SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY;

OR,

THE REASONABLENESS OF THE CARDINAL VERITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

THE birth, the death, and the resurrection of our Lord are historical events, for each of which appropriate evidence is at our command, and evidence more abundant and more cogent, as we believe, than can be adduced for any other historical facts of an equally remote date. Nay, more; even for the facts that the birth of Christ was an incarnation, and that his resurrection was followed and consummated by an ascension into heaven, we possess a mass of evidence so appropriate in kind and of such immense force, as should, in our judgment, suffice to carry conviction to every reasonable mind that will fairly consider it.

How comes it to pass, then, that many reasonable and virtuous men, many even who hold fast to the morality taught by Christ, and who still take part in the worship of the Church, are beginning to doubt these cardinal verities of the Christian Faith? It is, as I believe and will try to shew, because, while they do not mean to be unreasonable or unjust, they do not treat the evidence fairly; because, though they claim to be eminently reasonable men, they treat it unreasonably: and that in two ways.

1. First, there are many who, in place of looking at the Christian Faith as a whole, or even in its larger aspects, detach this fact or that in the life of our Lord from the rest, demand for this isolated fact a kind of proof of which it is not susceptible; and then, because they cannot get the kind of evidence they demand, permit themselves to speak of this fact, if not of the whole Christian system, as incredible or disproved. For example, I have known men, and men not altogether destitute of intelligence and good sense, fix on the Gospel story of the conception and birth of Christ, detach it from all that goes before and all that comes after it, treat it as an isolated event, declare that, thus viewed, no kind or amount of evidence would make it credible to them, and even break rude jests over it as an absurd fable which no sane man could be expected to accredit. For all purposes of accurate thought and fair conclusion they might as well detach one of the recently discovered moons of Mars from the solar system, study its motions and aspects as if it stood alone in the sky, and then triumphantly proclaim that the received astronomical theory was an imposture or a delusion. Why, there is hardly a fact in their own lives which, if it were thus detached from all connection with their character and history, could be either vindicated or explained. In every life the main events hang together, they are parts of a complex whole; and only when we view them as parts, and in due relation to the whole, can we hope to comprehend them. In like manner the supernatural birth, the incarnation, of our Lord, if at least it is to be treated rationally, must be viewed in its relation to his whole character and career, in its

connection with all that went before and all that came after it. If we take it by itself, and say, "Here was a child, the son of a virgin, with no father but God!" it is as easy to doubt and even to deride it as it is impossible to prove and explain it. But if, as we are bound to do, we take the whole Scripture hypothesis concerning the work and person of Christ, that which before was incredible becomes reasonable, credible, true. For we cannot deny that men have always been groping after God, if haply they might find Him; or that, left to themselves, they have never been able to find Him out to perfection, never even to frame such a conception of Him as would satisfy them. Not the book of Job alone, but all the great religious poems and confessions of Antiquity prove that the supreme religious craving of the race has been to see a *humanized* God, to behold the Divine Glory in the face and heart of a man. And who can deny that, if this craving were to be met, men needed to be prepared for its fulfilment; or that, according to the Scriptures, one race of men was set apart for centuries, and trained and educated by God Himself, in order that in and through them this craving might be satisfied? If there be a God, is it not reasonable to believe that He is good, loving, kind? If He be good and loving and kind, is it not reasonable to believe that He would shew Himself to the men who so much needed and longed to know Him? If He should shew Himself at all, is it not reasonable to believe that He would shew Himself within the limits and compass of humanity, since in no other way could He so adequately and persuasively reveal Himself to them? In man we find good and evil strangely

blended. If, then, to meet the need and craving of the race, God were to become man, is it not reasonable to believe that He would assume that which is pure and noble and akin to Himself in our nature, "not abhorring the *virgin's* womb," and yet not take on Himself that which was evil and impure and base? But if all this be reasonable, then the Christ of the Gospels is reasonable, and neither his human motherhood nor his Divine fatherhood should seem incredible to us. We may rationally believe that the God who is always with men, and in them, once took human form, in order to prove to our longing hearts that He is not far from every one of us, in order to let us see what He is really like, and, by manifesting his love for us, to win our love in return.

