian, and Appolonius of Tyana as given by Philostratus. Beneath each of these portrayals there was probably an historical figure. But who to-day hears of them? Who in any age has given them more than a passing thought? and that only to be amused at the absurdity of comparing them with the Christ.

And the evangelic Christ was, we are assured, a gradual product of a large number of men, through three generations of time. It was a gradual idealization. But if it be incredible that the image of the Christ in the Gospels is a consciously idealized creation, "it is surely tenfold more incredible that blind and groping ignorance should thus have chanced upon it, blundering into a conception which puts to utter shame the best imagining and highest culture and intelligence of the age," or, indeed, of any age.

If the evangelists had deliberately attempted the idealizing of Jesus, they had probably succeeded in giving us a Demonax or an Appolonius, but "that a multitude of scattered traditions should have taken form and resolved themselves into that matchless image which is enshrined in the Gospels, were a miracle" vastly more stupendous than any the evangelists ascribe to our Lord.

All remember the story of Pygmalion, who carved the statue of a woman so beautiful in form that he fell in love with it, and under the ardor of his passion and the warmth of his embrace it came to life, responding to his love, became his wife and bare him a child. Such a story has far more to commend itself to our belief than that a hundred hands working in different generations should

create fragments of an ideal Christ which should eventually drift together and produce a matchless figure of the Gospels. And still more incredible is it that men should venerate, and be transformed by, their own creation. One shrewd writer, speaking of Pygmalion, remarked that "it was a pity that he had not given his heart to a statue from another hand. The love that fell in love with its own creation was not likely to end happily." It were a miracle passing all credibility that Christ should be thus created; and one equally incredible that humanity through nineteen centuries should remain blind to the fact; or, knowing Christ to be a mere creation of men, should have continued to worship him, and be transformed into his own image.

And again we may say, "It is better to believe in the supernatural than the ridiculous."

II. It will refresh us now to turn, and for a brief moment examine anew the true foundation of our faith and hope—"the church's one foundation," not that we need fear to find it crumbled into decay or demolished by the blows of its adversaries. Rather that our souls may be invigorated at a view of its massive strength, its rare beauty; that, looking upon it, we may strengthen our assurance that "the firm foundation of God standeth."

I. I would mention, first, that the presumption is all in favor of a supernatural revelation. By supernatural, I mean that which cannot be explained in terms of the natural, and cannot be understood by the unenlightened mind. Miracles are impossible only to those whose God has become so involved in his laws as to lose freedom of action, to those who make nature's laws God's prison-house.

We may expect that God will not keep the race in a state bordering on nervous prostration by arbitrary and meaningless interruptions of the known laws. But we

may expect, also, that there are laws of whose operations we are not acquainted, and in the nature of the case cannot know. We may also reasonably expect, that, for a sufficient reason, God, who transcends his laws, may even interrupt the working of nature. We find that sufficient cause in the redemption of a race lost in sin. Those who oppose the supernatural are those who make light of sin; who consider it but an episode in the "cosmic process." But sin is the appalling interruption of the working of God's laws toward the moral perfection of the race; and it is entirely reasonable that God shall not allow his purposes to be frustrated, but shall, if necessary, make a second interruption for the remedy of the first. And is it inconceivable that he who knows the end from the beginning should have in creation arranged for this very thing? As Canon Gore expresses it, "Miracle depends, on the one side, on God's character, and, on the other side, on the consequences of sin." "A miracle is an event in physical nature that makes unmistakably plain the presence and direction of God working for a moral end." God is always present and always working in nature; and he means that man should see him in the ordinary course of nature, and should be led to praise him. But man has sinned; and sin has blinded his eyes that he cannot, and will not, see God in his world. He makes that order of nature his God: God, its creator and his creator, is forgotten and denied. So God works in such a way as to arrest man's attention. He breaks through the thin veil of the natural order, and forces man to look through the opening, that is, through the miracle, at him, a personal God, who works all and in all. He thus urges them to see the true meaning of nature as a partial expression of God's thought. Miracles are thus, as Gore expresses it again, "God's protest against man's blindness to him,—protests in which he violates a superficial uniformity in the interests of a deeper

law." The Incarnate Christ would be the natural and reasonable outcome of man's estrangement from God. "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer all these things and enter into glory?"

