CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

NEXT to the resurrection of Christ, the most momentous event in the history of Christianity is the conversion of Paul. The resurrection gave back to humanity the Founder of the Christian religion, or, to speak more correctly, Him who was Himself that religion; the conversion gave to humanity the greatest apostle of that religion. The resurrection was the foundation of the Christian Church—at least, in the opinion of those who founded it; the conversion was its enlargement and universality. The conversion of Paul might be termed one of the fulfilments of what the resurrection left incomplete—an *ἀνταναπλήρωσις τῶν ὑστερημάτων τῆς ἀναστάσεως*; from the resurrection it came, and to the power of the resurrection it gave wide and unrestricted scope. We might go on to other comparisons. Through the resurrection, the reappearance of the Lord to the first disciples—or through something,—came a sudden revulsion from despair to confidence and joy; through the appearance of the Lord to Paul, or through something, came a sudden revulsion from furious and relentless opposition to enthusiastic and tender-hearted devotion. In both cases the appearance of Jesus has been denied, and for the same reason; and, because of the preliminary objection to apparent interference with natural law, any solution within the bounds of sheer possibility has been preferred to the manifestation of the risen Jesus. Thanks to the advance of critical science, the alternative of fraud is no longer invoked; and thanks to the growth of the historic sense, we may, without fear of consequences, pass by the theory

that the story in the Acts is allegorical—a translation into the language of historical fact of the figurative expressions denoting the manifestation of Christ to the soul, and the consequent change from spiritual darkness to light. It would be a strange allegory indeed that fixed upon Damascus for the locality of the event, and brought in an Ananias, otherwise entirely unknown to fame. But almost any resource short of fraud and allegory is still summoned to the defence of the invariable course of material nature. It being once for all decided for us that there could have been no miraculous material phenomena—as "miracles do not happen," and never did,—we are offered, as the residuum, either an unreal, ecstatic vision, the product of Paul's excited imagination, or else a purely spiritual experience, a vision of the heart, of the spiritual eye, to which tradition has attached an actual experience of the senses. That is, either Paul believed that he really saw Christ, and did not, the subjective becoming objective to Paul; or else Paul knew that he did not see Christ, except spiritually, Christ shining in his heart, the Son being revealed in him, and this shining, this revelation, has been materialised by tradition. In this case, the subjective has become objective, or, more strictly speaking, the inward has become the outward, in tradition. These then are the alternatives: a real sight of Christ, Paul's eyes being opened, as the New Testament accounts seem to say; or no sight of Christ at all, but solely an affair of the imagination; or (the middle alternative, coming by way of a refinement upon the idea of imagination and a transformation thereof into imaginative faith) a purely spiritual, but, as we are asked to believe, none the less real, nay, all the more real, sight of Christ—a sight by this so-called imaginative faith.

It will be well to take the evidence before the speculation. What, according to the record, so far as we can determine its meaning, was the something which suddenly turned

Paul from recalcitrant enmity to loyal and loving service? There are three descriptions of the event in the Acts: one by the historian, and two by Paul himself as reported by the historian. At one time Paul tells his story to the Jews at the foot of the Castle of Antonia, and at another time to King Agrippa in the court of Festus. The accounts do not entirely agree together. In the historian's account we are told that Paul's companions heard the voice or sound (φώνη); in Paul's address to the Jews we are told, "They heard not the voice of Him that spake to me." The historian says again that they "beheld no man"; Paul says that they beheld the light. According to the historian, the men stood speechless; according to Paul, they fell to the ground. Then the words of Jesus are not quite the same in all the accounts; and, finally, the message given by Ananias in chap. xxii., where Paul is addressing Jews, is put as the utterance of Jesus Himself in chap. xxvi., where Paul is addressing Agrippa. But otherwise the narratives are so closely alike that their differences cannot be accounted for, as Schleiermacher supposed, by attributing them to the diversity of sources from which the author drew his materials. Nor is it difficult to explain these differences or unreasonable to reconcile them. Mr. Matthew Arnold indeed talks very scornfully of this reconciliation. "Need we say," he remarks, "that the two statements (about the voice) have been reconciled? They have, over and over again; but by one of those processes which are the opprobrium of our Bible criticism, and by which anything can be made to mean anything. There is between the two statements a contradiction as clear as can be; and what the contradiction proves is the incurable looseness with which the circumstances of what is called and thought a miracle are related." But the author of *The Kernel and the Husk*, who strains at such miracles quite as vigorously as Mr. Arnold, is not so easily startled. It is his opinion,