This, of course, is very far from being the whole teaching of Scripture on the incarnation of Christ. But with no more than these hints and outlines before us, I do not fear to ask which is the more reasonable of the two? the man who, detaching the birth of Christ from the vast system of thought and action, of which it is but a single incident, rejects it as an incredible myth or fable: or the man who, connecting it with the whole scheme of Providence, and the whole course of human history, and all the deepest cravings of the spiritual heart, confesses that, in this its proper setting, he sees nothing incredible in it, but much to render it credible, much even to persuade him that it is true?

But if the Incarnation be credible—if it is reasonable to believe that God, or the everlasting Word and Son of God, became a man and dwelt among us, —then that great miracle carries all other miracles in

its train. The God-Man cannot act as though He were only a man. By the necessity of his Divine nature He must also exert the creative and redeeming energies of God. The Almighty, sitting outside of and above this globe and sphere of Time, *may* touch it only through general laws; but if He descend and dwell within it, then He must do visibly and in a moment what before He had done invisibly and through long months or years of gradual change. If God, as all Deists admit, be the Centre and Source from which all the forces of the universe, physical and vital as well as moral and spiritual, ray out, how shall He stand by our side upon the earth and yet never once shew Himself to be the Lord of life and of death, the Source of all the hidden virtues of the universe, the Giver and Administrator of its laws? If Christ was God, if even He was—as the more thoughtful and spiritual Unitarians admit Him to be—the everlasting "Word" and "Wisdom" of God, then miracles were as natural to Him as they would be supernatural to us; and no reasonable man can well wonder at the signs and wonders He wrought. God turns water into wine every summer; God heals our diseases day by day; God quickens whom He will. And if Christ was, in any sense, God, if in Him God came down within the coasts and bounds of time, it was simply natural and becoming that whatsoever He had seen the Father do, *that* He should do also. On this hypothesis, all his miracles—from that wrought at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee to that commenced in the garden grave of Joseph of Arimathea and consummated on the hill above Bethany—become as credible to our reason as they are dear to our faith.

Whenever, then, men are so unreasonable as to detach any one incident of our Lord's life from the whole scheme of his Person and Work as revealed in Scripture and formulated in the universal creed of the Church, let us at least be so reasonable as to insist on connecting it with that scheme: let us refuse to view and debate it apart from all that really proves and justifies and explains it. His incarnation—with the long preparation for it, both in the history of the chosen race and in the universal heart of man—his ministry with its attendant miracles, his atoning death, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, all hang together and illustrate each other. Any one of them may be improbable or difficult of proof if taken alone, apart from the rest; but, viewed as a whole, they sustain and prove each other: they are, they shew themselves to be, the true core and key of the long human story; they frame a coherent and consistent hypothesis which, as it was above the wit of man to invent, we can only believe to be the gift and revelation of God.

2. There is another way in which men so handle the gospel of Christ as to make its cardinal facts and verities — the Incarnation and the Resurrection, for example—appear incredible. They cut the very ground from under our feet by affirming the supernatural—all that transcends nature and human nature as we ordinarily see them—to be absolutely impossible. Accustomed to find law everywhere, even in the phenomena which look most anomalous, they pronounce all miracles to be violations of law, and, therefore, contrary to reason. Before we yield

to this conclusion, before we permit it to trouble and darken our faith, it will be well for us to consider these two points.