2. The church has in its possession documents declaring that God did appear on the earth in the person of Jesus. These documents tell of the supernatural birth, of the gracious and wonderful life, the atoning death, and the triumphant resurrection and ascension. These documents belong to the sphere not of myth, but of history. They are near in time to the events of which they speak, "and the line of connection between the record and the fact is still traceable."

The newer criticism has produced not a shred of historical evidence to invalidate the substantial trustworthiness of these documents. All the fresh discoveries of the centuries have attested their genuineness. And it is on grounds other than that of proper historical and scientific criticism, grounds less creditable to the critics than to the records, that they can be discredited.

We do not need to affirm that every miracle in the Gospels took place as it stands, nor that every verse is genuine. We have reason to believe that some minor portions have been interjected later. But it is not on *a priori* grounds that they are rejected. The documentary evidence does not warrant us in accepting them.

A favorite form of argument has been to deny off-hand the genuineness of John's Gospel, and then assert that, apart from this Gospel, Jesus nowhere claims supernatural powers. Professor Gilbert was bold enough to make such an assertion while still accepting John's Gospel. But, to take one or two illustrations from the synoptists only. Concerning the record of the Temptation, Sanday writes: "If anything is certain in history, it is that the story of the temptation has real foundation, in fact, for the simple

reason that it would not have occurred to any one to invent it.”<sup>1</sup> “There is nothing in the Gospels more authentic.”

Let us consider this: The account of the temptation could have come from no other source than Jesus himself. And look at the assumption underlying the story. It presupposes the possession of supernatural powers sufficient to work not only such miracles as he did, but, from the point of view of crude interference with natural law, still more wonderful ones. “The story implies that he could have turned the stones into bread, could have cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple without hurt,” and the reason he did not was his own choice. In other words, his limitations were not imposed upon him from without, but were self-limitations, and this is his own emphatic assertion.

The kind of wonders a writer inventing narrative would produce, is well illustrated in the multitudes of apocryphal miracles ascribed to Jesus. Comparing these with those recorded in the Gospels, we at once say of the latter, These stories could not have been invented. They are records of facts.

Take an illustration of another kind:—The words of our Lord in Matthew xi. 27-30, “All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden,” etc. It has been well called the greatest text in the Bible. Let us conjure up before us the greatest, the purest, the sweetest human being we have ever seen or dreamed of, and put these words in his lips, and we say it is mockery—blasphemy. They are what Sanday calls “self-portraitsures.” “They present to us a character which

<sup>1</sup>Hastings's Bible Dictionary, art. “Jesus Christ.”

we say *was*, because it has been so described." "No mere artist in words, ever painted such a canvas without a living model before him."

Follow him through the synoptists. In the synagogue in Nazareth we hear him saying: "This day is this saying fulfilled." When, at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, he speaks of those who will come too late, saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" his reply will be, "Depart from me." He broke into home ties: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." At the last day, he declares, he will be the judge, and will say, "Come, ye blessed, . . . depart ye cursed." He proclaims his mission: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost, and to give his life a ransom for many." "This is my blood of the covenant given for many unto the remission of sins." "If this is not superhuman authority speaking here, it is superhuman arrogance." "Aut Deus, aut homo non bonus." This Gospel picture simply could not be invented. The evangelists were too near the events to understand their full significance; but they were honest men, and set down the records of the events and the words of Jesus. "But it was not their doing that these details work in together to a singular and unsought harmony."