that we "may put aside some slight discrepancies in the three accounts given in the Acts, discrepancies easily and naturally explicable, and valuable as showing that the accounts have not been arbitrarily harmonized."[1] "Slight discrepancies," that can be put aside as "easily and naturally explicable," are not "contradictions as clear as can be." *A priori* they hardly seem fatal to credibility. The unity of the authorship of the Acts is now an admitted fact in criticism, and we cannot believe that the same author, and an author of such literary skill, knowingly or heedlessly left fatal inconsistencies in this story. We may reasonably suppose that the historian's account (chap. ix.) is a strictly historical account so far as it goes, and that the author reports Paul's versions in the other passages without having any idea of radical opposition. The differences must have seemed to him altogether insignificant as his memory dwelt upon the one chief fact. If he saw no real contradiction, why should not we put ourselves with him into the background of his narrative, and supply the explanations which were dormant in his consciousness, unawakened by subsequent criticism? Is it an opprobrium to our Bible criticism to suppose that the companions heard a voice or a sound like a voice, but heard nothing that they could understand? They heard and yet did not hear: the emphasis is—Paul alone truly heard. Or is it an opprobrium to suppose that the men may have stood speechless, and yet have fallen on the ground in awe and astonishment? The one action may have followed the other: the emphasis in the historian's mind was on their speechless astonishment. Or is it an opprobrium for us to believe that they could behold the light, and yet behold no man? or to believe that Paul was likely to retain the mention of Ananias, the devout Jew, when addressing an audience of Jews, and to omit it in the unsuitable presence of Agrippa and Festus,

[1] Pp. 229 f.

—considering that he was firmly convinced the commission given by Ananias came direct from Christ, and that this commission from Christ was the main issue he desired, in his concise summary, to lay before Agrippa? Looking into all the circumstances of each case, we are justified, we think, in saying, "Here is faithful reporting," rather than in saying, "Here are contradictions as clear as can be." We may epitomise as follows what may fairly be gathered from the three accounts. What Paul's companions saw was a flash of light at mid-day; what they heard was an inarticulate sound; what they afterwards did was to take by the hand their blinded and awe-stricken leader, and guide him into Damascus. What Paul saw in the flash of light was Jesus of Nazareth as the Lord in glory; what he heard in the sound was the voice of Jesus saying who He was, rebuking Paul for his threatening and slaughter as the persecution of Himself, and sending him into Damascus to be told what he should do. According to this interpretation therefore the manifestation was both outward and inward, both objective and in one sense subjective. It was outward, it was objective to all in the flash and in the sound; it was inward also, and so far subjective, yet still objective in its inwardness, to Paul. To quote Dr. Abbott, "He actually saw a sight, and actually heard words which other people, his companions, with the same opportunities for seeing and hearing (*i.e.* sensuously) did not see and did not hear."

Paul does not tell in his Epistles, in detail, the story of his conversion, partly because his letters were written for other purposes, partly because, even when the conversion is referred to, he is writing to converts who must have heard it from him before, by word of mouth. But what he does say about it is, so far as it goes, in harmony with the Acts. When he appeals to the Corinthians, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" he rests his

claim to the apostleship on a sight of the risen Lord; for he cannot mean to rest such a claim on the sight of the earthly Christ (supposing that he did see Him) in the days of his unconverted Pharisaism. Moreover we need not hesitate to conclude, from the statement of the Acts in the case of Matthias, that in this "sight of the Lord" is implied the power of witnessing to His resurrection. And in writing to the same Church, as he briefly summarises the gospel preached by him and by the other apostles, he, in so many words, affirms himself a witness of the resurrection; he declares that, just as the apostles before him had seen the risen Christ, so also in the same way had he seen Him, only later in time, and indeed in the last appearance of all. And, if we look closely into the passing reference found in the letter to the Galatians, we shall discover a similar harmony. There is a similar locality, Damascus; a similar concrete event (suggested by the phrase, "immediately,"—*i.e.* after some definite moment—"I conferred not [as to my gospel] with flesh and blood"); there is a similar "call by grace" to be a Christian, accompanied by a revelation of the Son in him; there is a similar call to the apostleship among the Gentiles, proceeding directly from Jesus Christ, and indirectly from God the Father, who raised Him from the dead, the last clause being pointless unless it implies that he was commissioned by the Christ so raised.