First, let men affirm what they will, the impossibility of the supernatural has *not* been demonstrated, nor is it at all likely to be. On the contrary, all the indications of the most recent scientific discoveries and speculations point in the opposite direction. Science has perchance discovered the final forms of matter in the atoms, or molecules, of which we have heard so much of late. And, moreover, Science shrewdly suspects, and has gone far to prove, that all the forces — chemical, mechanical, cosmical — which govern the motions and combinations of these atoms may be resolved into one. But on *the origin* of these atoms it is dumb. It cannot tell us whence they came, nor can it account for the forces by which they are shaped and ruled. Its foremost ministers admit, not only that they know nothing of the origin of matter, but that they cannot so much as demonstrate its reality. They confess that they know nothing of the great natural forces except the modes in which they act. And they acknowledge that the origin of *life* is even a more inscrutable mystery to them than that of matter and of force.

Science itself bearing witness, then, ample space and scope are left for the creative power of God. Nay, more: as of all the agents which affect the material world, the mind or will of man is confessedly the highest, it seems probable that Science itself will ere long return to the conception of an Intelligent Mind, an Almighty Will, as the true first cause of that vast complex of phenomena which we

name the universe. Assuredly its latest accepted hypothesis, the theory of evolution or development, tends steadily in that direction. This theory, which seeks to account for the τὸ πᾶν, "the universal all," by assuming that the whole organic universe—from the very lowest forms of life to the very highest—has been gradually evolved from certain germs or cells capable of assuming an immense variety of forms, is marked by a large and noble simplicity, which makes it at least as attractive as it is true. To conceive of God as patiently educing through interminable ages the vast and varied scene of universal life from a few primordial germs, perhaps even from one, wrought upon by a single force capable of taking many forms, is surely to think back all things to their origin as simply and as nobly as we can hope to do.

For the present, indeed, this hypothesis is only an hypothesis, and a very dubious hypothesis, let fanatics and enthusiasts, such as Professor Huxley, say what they will. But, for the sake of the argument, let us for a moment assume it to be true, and ask: On what principle can Science demand that the development which has risen from the mere atom or germ, through the graduated and rising scale of existence, to the lofty and reasonable nature of man, should be suddenly arrested at that point, so that to conceive of beings higher than man is to conceive the incredible? So far from being incredible, it is most probable that the development which has run so high should run higher still, and that there should be creatures as much above us in the scale of being, and as much more highly and subtly organized, as we are above the dog and the ape, or the oyster and

the polypus even, or even the weed that grows in our garden or the fungus which springs up in the moist warmth of the wood. And if there be these higher grades of life—as surely there must be, or what becomes of the hypothesis of development? —we may know as little of *them* as the inanimate, or the lower orders of animate, organisms know of us. As, moreover, the gift which distinguishes us even from the orders nearest to ourselves is the reasonable spirit which enables us to think and plan and forecast, so it is rational to believe that the grades and orders above us are distinguished from us by still larger gifts of intelligence and love, by a nature more spiritual than our own; and even, if they have external frames and organs, by organs and frames more delicate and more pliant to the spirits which inhabit them.

This, I think, we may fairly call *a scientific induction*, or, at least, *a scientific speculation*, if we care to put asunder two—Induction and Speculation—whom the British Association has done so much to join together. And how remarkably this induction, or speculation, accords with the Biblical revelation of an angelic hierarchy, grade rising above grade, and of the spirits of just men made perfect clothed in psychical bodies, I may leave every man to determine for himself. All I desire to do is to point out that angels, and perfect spirits in psychical bodies, are, to us at least, *supernatural* existences or modes of existence; and that, none the less, the fashionable scientific hypothesis of the hour, so far from disproving them, renders them a very credible and likely step in the long process of development.

Again: if Science, so far from having proved the supernatural to be impossible, rather favours the conclusion that what seems supernatural to us may nevertheless be included in the course and order of Nature, so also it is to be borne in mind that any scientific hypothesis is sound and valuable in proportion as it explains the facts for which it was invented to account. The very "law of gravitation" is still only a scientific assumption. It has not been, and cannot be, demonstrated with the rigid logic and precision with which we can prove the angles of every triangle to be equal to two right angles. It proves itself; that is, it explains all the facts to which it can fairly be applied. If it failed to explain many of them, if it even failed to explain any one of them, providing the fact were indisputable, the law would be questioned and denied.

Well, apply this axiom of Science to the life and work of our Lord. When we who believe set ourselves to study his life and ministry, we are arrested by certain sceptics with the objection, "But you are starting with the hypothesis that the supernatural is possible. You must discard that hypothesis. You must come to the investigation with a mind free from any prepossession." We reply, "But *you* are starting with the opposite hypothesis—that the supernatural is *im*possible, that miracles are incredible. You, in your turn, must discard that hypothesis, and bring a mind free even from negative prepossessions to this great inquest." If they decline to do that, they condemn themselves, for our theory, our assumption, is at least as probable as theirs; nay, as we have seen, it is far more probable. But if they rejoin, "But

we must have some working hypothesis to go upon; or, at least, when we have collected our facts, we must frame some hypothesis that shall connect and explain them," we instantly assent, and pledge ourselves to accept the hypothesis which best explains the facts.

What are the facts, then? The facts, as recorded in the Gospels and the subsequent history of the Church, are briefly these:—That, after many centuries of elaborate and gradual preparation, God revealed Himself to men in the person of a Man who claimed to be the Son of God, who affirmed and shewed that He came to do and to disclose the Divine Will. This Man taught as never man taught before or since, giving the world religious ideas and a moral law so high and pure as it had not entered the heart of sage or philosopher to conceive. To shew at once who He was, and how good God is, He wrought many miracles of healing and consolation, which were, at the same time, lessons full of a heavenly wisdom. But though He was—nay, *because* He was—the best of men and teachers, the world hated Him, rejected Him; and at last, as He always said they would, they put Him to a cruel and ignominious death. His disciples, a few poor men, uneducated save by Himself, lost all hope when He died, although He had promised that He would soon be with them again. When, in accordance with his promise, He rose from the dead, they could not believe for joy and wonder. After He rose, He tarried with them forty days, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and telling them that He would pour down his Spirit upon them, and

send them forth to conquer the very world which had rejected Him. In due time they received and went forth in his Spirit. Before three centuries had elapsed the whole civilized world *was* conquered by them, and the Cross overshadowed the throne of the Cæsars. Since then, although the faith Christ taught has been terribly corrupted by the Church, and the law He gave has been openly broken by those who have professed to be his servants, it has raised and purified all the conditions of human life; the world has received another heart and worn another face. And in every age, however feeble and corrupt, there have been myriads in whom the peculiar spiritual life of Christ has been reproduced, so that they too have overcome the world, and have lived unto God in that they have lived for men.

This is but a poor and imperfect abstract of the facts of Christ's life and work. To do it justice would require volumes penned under the enfranchising constraints of blended genius and inspiration, rather than a few bald sentences such as these. But even with only this bare abstract before him, I would fearlessly appeal to any reasonable man, and ask: On which hypothesis is the life of Christ and all that has come of it more explicable—on the natural hypothesis or on the supernatural? If we say that even the best of men was but a man at the best, how can we account for his claim to be more than man? how account for his miracles, for his resurrection from the dead, for his ascension into heaven? Nay, even if we could detach the miraculous element of his life from the merely natural and human, even then how should we account for the unapproached elevation of

his thoughts, for the purity and tenderness of his morality, for the amazing and quickening power of his word? How came it to pass that He, a poor untrained Jew, made the greatest spiritual discoveries of all time, breathed the loftiest, most catholic, most pure and heavenly spirit that ever animated the breast of man, and threw his spirit and discoveries into forms so penetrating, so potent, so universal, that they have charmed and conquered the world, and have constrained many myriads in every subsequent age to live a life truly unselfish and spiritual and divine?

I confess I do not see how these questions are to be answered by those who hold the merely natural hypothesis, who maintain that Christ was simply a man of the most unique capacity and the most eminent gifts. To me, at least, their hypothesis fails to account even for the poor residuum of facts concerning Him which they admit to be true; while it does not so much as touch those larger facts of the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension, for which we have as much evidence as for his perfect character and pure morality. On the other hand, the supernatural hypothesis, the assumption that He was "God with us," accounts for *all* that is recorded of Him and affirmed concerning Him—for his incarnation, for his miracles, for his resurrection, for his ascension into heaven, for his amazing yet undeniable power over the spirits of men, and of the best and wisest of men, no less than for his blameless character, his lofty doctrine, his pure commandments and rules of life. If that hypothesis is best which best explains all the facts it ought to explain, then

assuredly we do well to cast ourselves at the feet of this supreme and sovereign Man, and to cry, with sceptic Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

Without fear or hesitation, then, we affirm that even the facts concerning Him admitted by the most sceptical critics and historians demand for Him a supernatural origin and power. We affirm Him, that is, to have been as truly out of and above the ordinary course of Nature as, confessedly, He was within and under it, since on no other hypothesis can we frame any adequate explanation whether of his Person or of his Work. Certain votaries of Science may, indeed, cut the knot of this difficulty by pronouncing the supernatural to be impossible, the miraculous incredible. But it may be questioned whether even the most successful study of the facts and forces of the material universe entitles any man to speak with authority on the facts and forces of human life. It may be questioned whether even the most successful study of human nature and the long story of its development gives any man the right to speak with authority on that which transcends the merely human limit. And when on the strength of her study of nature and of human nature, Science, in the person of some of her votaries, ventures to pronounce all that lies beyond and above these limits to be unworthy of belief, she simply stultifies herself by overpassing her proper bounds; she commits herself to the most hazardous of logical forms—an universal negative: she even contradicts herself, since, in her last analysis, Science is for ever coming on forces—mechanical, chemical, vital—of the nature and origin of which she confesses her ignorance to be absolute:

and, worst of all, at least in her own eyes, she illogically arrests her pet theory of development at the moment it reaches the spirit that is in man, and contends, against all probability, that at *this* point the ascending grades of life are abruptly broken off.

Would that I could close here, leaving the whole burden of the scepticism and unbelief of our age on those "oppositions of Science" to Faith of which she is guilty when she is no longer true to her name. But, alas, it is not Science alone that has been to blame in this great controversy on the Person and Work of Christ. Theology has been equally at fault. Systems of dogmatic thought have long been current in the Church, so harsh, so crude, so irrational and self-contradictory, as to be utterly incredible to reasonable and reflective men. In their recoil from these they have, not unnaturally if unwisely, jumped at any sceptical hypothesis which has less obviously offended against reason and conscience. By insisting on these unreasonable dogmas, even more, I think, than by the narrow and ignoble morality which has too often characterized her, the Church has repelled the very men for whom she should have possessed the greatest charm, and has predisposed them to accept the sceptical theories in vogue in their several generations. I do not propose to discuss the various theological systems which have had their day, and which even yet have not quite ceased to be, by which the reason of thoughtful men has been affronted and repelled. That would carry us too far, and occupy us too long. All I intend to attempt is, to draw the contrast between what we of *this* generation may call the *old*

and the *new* theology; and briefly to indicate how, by its unreasonableness, this old theology drove men to scepticism and unbelief, and how, in the new, we may find a conception of the Person and Work of Christ in entire accord with the demands of reason and conscience.

The keyword to what I have called the old theology is *time;* the keyword to that which I mean by the new theology is *eternity.*

According to the old theology—the theology in which most of us, I suppose, were brought up—the work of Christ, the work of God in and through Christ, was an abrupt and arbitrary prodigy, a miraculous interruption of and departure from the ordinary methods of Divine action. There was nothing like it before, and there never would be anything like it again. It was forensic rather than moral in its tone and spirit; a gift of sovereign grace rather than a satisfaction of human wants and a condescension to human needs. All men were alike sinners, and all had an ineradicable and irresistible tendency to sin, not simply by the law of hereditary descent, but in virtue of an inexpiable crime committed by the first of the race and attributed to all who sprang from his loins. As all men were thus alienated from God, they were all justly exposed to the condemnation of his law. He, in his turn, was alienated from them, incensed against them, and cherished a settled intention of avenging Himself upon them by exposing them to an endless and depraving torture. But, to shew that He was rich in mercy, He either sent his Son, or permitted his Son to come to earth—not to eradicate the tendency to evil from

every heart, not to take away the guilt of the whole world, not to redeem the whole family of man to life everlasting, but to die, the just for the unjust, in order that the sins of those who should hereafter believe might be imputed to Him and that his righteousness should be imputed to them. By this transaction, this drama enacted in the days of time, and based in part at least on legal fictions, an eternal salvation was provided for the few, and the eternal condemnation of the many was vindicated afresh. God was enabled to reveal the exceeding riches of his grace to the elect, to the faithful, and was justified in pouring out the treasures of his wrath on the unfaithful, the reprobate, on as many, in fact, as had not been able or willing to conquer that tendency to evil with which they were born. In so far, therefore, as the salvation of Christ was an act of grace at all, it was regarded as exceptional, unparalleled, out of the usual course and method of the Divine activity; not as an instance and sample of that activity, not as a temporal manifestation of what was always in the mind and heart of God. Those who held and taught this view do not seem so much as to have suspected how opposed it was to their own conception of the character of God, although they saw clearly enough, and sometimes rejoiced to see, how utterly opposed it was to human reason, or, as they phrased it, how "*humbling* to the pride of reason." And yet, as there is nothing more consonant with reason than that, if there be a God, He must be eternally the same, so there was nothing they more surely believed. But if God be the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, must not that which we see to

be true of Him at any time be true of Him at all times? Must He not have been yesterday, will He not be to-morrow and on every to-morrow, what we find Him to be to-day, and that even though to-day be the day of Christ's passion and death?

This was the point of departure for the new theology—new, and yet as old as St. Paul and St. John. Those who in our own time first gave it form translated the essential facts of the gospel out of time into eternity. They argued that if, when Christ came and dwelt among us, God delighted in men—delighted to dwell with them and teach them and comfort them—He always must have delighted Himself in them, and always will delight to dwell with them, and teach and comfort and redeem them. They argued that, if He then came to shew mercy on men, to take away their sins, to reconcile them to Himself, He always must have had mercy on them, and will always, in so far as they will permit Him, deliver them from their bondage to evil into the freedom of a loving obedience to his will. In fine, they argued—and, as, it seems to me, argued with an irresistible logic—that in Christ the world was granted a momentary glimpse of what God *is* in Himself always and for ever; and that in the teaching and redemption of Christ the world was shewn, as in an instant of time, what God has been doing from the beginning and will do to all eternity.

Now if we view them in the light of this newer and yet older theology, the incarnation, the passion, and the resurrection of Christ appear no less conformable to reason than the life He led and the law He gave.

(1) Consider the Incarnation in this light for a moment. Men have always seen God in nature. In the several stages of their progress they have deified almost every natural force and production. But, as I have said, they have always longed to see, they have always felt their need of seeing Him in humanity, in order that they might be assured that He is not far from every one of us, that He is with us and within us, that we are in very deed his offspring. Proofs of this craving, this need, are to be found not only in "the fair humanities" worshipped in the temples of Greece and Rome, but in every literature of the many-languaged earth, even in the Bible itself. No moral law, however pure, would satisfy Job, for instance; no remote and obscure God, whom he could not see and grasp and apprehend. If that sublime poem teaches us anything, it teaches us that the nobler men are and the wiser, the more profoundly they need and long to see Him for themselves, to see Him humanized, that they may not be affrighted by his majesty, but talk with Him face to face as a man speaks with a friend. Is it not reasonable to believe that this yearning was gratified, this need met; that at least once in the ages of time the curtain, the glory, which hides God from us, was withdrawn for an instant, and withdrawn, not only that men might see God for the instant, but also that they might be sure that He is always with them?

Wise and good men are tormented by this profound and incessant craving, not because they long to indulge a merely speculative curiosity, but because they yearn to know what God's will really is. They are conscious of much in themselves that seems good

and fair; they can excogitate rules of life which seem to them worthy of obedience; but when they meet with men as good and wise as themselves, they find that the inward oracle can assume many voices, that it utters an uncertain sound; that, on some points, what seems right to them does not seem right to others. Even where they agree, is it not natural that they should long to hear some authoritative voice, a voice from Heaven, which shall sanction the utterances of their own moral sense? and where they differ, must they not much more long for such a voice of authority to end and determine the debate? Must it not be an infinite gain to them if they can ascertain that their conceptions of right and wrong are in harmony with the Supreme Will?

Viewed in this light, I am bold to say that the fact and doctrine of the Incarnation are in entire accord with human reason. If men, for ends so noble and momentous, needed to see God and to hear his voice, who can wonder that the Everlasting Word took flesh and dwelt amongst us, that men beheld in Him the glory of the Father, and gathered from his lips the law of truth and grace? Persuade me that no Incarnation has taken place, and you will but drive me to look for an Incarnation in the future, so sure am I that He who implanted in the human heart the instinct which craves Him, and the deep necessity which demands Him, *must* satisfy them in his own time and way.

(2) Nor, again, is the passion of Christ less reasonable than his incarnation. If we believe that there are or may be as many grades of life above us as there are beneath us; if we believe, as Science

insists we should believe, that the whole universe—physical, psychical, spiritual—is one, shaped by the same forces, ruled by the same laws, it does not become us to deny that the Atonement of Christ may have aspects and far-reaching influences—relations to the equity and universal throne of God—of which we can *know* nothing, although glimpses of such relations and influences are now and then reflected in the glass of the Word. It may be that, just as the man Job was singled out for a crucial test and experiment in order to demonstrate to the hierarchies of heaven that humanity is capable of an unselfish and disinterested virtue, so this world may have been singled out and made the theatre of the Divine tragedy of the Cross for the instruction of angels and principalities and powers in heavenly places. We cannot tell, or cannot fully tell. But there is one aspect of the Atonement of Christ, and that the most important to us as yet, which is well within our reach; and, in this aspect of it, it supplies a want of our nature as deep and universal as that supplied by the Incarnation. For if we and all men are conscious of a sympathy with righteousness which breeds a craving to have our conceptions of it verified or rectified by a Divine authority, we are also profoundly conscious that we have violated our own sense of right, and have thus brought guilt and shame into our souls. If we cannot hold it just that men should be damned with an irresistible tendency to sin, and then damned again because they did not resist it, it does not follow that we doubt either our responsibility or our guilt. The better a man is, indeed, and the loftier his conception of God and of

righteousness, the more profoundly he feels and mourns his sin, the more earnestly he craves to know that God's love "is more than all our sins," that "He, who best the 'vantage might have took, Himself found out the remedy."

Now this craving is met in the passion of Christ regarded as a revelation of the forgiving and cleansing love of God. If we detach and isolate the sacrifice of Christ, if we make it a mere event in time which affects only a certain select company of men no better than their fellows, reason revolts from it as wholly unlike, wholly irreconcilable with, the best conception it can frame of the character and rule of God. But if we take it simply as the crowning illustration of the love of God; if we remember that the self-sacrifice exhibited on the cross must be as eternal as God Himself; if we believe that the "agony and passion" were endured to shew us how far God would go, and how much He would do, to redeem men from their sins; then surely we may see it to be reasonable that such an exhibition of the Divine love and forgiveness should be made once for all to men burdened and trembling under the burden of sin. If such a sacrifice had not been made already, we might confidently expect it, since nothing short of it would meet the deep want of sinful men or fully disclose the mercy and love of God.

(3) And here, finally, we have reached a point at which *the resurrection* and ascension of Christ may be shewn to be as reasonable as his incarnation and passion. The longing for immortality, the hope of rising into an after-world in which all the wrongs of time shall be redressed, is as marked and profound

a feature in the heart and history of man as the sense of sin or the craving for righteousness. If this longing were a sentiment peculiar to Christian times, we might suspect its origin and question its validity. But there is no age of which we have clear historical records, and no noble upward-striving race of men, in which it may not be traced. There may be, as there may have been, men with so little manhood in them as to be unconscious of it; but, these apart, this longing, or its dark and ominous shadow, the *fear* of immortality, has been universal And to what *are* we to trust, if not to these facts of universal consciousness, to these primitive and in-bred instincts of the race?

But though the longing for immortality be so deep, so natural, so general, so well-defined, will any thoughtful man assert that it could be more than a longing, or at best a faint and flickering hope, until it was confirmed by the authority of One who had found a path of life even in the darkness of death? Will any such man affirm that it was unlike God to meet and satisfy a craving so profound, for a knowledge so essential to the welfare of the human race? To me, I confess, this supernatural event, the resurrection of Christ from the dead consummated by his ascension into heaven, seems most natural, most reasonable, if we regard it as the Divine sanction of man's craving for immortality, as at once the proof and the prophecy that death is but the point of transition from life to life. That we should know what we have to expect in the future is necessary to a wise use of the present. The senses make many and imperious claims upon us. The kingdoms of

this world and their glory make claims on us as many and as imperious. How shall we meet and resist their attractions, save as we yield to the mightier attractions of the inward and immortal world, the world that is ever coming and ever to come? That that world should be *revealed* to us was requisite, if we were to know it, or to know of it, in any definite and assured way; for no traveller has returned from beyond the bourn which every man must pass in turn, to tell us how it fared with him beyond the grave. And if it must be revealed, how could it have been revealed more nobly and more generously, and yet with a greater economy of miracle, than by the resurrection and on the authority of Him who died for us all and in whom we all died, and who rose and went up on high, that where He is there we might be also?

I do not profess, in this brief essay, to have glanced at all, or even at most, of the aspects in which the cardinal facts and verities of the Christian Faith need to be viewed, and ever re-viewed. That has not been my aim. I have tried rather to select those aspects of them in which they commend themselves to the inquisitive and sceptical intellect. And I am content if I have shewn that, even when the appeal is to Reason, much may be said for the leading supernatural facts in the life of our Lord—for his incarnation, his atoning death, and his resurrection from the dead. Men always have craved and always will crave to see God in man, to hear his voice confirming or correcting their fluctuating conceptions of duty and virtue; and in Christ He came to be seen of them, to give them "the law of truth,"

and to assure them that He is ever with them to guide them into ways of righteousness. Men have always been conscious of sins from which they could not detach and cleanse themselves; and in and by Christ God both made an atonement for their sins and shewed them that He is always striving to cleanse them from their guilt. Men have always yearned for an immortal life beyond the grave; and in Christ God has given them the assurance of a final and eternal victory over death. Was it not *reasonable* and *right* that He should thus graciously respond to the spiritual instincts and affections which He Himself had implanted in their hearts? And if it were reasonable and right, in what way could He more effectually and more conclusively have responded to them than in the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ Jesus, his Son, our Lord.

Let us remember, however, that to admit the credibility, or even the truth, of these great historical facts will be of little avail, unless we permit them to become spiritual factors and powers in our lives. The incarnation of Christ only reaches its true end in us as it assures us that we too are the sons of God, only as it makes us the conscious and happy partakers of the Divine Nature. The passion of Christ only reaches its true end in us as it actually cleanses us from sin and quickens us to all righteousness. And the resurrection of Christ only reaches its true end in us as it both renders us tranquil amid all the changes, adversities, and wrongs of time, by the hope of life everlasting, and enables us, even now and here, to have our conversation in heaven.

S. COX.