Let us remind ourselves that it is not a question for the experts to solve, but for any man of honest mind who will look straight at the Gospel narratives and the Christ there portrayed. As Dr. Nicol puts it, "What the experts possess in addition to what the people possess is of comparatively small value. Experts may wait for the latest paper-covered book from Germany, . . . but nothing that the post or newspaper can ever bring us will touch the convictions which the earnest mind may arrive at from the study of the Lord's life in the Gospels."

The earnest student will find, to summarize briefly: A

unique and absolutely original character, incapable of invention; a being at one with humanity, yet claiming and manifesting absolute perfection of character, claiming and exercising the attributes and prerogatives of deity; a life absolutely harmonious in all its parts, a life pointing forward from the beginning of its public activity, not to victory and honor on earth, but to shame and death, as the deliberate and conscious completion of its mission. We find One who, according to his own words, was crucified and buried, and, above all, who rose from the grave and ascended up on high.

There is probably no better attested fact of history than that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and ascended into heaven; and at the same time it is the climax of the historical argument for the truthfulness of Christ's claims. All criticism breaks down upon this tremendous fact. Like the waves beating against the cliffs, criticism has lashed itself into fury against the Resurrection, only to spend itself in a moan at the futility of the attempt. One of the latest phases of the attempt is to talk of a spiritual resurrection, as though a spirit could ever be buried! Such efforts are their own best answer.

These modern critics declare that John created Christ. John declares that he is a witness to Christ, and we can catch pathos in his words, "This is the disciple that witnesseth concerning these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true." And in his epistle: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship

with us." A "fair deposit" had been intrusted to their keeping, and above their life it must be kept. They were *witnesses* to the Fact of Christ, and even to death must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

3. But the Christian faith is dependent not only on the historical authenticity of the Gospel narratives. Our faith can never stand in a fact of history alone. The believer has access to the living Christ to-day. He meets him face to face. The words of Christ bring comfort and cheer to his heart. He may not be able to answer the arguments of the critics. He has no equipment for entering into the critical arena. He has no disposition to do so. He judges the records of Christ's life to be accurate, because Christ has been to him what he was to men in Galilee. His experience corresponds to the experience of men in the Gospels. Christ has performed a greater miracle in his heart than upon the eyes of the man born blind. The feeding of his soul is as great a wonder to him as the feeding of the multitudes. Christ said, when on earth, "Come unto me," and he hears the same invitation, and accepts it, and finds rest. In other words, the Gospels do not so much verify his experience as his experience verifies the Gospels. But these cannot be separated. They are the two modes of access to the living Christ. He reads the Gospel records; and in very truth, he is the blind man, the palsied, the woman by the well, the one who labors and is heavy laden; and he hears for himself Christ's words, and feels Christ's life pulsing in him. And we have the combined experience of all the ages, the fruits of that experience in the lives of the saints.

If I alone had such an experience, days of darkness and hostile criticism might cause periods of doubt:—Is it not possible that this is all the fantasy of a fevered brain? There are many happy ones who have no such doubt, but to others they are daily visitors. We do well to recall

Dale's luminous argument. He supposes himself to be the only one who had ever seen the sun. Others knew that darkness came and went, but never saw the sun by day or stars at night—no trace could be found in literature, that men had ever seen these visions, there were no words for star or sun, and, while he alone had seen them, others had far keener vision for earthly things. Others would regard his alleged visions as figments of a disordered brain; but, for himself, when he saw the sun and the stars, he would *know* his senses were not deceiving him. Still, on a dark night or on a cloudy day, doubts might creep into his mind, doubts mastered and suppressed, and yet, if many dark nights and cloudy days succeeded one another, doubts which would grow large and ominous. But if here and there another man came to see what he saw, and an ever-increasing number; and in other countries groups of men asserted the same; and a long-lost literature declared that poets had sung of the sun and stars, and sailors had guided their ships by them;—though all this would not make his vision more real to him, yet it would forever destroy all doubts that his visions may have been merely subjective. And so the knowledge that other men have met Christ, and have found life and hope in him, and live in communion with him day by day, while it does not make Christ more real to us, yet it saves us from doubting the trustworthiness of our consciousness.