But, we are told, Paul believed indeed that he saw and heard, yet all the while did not see and did not hear. It was all an hallucination, the offspring of an excited imagination. Paul is fatigued with a long journey in the broiling sun; his nerves are unstrung with the prospect of soon playing the odious part of executioner, perhaps among the very people whose peaceful homes are just breaking upon his view; his eyes are inflamed with incipient ophthalmia; he passes too hastily from the sun-smitten plains

to the cool shades of the gardens round about Damascus; a dangerous fever, accompanied by delirium, so common and so sudden in those latitudes, seizes him, and in a few minutes the victim is prostrate upon the ground. When the crisis is over, the sufferer, as is usual, retains only the impression of a period of profound darkness, crossed at intervals by dashes of light, in which he has seen outlined images against a dark background. How natural it all is! M. Renan himself experienced a crisis of this kind at Byblos; and "with other principles," he says, "I should certainly have taken the hallucinations that I had then for visions." Through lack of M. Renan's "principles," it appears, Paul became an apostle; and but for his "principles" M. Renan might have become an apostle too. But what about the light and the sound? Oh! that might have been lightning and thunder, for the flanks of Mount Hermon are the point of formation for thunder showers unequalled in violence. Besides, there is this advantage in a thunderstorm: if the ophthalmia will not suffice, there was the lightning to blind him, and the Jews regarded lightning as the fire of God. If fever and delirium do not commend themselves, why then there was the thunder-clap to produce a "cerebral commotion," and the Jews regarded thunder as the voice of God. No wonder that Paul's recollections were rather confused: a cerebral commotion "is apt to produce a sort of retroactive effect, and completely perturb the memory of the moments immediately preceding the crisis." Moreover, what a suitable victim was Paul for hallucinations! He tells us himself that he was subject to visions. "I come to visions," says he, "and revelations of the Lord"; and a circumstance insignificant, as it might have been to others, was sufficient to make him beside himself. And then what a poor, weakly, diseased, nerve-shattered creature he was! He preached in weakness, he boasted of infirmities, he had a thorn, a stake in the flesh,

possibly epilepsy; the marks of the Lord Jesus upon him were the marks of chronic disease: in a word, he was a man timid, sick, exhausted, half dead. Behold then all the physical and psychical conditions of hallucination, and all the exterior facts of time, place, and the elements, leading these conditions to a crisis; and the hallucination is ready made. He saw the countenance which had haunted him (though the balance of evidence goes to show that he had never seen it before, and did not know it now when he did see it) for all those days during which he had thought of Stephen's martyrdom and the patient sufferings of the harassed Nazarenes, and had wrestled with the doubts and compunctions that had thronged his soul as the journey dragged itself wearily along; he saw the phantom of which so much had been said, even Jesus Himself, who spoke to him in Hebrew, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"[1] A plausible description indeed, for minds adapted to it, a prepared picture for a prepared people; but will it bear examination?

First of all, was Paul such a very weakly creature? I am sometimes drawn to think that the theory of Paul's exceeding nervousness is one of the questionable results of applying the magnifying glass to the modicum of information left us as to his life, circumstances, and physical and mental constitution. Far too much appears to have been made of what was admittedly a high-strung and sensitive nature, too much of the *ἀσθένεια* in which he sometimes preached; of the *σκόλοψ*, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him; of the *στίγματα*, the marks of the Lord Jesus, which hardship had fastened upon him. We have no evidence that Paul was by habit sickly. He had illness at times, as we know; he cannot be said to have been a really strong man, or to have had the air of robustness about him, for we are told, on the word of his enemies, that his bodily presence

[1] See M. Renan's *Apostles*, chap. x.

was weak. But no habit of sickliness or of nervous disorder is consistent with his immense work.[1] He was not relieved of the duty of "buffeting his body and bringing it into bondage," though his hardships, one would think, might have saved him much trouble in this direction. The man that travelled and preached by day, even with illness upon him, and wrought by night to win bread for himself and others; who, in comparison with self-vaunting, pre-eminent apostles, was in labours more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft; who had been five times scourged, thrice beaten with rods, once stoned and taken up as dead, thrice shipwrecked, passing a night and day in the deep; whose perils were multitudinous; who, besides his labour and travail, his watchings often, his hunger and thirst, his fastings often, his cold and nakedness, had, pressing him daily, the anxious care of all the Churches—what endurance must have been there! Brought in to explain away one miracle—the personal manifestation of the Lord—the theory of bodily weakness and shattered nerves looks as though it would introduce another, a miraculous sustaining power. A man, too, whose head was as strong as his heart, whose enthusiasm was tempered by practical wisdom, whose spirituality was wedded to a sanctified common sense—was he a man whose mental balance was for ever nigh to toppling over? We might almost as readily admit the weak nerves of the hale and hearty fishermen of Galilee, who had their visions and trances likewise.

Paul however, so we are reminded, was specially subject to visions. After his conversion he had "visions and revelations of the Lord": why should not the conversion manifestation have been one of the like kind? But Paul's

[1] Cf. Beyschlag, "Die Bekehrung des Apostels Paulus" (*Stud. und Kritik.*, 1864). To this paper, along with Sabatier's *L'Apôtre Paul*, I would here make a general acknowledgment.

treatment of these visions and of the revelations of Jesus at his conversion affords striking points of difference. In the first place, the genitive *Κυρίου*[1] in "visions and revelations of the Lord" is pretty obviously subjective, signifying visions and revelations granted by the Lord. So we judge from what follows. Paul never affirms that in any of these visions he saw the person of the Lord Christ. He knew not whether his spirit was in the body or out of the body, but he was caught up to heaven, and there heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for a man to utter. What he saw in the visions he does not say; but even if he saw the Lord, it could hardly have been after the same fashion as at his conversion, for the *ἔσχατον πάντων* of 1 Corinthians xv. (which is equivalent to "in the last of all the appearances He was seen of me also") is quite inconsistent with later parallels. The apostle, then, draws herein a distinct line between the manifestation accorded to him at his conversion, due to the personal intervention of the risen Lord, and the visions and revelations afterwards, as well as the spiritual ecstasies which were characteristic of the apostolic age and were ascribed to the action of the Holy Spirit. He draws further distinctions. He dates these visions fourteen years ago. It seems unnatural that Paul, in recounting the visions in question, should not begin with the vision that turned the whole course of his life, if it were a vision of the same kind. But any reasonable system of chronology places the conversion twenty or twenty-one years anterior to the writing of this Corinthian letter. Differences, however, more striking still, deliver us from the temptation to lay stress upon this chronology. It is plain from the context that he had never described these ecstatic visions in the course of his preaching. He regards them as spiritual gifts of which he might boast, but he is loath to do so. He is modest about this province of his

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 1.

spiritual life; and even now, when the depreciation of his adversaries suggests to him to make use of these spiritual gifts as an argument to show the Corinthians that here also he is at least the equal of the supereminent apostles, this holy modesty, this delicate repugnance to tearing asunder the veil of his inner life, stops the argument midway. From the first the argument has been adopted with reluctance: "I am become foolish: ye have compelled me. I must needs glory, though it is not expedient." "No" (he adds almost immediately); "I will not glory; though, if I did, I should speak the truth; but I forbear, lest any man should account of me above that which he seeth me to be, or heareth from me. I will glory only in the weaknesses which bring the strength of Christ to rest upon me." But about the appearance of Christ to him at his conversion he has no such modesty, he feels no such reserve. He speaks of it quite freely, if we may judge from two instances being recorded within the circumscribed and fragmentary narrative of the Acts. He regards it as an occasion of spiritual humiliation; whereas the subsequent visions were occasions of spiritual exaltation, and, according to his own account, had tended to excite spiritual vainglory. Again, in these visions he tells us he was rapt in ecstasy or trance up to the third heaven; whether his spirit was in the body or out of the body, he could not tell. At his conversion, on the other hand, he was perfectly self-conscious; there is no hint of ecstasy in any of the narratives: and it was Jesus that came to him; it was a visit from heaven to earth, instead of from earth to heaven. Paul did not confuse the two psychical conditions; this chapter (2 Cor. xii.) itself affords indubitable proof that he was quite alive to the distinction between a state of ordinary self-consciousness and a state of ecstasy in the region of the spirit and outside the region of sense; and when he says, in Acts xxvi. 19, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," the word he

there uses, ὀπτασία, does not in the least necessitate the notion of unreality. Not that St. Paul occupied any exceptional position among the great actors of New Testament history, in the matter of discriminating between phantoms and realities. St. Peter, for example, was fully aware that there was such a thing as an ecstasy, for he describes his vision of the sheet let down from heaven by four corners as ἐν ἐκστάσει ὅραμα; nor did he swallow with open-mouthed credulity every wonderful experience as though it were necessarily a supernatural fact, for when he was released from prison by angelic interposition, "he wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision" (ὅραμα). And if the Acts was written by Luke, and if Luke was a physician (a double tradition which has not yet been seriously shaken), then we have these accounts from the hand—I will not say, of a scientific man, but—of a man who was even more likely to be aware of the possibilities of the imagination than his unprofessional contemporaries Peter and Paul.

Finally, the hypothesis of hallucination or mere vision cannot weather the *a priori* consideration that such a vision must have been the product of faith, and not the cause. The visions, the ecstasies, he speaks of, came after he believed in Christ; the sight of Christ near Damascus led to his conversion, and therefore came before that faith. Joan of Arc saw saints in vision: yes, but she believed in them, she lived in them. Mr. Matthew Arnold's Sampson Staniforth had his vision, it is true: when sentinel at a most perilous post, after long hours of wrestling in prayer that God would forgive him, he saw Christ in heaven upon the cross, and heard the words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." And so, concludes Mr. Arnold, "Sampson Staniforth had his vision, just as Paul had his." But Sampson Staniforth believed in Christ as the Saviour from sin; he was looking for some revelation; he craved for it, he

panted after it, and at last he seemed to see it from the very ardour of his desire. Who shall set Joan of Arc and Sampson Staniforth in the same category with the bigoted, unbending, unbelieving Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, breathing threatening and slaughter? An enthusiast already Christian might, in his intense longing for Christ, have created for himself such a vision; but it could hardly be that a stanch Pharisee, hating Christ and everything Christian, regarding with bitterness and dismay all that the faith in the Nazarene was doing to undermine his ancestral traditions and his patriotic hopes, resisting in God's name the spreading blasphemy even unto blood, could have evolved from his hostile consciousness what was foreign alike to his knowledge and to his imagination?

But we are asked to believe that before his conversion his hostility had ebbed away, and the tide of faith was rolling in. The theory that Paul was gradually converted is based upon the words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." The basis is an uncertain one, as the proverb may imply nothing beyond the certainty that Paul's efforts to retard the advance of Christianity would only recoil upon himself. But the basis may be conceded for the sake of examining the superstructure, which, after all, may stand as a fact, even though this particular passage be forced beyond its true meaning. There was a goad in his soul, it is said, hard to kick against. His impressible nature had been touched by the joyful patience of the Nazarenes: could such faith, the faith of a Stephen, with heaven's light upon his face as he died, be a mere delusion, a godless deception? He had doubtless listened to the apologetic of Stephen in the synagogue "of them of Cilicia and Asia," perhaps he had even broken a lance with him; he had heard the acknowledged Pharisaic method of Messianic interpretation extended by the Nazarenes to such prophecies as that of the suffering

servant of Jehovah, and the stone which the builders refused; he had become familiar with the arguments which went to prove that a Messiah on the cross was not a disgraced criminal, but a Messiah bearing away the people's sins, that they might be righteous enough for deliverance from their oppressors—a Messiah who, to complete His work, must rise again and appear once more upon the earth; and he himself, as a true Pharisee, was looking for national righteousness before national restoration, and believed that the vicarious righteousness of the law-abiding was transferable to those who were deficient in their obedience to the law. Why should not the guiltless passion of the Messiah be the ordained means of this righteousness? And then, the burden that was weighing upon his own spirit; the fruitlessness of his desperate strivings after a righteousness without which the conscientiousness of a Paul could not be satisfied; the heart-breaking gulf, seeming to gape wider and wider the more he knew, the more he strove, between him and his soul's rest: might not the Messiah deliver him from this body of death? Might not that righteousness arrive as a gift which all his painfulness had failed to win as a reward? And might not Jesus be this Messiah, and have risen again, as His followers had said? The five days' journey to Damascus, with none but inferiors, officially and intellectually, to bear him company, afforded unwonted leisure for unwonted reflection. He had sought to crush his doubts as devil-born; the more persistently they rose upon him, the more he strove to hurl them from him, and prove and fortify his loyalty by faster and more furious persecution. Now however there was nothing for it but to think as he travelled on; and with thought returned the old uncertainty in gathered force. But Damascus was close at hand, and he must soon decide. To this side and to that was his racked soul driven. Suddenly all obstacles were swept away by an instantaneous

deluge of conviction that the persecuted Jesus was the Messiah; and then he thought that he beheld and heard Him. So the conversion was but a kind of growing faith come to maturity, and the vision was this faith in fruition.

Plausible to some extent, once more; but not historical. Here indeed the vision did not produce the belief, but the belief the vision: so far, it may be said, the natural order has been maintained; yet only just maintained, seeing that the mature belief and the vision were all but simultaneous. But this order is not Paul's, if we are to retain any of the evidence. Paul knows nothing of a gradual conversion, nor does the historian; the air of the narratives reverberates with the tones of suddenness and violence; it was a sudden conversion, it was a violent wrench from one side to the other. Christ appeared to him *ὡσπερεὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι*, "as though to the abortive birth"; or, as Grotius paraphrases, "he was not brought to Christianity by a long education, else would he have been as it were a natural birth, but by sudden force, as immature births are wont to be ejected." Before that hour Paul was, as it were, an embryo not ready for the birth; in that hour he was brought forth in abruptness and violence, all his imperfect life gone from him. Further, the persecuting fury, in the very midst of which Paul was overtaken, is not connected by him with any compunction or uncertainty; his remorse for it is bitter and frequent, but he had persecuted ignorantly, in unbelief, not in any serious doubt, for doubt rather paralyses than impels to more energetic action. He was an earnest, conscientious Pharisee, more abundantly zealous than others for the traditions of his fathers; his zeal in persecuting the Church he regarded as equal in merit with his blamelessness in keeping the righteousness that was in the law; he was as sure, broadly speaking, of his duty in the one respect as in the other, for Jesus was to him an impostor and the worship of Jesus a blasphemy.

Was a man in this mood,—a man on whom not the tolerance even of Gamaliel had left a single discoverable trace, a man whose madness, having driven men and women from Jerusalem, was now pursuing them even to Damascus,—was such a man, at such a time, likely to get so near Christ in spirit as to be prepared in the course of a few days' march for creating a vision of Him as the exalted Messiah? Not a fragment of history can be produced to vouch for a change in Paul before the vision; and without a radical change a vision was not possible. Even if we admit that compunctions were at work in his heart, compunctions and doubts are not enough to produce such an hallucination,—a vision of Jesus taking the persecution to Himself, and sending the persecutor to preach, not to the Jews, but to the Gentiles. And if Paul was not changed before the vision, can we think that a man in his mood would have been transformed root and branch by anything he could by any means have attributed to his disordered fancy; or that, after such a vision, with all its uncertainty, he would have been suddenly revolutionised from a stubborn, conscientious, heresy-hunting Pharisee to a preacher of that faith which once he destroyed?

It is not surprising that the hallucination theory, which on historical investigation is found to raise difficulties greater than it dispels, should have experienced modifications at the hands of earnest inquirers. These are the holders of the third or middle theory. Dr. Abbott, for instance, the author of *The Kernel and the Husk*, is satisfied that the vision was a real one, real but not material, and all the more real because solely in the spiritual sphere; and he is further satisfied that this was the view of Paul himself. He fights to the death the notion of any bodily appearance, whether the body be spiritual or otherwise. At the same time he indignantly scouts the proposition that a mere vision could lay the foundation of the vast moral effects

that ensued, or that the gospel of Paul could spring from a deception of the imagination. His view of the absolute spirituality and reality of the vision is in accordance with his admission of what, for want of a better term, we call the supernatural into the purely spiritual world. But he has his own way of putting this solution, if it may be so termed. Relying upon the narrative, in some degree, he declares that, because the vision was not visible to Paul's companions, it must have been "subjective in a sense"; in what sense it was not, he does not carefully define. Having prepared Paul's mind after much the same fashion as the holders of the hallucination theory, he proceeds: "Such was the struggle through which Paul's mind was passing when the Spirit of Jesus, acting indirectly through the constancy and faith of His persecuted disciples, having first insensibly permeated and undermined the barriers of Pharisaic training and education, now swept all obstacles before it in an instantaneous deluge of conviction that this persecuted Jesus was the Messiah. At the same moment the Messiah Himself (who during these last months and weeks of spiritual conflict had been bending down closer and closer to the predestined apostle from His throne in heaven) now burst upon the convert's sight on earth" (p. 244). And elsewhere he says: "I myself firmly believe that there was a spiritual act of Jesus simultaneous with the conveyance of the manifestation to the brain of the apostle" (p. 230).

I confess that there is something here far too subtle for plain men of ordinary comprehension; but with some effort we may be able to grasp what it involves. I have already endeavoured, in treating of the theory of mere vision, to deal with the historical incongruities which lie at the root of this theory; for the two theories are near relatives, and some difficulties are therefore common to both. But this middle theory has difficulties of its own. It is a mass of

what, for want of a better term, we call miracles. There is, first, the direct spiritual interposition of Jesus, as a climax to the indirect effect of His Spirit through the constancy and faith of His persecuted disciples; that is, there is an extraordinary spiritual act, or, in other words, what is to us a spiritual miracle. That is not subjective, but objective, and is miracle number one. Then there is the "conveyance of the manifestation to the brain of the apostle, the Messiah Himself bursting upon the convert's sight on earth." Now it is plain that there is something here, not spiritual or subjective, but physical, and again objective. The conveyance of a real manifestation to the brain is at any rate not purely spiritual, but involves the physical: the manifestation so conveyed is essentially objective; the vision, we must not forget, is "real." There is, by a special act, an enabling the brain to see a real thing without the intervention of the eyes; it is therefore, in the common acceptation of the term, miraculous. This is in the physical sphere, and is miracle number two. But these are not the only miracles. Dr. Abbott does not absolutely say that the spiritual act produced the physical manifestation; he says the two were simultaneous: but it really looks as if the Spirit of Christ was intended to cause the conveyance to the brain. If so, that would be a heterogeneity, and another miracle. If the spiritual act however had nothing to do with the physical manifestation, but the two were simply simultaneous, then the two independent events were so timed as to fall exactly together, without any interdependence whatever: and this would have been, not an accident —for there are no accidents in this theory—but another extraordinary interposition, that is, another miracle. Yet, after all, this theory of real vision may be so presented as to leave little room for quarrelling with it. If an actual manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth was conveyed to the brain of St. Paul—in other words, if his eyes were open to

see Christ (the Messiah Himself, so it is put, bursting upon the apostle's sight on earth), then we have only one condition to impose; namely, that the manifestation should be of such a nature as to be a proof to Paul, not merely of the continued existence of Christ after death, but of His resurrection and exaltation to glory. For with this proviso there is objectivity enough in the "real vision" theory to account for Paul seeing a sight which he was not yet in a condition to conjure up for himself, by imaginative faith, or by any other faculty whatever which the unbelieving and persecuting Pharisee had then at his command. Without some such objectivity, it is incredible that Paul, as he then was, could have been so certain of seeing Christ as to accept at once the revelation and the commission, and preach them without faltering to his dying day; to make the resurrection the basis of his gospel, and to affirm without the faintest sign of doubt, "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain: . . . ye are yet in your sins."

To touch upon another point which has some bearing upon Paul's own view of what he saw. Where did Paul obtain his idea of a spiritual body? Perhaps he may expose himself to Dr. Abbott's satire on spiritual hands and spiritual bipeds; but, to a candid student, Paul's phraseology suggests that he believed in some spiritual-material form—if a term be allowed which is to us a paradox—in which believers shall hereafter bear a likeness to the risen Christ. It is difficult otherwise to interpret such passages as these: "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able to subject all things unto Himself"; and another: "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. . . . The first man is of the earth,

earthy: the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." I am not just now defending Paul's deduction: all that I desire to contend for is, that we may fairly connect Paul's doctrine, so uncompromisingly asserted by him, with the appearance of the risen Lord. If the contention be correct, we have another argument for Paul's uncompromising belief in the real and personal presence of the Lord in the way.

But it is objected, that the theory of sudden conversion renders the revelation to Paul psychologically inexplicable, and represents his change of heart as the result of an external act of magical force. We do not profess to have a complete explanation of the psychological difficulties; any more than we can profess to be satisfied with the explanations confidently offered by those who set the history and evidence aside. And yet we are not driven to admit that Paul's conversion was a magical transformation. "No revelation of Christ," says Neander, "could have changed a Caiaphas into a preacher of the gospel." Paul was no Caiaphas; he was no worldling time-server, able to find an excuse for ignoring even a sign from heaven, if it impelled him to inconvenient duty. There were therefore sympathetic points of contact in Paul's soul for Christ to touch when He wished to reveal Himself: an earnestness of will, a determination to accept truth when found, an energy of action for the truth's sake, and, all the while, a consciousness of inward moral weakness in the midst of his Pharisaic pride in outward performance.

Lastly, while it seems an unhistorical exaggeration to speak of the "struggles" of Paul's conscience in the midst of his persecution, it would be unreasonable to exclude the possibility of thoughts and questionings now and then

starting up in his mind. All that was needed was, that the blindness should be swept away. For this purpose Christ by the flash and the voice brought the outward sense to the help and assurance of the inward. Then the appearance of Christ in person—the appearance of one Paul knew to be dead—brought back upon him his thoughts and questionings, brought back all that he had heard from the faith of Christ's followers; and the question, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" drove the shaft into his heart. This was, if true, a "mighty work"; but just as Jesus of Nazareth had on earth made mighty works minister to His revelation of the goodness of God, so the same Jesus of Nazareth now, from heaven, availed himself of a mighty work—the spiritual-corporeal manifestation of Himself—to break down the only barrier between an honest seeker and the truth. As before by His resurrection He had lifted His earlier followers out of the depths of their despair, that by their joy and confidence they might turn the hearts of their brethren the Jews; so once more, by the same resurrection, He burst the chain which bound that earnestness of will, that energy of purpose, that aspiration after truth, that burning zeal for holiness, that enthusiastic and tender-hearted devotion to an ideal, which afterwards gave the chiefest of the apostles the western world as a prize for Christ.

The very suddenness and abruptness and violence of the change has left its mark upon the message he was sent to deliver, has served to clothe it with persuasiveness and power. Caught in the midst of fierce enmity, and, not only pardoned for his sin, but honoured with a mission direct from Christ, with what force and with what humility he could proclaim Christ's free and unmerited grace! Bowed down all at once by remorse as the chief of sinners, because he had persecuted the Church of God, he beheld in the forgiving Christ who raised him up, no longer the Messiah of the Jews, but the Saviour of all the sinners of a godless

world. Appalled in a moment at the degradation with which his Pharisaic pride in Jewish privilege had overwhelmed him, he flung from him all Jewish prerogative, and grasped the universal equality of man. Snatched from his hopeless struggle with that slough of despond, the law as a source of righteousness, confounded with the revelation that in fighting for the law he had been rebelling against God, and flooded with the light that unveiled to him the person of Christ, he could preach a righteousness, not of weary works, but of lively faith in Him. Possessed with the surprising vision of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified in weakness, the exalted in power, the almighty in love, he could know nothing among men but Christ and Him crucified, he could demand honour and glory for the Crucified, not in spite of, but because of the cross. Profoundly stirred by the Saviour's agony for his sake, he could henceforth count all things but loss that he might have fellowship with those sufferings, being made conformable unto that death. Christ came, Paul saw, Christ conquered; and the suddenness and completeness of the victory may help us to understand how, next to the resurrection of Christ, the most momentous event in the history of Christianity is the conversion of Paul.

JOHN MASSIE.

THE EIGHTY-SIXTH PSALM.

THE 86th Psalm forms a strong contrast to the four psalms —the 4th, the 8th, the 16th, and the 32nd—which we have already sought to study at once historically and devotionally. All these poems form part of the earliest collection of psalms, which the Jews called the first book of psalms, and which, from their freshness of style and, in some cases, from their supposed appropriateness to moments in the life of David,