4. Still further, Christ is his own witness. Men may know him directly. There is truth in Carlyle's statement: "Of final causes, man in the nature of the case can prove nothing, knows them (if he knows anything of them), not by the glimmering flint-sparks of logic, but by an infinitely higher light of intuition." These words of Carlyle are reaffirmed by Romanes, "All first principles, even of scientific facts, are known by intuition and not by reason." The fact that there is a God is of the nature of a first prin-

inciple. No one can, therefore, dispute the necessary conclusion that, if there be a God, he is knowable (if knowable at all) by intuition, and not by reason.

Faith does not rest on the mere process of reasoning. Faith is rather the surrender of reason and the whole man to God in Jesus Christ, and thus directly we may come into knowledge of the Eternal. Immediately we know Jesus to be the Son of God; we too, as Thomas, fall on our faces, and say, "My Lord and my God," or as Nathaniel, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." The story of Lord Littleton and Gilbert West is a striking illustration of the direct coming of Christ into the soul of man irrespective of argument, and even in spite of natural bias against him.

Dr. Dale relates a similar case of a highly intelligent and cultured gentleman of Japan. Thoughts came into his mind of a personal being great and kindly, above him. He was anxious to learn if these thoughts were true. Confucius could not help him. At length a Christian gave him a Chinese Bible. He read page after page, until he came to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. I use his words: "I was arrested, fascinated. I had never seen or heard or dreamed of a morality like that. I felt that it was above the reach of the human race, that it must have come from heaven, that the man who wrote that chapter must have received light from God—from God, about whose existence I had been speculating. And then I read the Gospel of John, and the words of Christ filled me with wonder. They were not to be resisted. I could not refuse Christ my faith." So he became a Christian. He asked no questions about Paul or about John, whether they were normal men or speculative dreamers, nor about the One portrayed by John. The light was in the record. He saw it and believed. "He did not ask whether the transcendent perfection could have been the creation of

the love and reverence of Christ's disciples; the question was impossible; it had been as easy to ask whether the splendors of Orion could have been kindled from earthly fires. He *saw* the divine majesty and grace of Christ: what could he do but worship him?"

That in the humbler walks of life, and among the pur-  
lieus of society, the same is true, is abundantly attested from the experience of every one of us. The story has been told of a woman of loose moral character who earned a livelihood by posing for a noted artist. She was specially gifted for this work. Her grace of form and her imitative genius made her an admirable model. If she were to pose as Mary Queen of Scots she would gather together all the material of the queen's life, visit her haunts, and after three weeks come to the studio as Mary Queen of Scots. One day the artist said, "You would make a splendid model for the Magdalene." "And who is that?" she asked, "and where shall I find out about her?" The artist told her, and procured a Testament. She went to her home, and for the first time came face to face with herself in Mary Magdalene, and with him whose words and acts were such as she had never even dreamed of. At the end of three weeks she failed to appear. After a further three weeks the artist sought her out, and found a transformed Magdalene, sitting at the feet of her new Master, clothed, and in her right mind, an angel of mercy to those who, like herself, had gone astray. Now all this is not sentiment, it is history; and history that is repeating itself every day.

The question, to sum up, is simply this: Is there or is here not, a supernatural revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Has God created us, loved us, and redeemed us in the person of his Son Jesus of Nazareth? If this is true, its opposite, that Christ is the supreme product of human reason, is false. Through our direct access to him,

and our communion with him day by day; through the spoken and recorded experience of the thousands of the redeemed, all verifying, and being verified, by the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel records,—we have assurance that the Eternal Word was made flesh, and, beholding his glory, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. And our hearts affirm the ancient phrase: "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb. When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers."