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ART. I.—THE CHRISTIAN COMMISSION AND  
CRITICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RESULTS.

HOW far is the Christian Commission independent of critical and scientific results ?

In this question, there are two indeterminate quantities—one is the Christian Commission, and the other is Critical and Scientific Results. By the Christian commission I understand the final charge of the Saviour, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." This implies (1) that a gospel has been committed unto us, has been laid upon us as a burden and a charge; and (2) that we have a gospel to preach. (1) It implies that the imposition of this burden is perpetual and not transient; it anticipates no essential change, and looks forward to no end. Human nature being what it is, and Christ being what He is assumed to be—the risen Son of God and Son of Man—it conceives of no condition of things when the commission will have spent itself, till the kingdom, which is announced as always at hand and is ever being prayed for, shall indeed have come. (2) It implies that what we have to preach is a gospel, a message of good news; that it is sent to every creature, to the whole creation, primarily of mankind, as directly concerning them, although indirectly calculated to benefit also the brute creation, whose physical condition is so largely subject to the will of man. And, if I am asked to define it further, I should say that it is the Gospel of God's forgiveness and goodwill to man, that it contains the promise of deliverance, of pardon, of redemption, of salvation here and hereafter, a promise that is limited only by man's rejection of it. "He that believeth not shall be judged" and condemned (*κατακριθήσεται*) for his unbelief. "He that believeth not hath been judged already (*ἤδη κρίσται*), be-

cause he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

This is the Christian commission; it is a commission that comes only through Christ. Historically it was first given by Him, and the terms upon which it was given involved the recognition of the fact that He was the author and cause of it, and that but for Him and His work there would have been neither the knowledge of, nor the authority for it. For the Christian commission is not a philosophy or a school of teaching, but it is the proclamation of a fact through the revelation of a Person who bases all that He has to announce upon the unique position that He claims to fulfil. This position is itself either a fact or a fiction; if it is a fiction, then it will infallibly be detected, and the sharper men's intellects become, and the wider their experience grows, the more certainly and speedily they will detect it; but if it is a fact, that is to say, part of the substantive truth of the universe, and consequently in keeping and harmony with its central truth, then in proportion as men's knowledge of the facts of the universe, which can never be other than partial, increases, it is probable that from time to time it will seem to contradict these facts; but no less certainly and surely is its eventual triumph guaranteed, because, as Hooker says, "truth of what kind soever is by no kind of truth gainsaid," and on the hypothesis the Christian commission is part of the substantive truth of the universe.

Of course if we demur to this hypothesis we are only pretending Christians, and not believers; the real question turns upon our acceptance of the hypothesis, that is, upon our admission or rejection of the claims of Christ. It does not turn upon the abstract truth or falsehood of those claims—of that we are and can be no judges; but it turns upon our acceptance or rejection of them upon adequate grounds. If we accept them, then the question for us is closed as far as regards our ability to demonstrate the harmony between *that* and any other truth. If we reject them, it is quite possible, and more than probable, that our sense of allegiance to some other truth may make us believe it our duty to reject *this* as false; but so far as we are Christians, that is, believers in Christ, we cannot do so.

And it is perfectly clear that we cannot be the bearers of any commission unless we are believers in Christ. What is it that is committed to us, unless it be the Gospel which He died to establish? If His death did not establish it, then we have no Gospel—we have nothing to proclaim. The Christian commission implies not only its own absolute truth, but yet more, that those who receive it are profoundly convinced of its truth. This, doubtless, is no more than may be said of the

Mohammedan commission, and then it becomes a question of the comparative merits of the Gospel of Christ and the religion of Mohammed; but no man in his senses can for a moment suppose that the two rest upon anything like the same foundation of independent evidence. In speaking of the Christian commission, as we are speaking now, we assume beforehand that the basis of evidence on which it rests has been found to be altogether satisfactory and entirely sound. In receiving the testimony of Christ, we have, in the words of St. John, "set to our seal that God is true," and that the truth of Christ is the truth of God.

So much, then, for what we understand by the Christian commission. And in saying this we have anticipated the essential answer to the question proposed. To a large extent the Christian commission is entirely independent of the results of science and criticism. And for these reasons. First, the foundation of the Gospel is one of historic fact. It is idle to suppose that Christ was not an historic person, as real as Plato and Aristotle, as Alexander and Cæsar. The validity of His claims turns upon His known historic character, the nature of His teaching, the reality of His death, the truth of His alleged resurrection, the kind of recognition which has been supplied by the long result of history and the experience of ages. These are all, or nearly all, facts which are not open to question. The only question is the meaning and interpretation of the facts; and that is a question only so far as the ultimate resolution of it is essentially a matter of belief rather than of intellectual demonstration.

But, secondly, what is historically true once is historically true for ever. No discoveries of science or speculations of criticism can undo a thing which has once been done, or turn back the course of history. If Christ ever truly died, no lapse of time can have the smallest influence upon that fact. Having been a fact once, having once occurred, it is a fact for ever; and whatever its significance may be, so far as that significance depends upon its being a fact, it is unalterable. Every believer knows that the death of Christ as a motive power, as a source of life, is as fresh and potent now as if it had happened but yesterday. The lapse of time has no effect upon it; and that divine energy arises, not from his faith, but from the fact itself, which awakens and stimulates the faith. If the unbeliever is not conscious of this, it is the fault, not of any weakness in the evidence of the fact, but of his inability to apprehend it—that is, of his unbelief. It stands to reason, therefore, that so far as the Gospel is based on fact, and derives its strength from fact, so far the revolutions and

mutations of time can have no effect upon it. If it ever was true, it must be true for ever.

But, thirdly, the revelation of the Gospel is a revelation of the relation between God and man; and this, from the nature of the case, is an unalterable relation. However man may vary in condition, intelligence, knowledge, power, and the like, his relation to God will not vary. God either is or is not his Father; man either is or is not the handiwork of God. This is not a matter that we can find out by science or criticism. The Gospel announces it as a fact; and, if a fact, then the relation is a permanent one, independent alike of development on our side, and of growth in our conceptions of God arising from increased knowledge of His works. The Fatherly relation is independent of infinite possible variations in the subjects of it, and is itself beyond the sphere of observation and induction so far as it subsists between God and man. For though our conceptions of God will vary as we vary, yet the relation between us, if a true one, must of necessity be permanent. The relation is *constant*, however much the condition of the things related may *vary*. For this reason, then, the Christian commission, assuming it to be a true one, is necessarily independent of any conceivable results of science, because, however much they may enlarge and modify our conceptions of God, it is manifestly impossible that they should affect His relation to us if only He has made that relation known; and that He has done so is the declaration of the Gospel of Christ.

The results of science and criticism differ in this respect, that those of science are likely to affect our knowledge of God and of the ordinary methods of His working. It is impossible to read such a book, *e.g.*, as Mr. Norman Lockyer's on the chemistry of the sun, or any astronomical treatise, and not feel that the name of God, which we name so lightly, is raised to an inconceivable degree of glory and majesty, which may well tempt us to adopt Tyndall's variation of the Psalmist's language, and exclaim, "What is man, that Thou shouldst have respect unto him, or the son of man, that Thou shouldst regard him?" It is impossible to note the uniformity of the operation of natural laws, and not be led to reconsider the belief that their uniformity has been less than universal. It is simply our conception of God and His mode of working that the study of physical science is likely to affect, but the results of criticism are calculated not to interfere so much with our conceptions of God as to "throw ominous conjecture on the whole success" of the methods by which we have arrived at the conclusion that the recorded testimony concerning God is valid and genuine. And certainly the extravagance with

which some critical questions have been pushed of recent years is such as to threaten the very existence of that testimony.

I wish, then, to inquire how far it is reasonable to suppose that the results of science and criticism are likely to affect the alleged validity of the Christian commission, and I will consider some of the results of science first.

It is, of course, obvious that it was not for many centuries after the canon of Scripture was closed that men began to be at all aware of the true relation of the earth to the heavenly bodies among which it moves. Doubtless, if the writers of the Old and New Testaments thought at all about the matter, they thought that the sun moved round the earth, and believed that the earth was a vast plain, broken only here and there by seas and mountains. To be sure, we read in the Prayer-book Psalms, "He hath made the round world so fast that it cannot be moved," but there is, of course, no authority for the word *round*. The writers uniformly speak of the earth and the heavens as they appear, and it possibly never occurred to them to ask how far these appearances were true. If, then, their ignorance on these matters affords any reason for calling in question the authority of their Divine message, it is plain that we cannot for a moment regard it; and possibly, when it began to be known that the earth moved round the sun, and was itself a sphere, it was felt by many as a rude shock to faith; and yet clearly without cause, for why should any Divine commission in the writers carry with it also the promise of information on topics such as these? Rather, the very fact of their special illumination being coupled as it was with the natural ignorance of their time is calculated to enhance the value of that special illumination. How strange that in the midst of the thick surrounding darkness there should be flashes of such conspicuous brilliancy! And, in like manner, when within the last three-quarters of a century the researches of geology and palæontology have made plain to us the fact that the earth has been in existence for inconceivably long cycles of ages, it is impossible not to feel that there are certain statements in the early books of Scripture which, if not contradicted thereby, must at all events be understood in a way vastly different from that in which the writers understood them. And yet here, as before, it is more natural that they should speak on the level of their own knowledge than that, because they were the agents of a really Divine revelation, they should also have been enlightened upon matters which, however interesting to us, were foreign to the immediate purpose of their commission. The very perfection of the fossil was, to a large extent, dependent on the environment

of the chalk or the old red sandstone in which it was embedded and preserved.

So, too, with the antiquity of the human race, and its origin from a single pair, and the connection between sin and death of which St. Paul speaks, and the accounts of the flood and the dispersion after it. These are all matters upon which our opinion must be liable to modification as our knowledge of physical facts increases. But I feel myself, with regard to the early statements concerning them, that inasmuch as they are altogether unique in their kind, differing *toto celo* from the legendary narratives of other nations, and being immeasurably superior to them, and doubtless of far greater antiquity; and forasmuch as they manifestly contain so much of truth, which a far wider experience has only tended to confirm, but which it was not at the time conceivably within the power of man to discover; and considering the credentials with which they come to us, it would certainly not be wise to jump at once to the conclusion that they are to be rejected because some of the conjectures of some speculators are opposed to them. These are, for the most part, matters on which we have had to wait long for further knowledge, and there is no reason in the nature of things why we should not be content to wait yet longer, or possibly to forego it altogether.

It is very rarely, if ever, that we find the express statements of Scripture irreconcilable with assured facts. Take, for instance, the connection between sin and death as stated by St. Paul. Unless we shut our eyes to facts, we know for certain that there never was a time in the history of the physical universe when death was not an essential element in its constitution. The mere alternation of the seasons alone is a proof of it. Summer gives birth to multitudes of creatures that winter destroys. No season can pass without vital changes taking place in the animal kingdom. To suppose, therefore, that man was originally possessed of natural and inherent immortality, which he lost in consequence of a certain act, seems to me to be no less opposed to the analogy of God's revelation in nature—which I presume is a *true* revelation—than it is not necessarily required by literal adherence to the language of St. Paul. He says that "by one man's disobedience sin entered into the world, and death by sin." There was clearly no *sin* in the physical universe till man had sinned; and what was it but sin that introduced death?—not, indeed, into the natural world, but with all its attendant misgivings and terrors to the moral world of the human conscience. With what would have been had man not sinned it availeth not us to concern ourselves, and Scripture, which deals only with the realities of our condition, has not told us. We, if

we are typical men, are conscious of two great realities, sin and death. It is highly desirable that we should know how to deal with these, and *here* it is Scripture alone that has not left us in the dark; for I never yet met with the philosopher who could deal with death, however wisely, if not well, he might speculate about sin; but it is the remedy for death and the promise of eventual triumph over it that is the central and essential burden of the message of Scripture.

With regard to the antiquity and origin of the human race, the results of science are, perhaps, as yet, too uncertain to occasion much apprehension from any apparent conflict with Scripture. To my mind the literal narrative in Genesis suggests the existence of other races besides the Adamic. Whom did Cain marry? Of whom was he afraid when he went and dwelt in the land of Nod? How could he build a city without the help of others? Of what use would it be to him when built? These and similar questions impress me with the unwisdom, as well as the injustice, of supposing that the Mosaic narrative is a sufficient and still more an exhaustive summary of human history from the first. What it has told us it has only told us in an enigma, hard and obscure in the extreme; and it will be a long time before we shall be justified in saying that what it has told us is in insuperable variance with known facts. And with regard to the origin of man, accepting the wildest theories of Monboddo and his more recent and illustrious followers, there must have been a wide chasm as well as a long interval between the first man and the last monkey; and it will be a still longer time before we ever can succeed in proving, contrary to universal experience and the recorded testimony of the old Roman "*pulvis et umbra sumus,*" that virtually the constituent elements of which we are made, are anything better than, as Genesis tells us, dust and ashes. So far then, I think, we may rest securely in the tent of sacred tradition, while the blasts and counterblasts of unlimited speculation rage and storm without.

With regard to the story of a flood co-existent with the area of man's habitation, and that of the subsequent dispersion, there are undoubtedly all but universal traditions which point to a confirmation of the one, while the broad and patent fact of three great families of language, the Semitic, Aryan, and Allophylian, having marked features of characteristic difference, and yet severally of individual likeness, is at all events in general conformity with the other, which refers to three primary branches, the families and tribes with which the whole earth was overspread.

I am, of course, well aware that very great latitude of opinion is allowable and, indeed, inevitable in questions of this

kind, and moreover that the questions themselves are not directly connected with the Christian commission; but I think, nevertheless, that inasmuch as the records to which we are indebted for our knowledge of that commission are also the sources of our traditional knowledge in these matters, it is desirable not indeed to make Christianity stand or fall therewith, but to show that there is not even in them that insuperable disagreement with probable fact which those who reject Christianity are so ready to assume and assert.

I think, moreover, that we have two sources of knowledge—one in Scripture, and the other in the reverent study of the works of God in nature; and I regard the one as hardly less a revelation than the other. It is certain that in our study of the one we shall continually be obliged to correct and modify our former conclusions; and who shall say that the principles of our interpretation of Scripture are as yet mature and perfect? There, as in nature, we must be largely dependent on observation, comparison, reflexion, inference, induction, and the like. The great previous question that we have to determine is whether or not Scripture is legitimately to be regarded as a special and unique source of Divine knowledge. If it is not, then there is an end to the whole matter; then Scripture is but another department of nature, and we have only one source of knowledge instead of two. But if it is, then there is no reason why our studies and even our discoveries in the one should not go on almost *pari passu* with those in the other. Certainly nothing can be a greater hindrance to our progress in either than the assumption that we have learnt all that it has to teach us—that we have no need to reconsider, re-examine, and correct.

Surely the revelations of the telescope, the microscope, the spectroscope, and the like, are scarcely less sacred than those of Scripture, and that only for the reason that while the one speaks to us, or may speak to us (for alas! this is not absolutely certain) of a God, the other tells us with no faltering or uncertain tones that that God is a Father. I fear we must first postulate the God whom the telescope and microscope are to reveal even as we must first postulate the fact that He has spoken or can speak, before we can receive Scripture as the Divine word. But conceding these two positions, there can be no conflict between the two revelations, and if we imagine that there can be, it is only because we have not rightly apprehended one or both. The Bible most distinctly proclaims God as the God of nature. What nature, then, has to tell us is only more and more about the God whom the Bible proclaims, only there is this difference: that the Bible claims to tell us that about God which we cannot learn from nature, viz., the relation in

which He stands to us and we to Him; and, as I said before this relation is a permanent and unalterable one, not directly susceptible of proof, but dependent for acceptance upon our faith, though, when accepted, confirmed in ten thousand ways by the converging lines of moral and historic evidence. If, then, we really hold a commission from Him, that commission must be independent of anything that nature has to teach us about Him.

But then this position which I assign to Scripture turns upon the credibility with which it comes to us, and here it is that the so-called results of criticism are likely to affect us. And how are we to estimate these? They may involve the rejection of the fourth Gospel, that of the historic authority of the Synoptic Gospels, the rejection of the greater part or even of all of St. Paul's Epistles, for who shall set bounds to the possible conjectures of irresponsible critics? They may involve the absolute rejection of the New Testament as anything more than a group of purely human documents possessed of no final authority. They may involve, therefore, the rejection of Christ as anything more than a benevolent and large-hearted visionary, who was adroit enough to avail Himself of the concurrent forces of His age to achieve a prominent position in His own time, and a unique position among the reformers of all time; and though not skilful enough to avoid the natural consequences of His collision with the then dominant powers, yet sufficiently enthusiastic to inspire His followers with a belief that led them to advance the most extravagant claims for Him after His death, which, in a society naturally prepared and predisposed, were destined to achieve even greater success than He did.

I say that the so-called results of criticism may involve even this as regards the New Testament, for it is unquestionably these supposed results to which the wildest and most extravagant of our modern lights so confidently appeal; and as regards the Old Testament there is, of course, involved the entire rejection of the Pentateuch as the work of Moses, the rejection of all the historical books as trustworthy records, the abandonment of almost all the Psalms as the composition of David, the rejection of the greatest part of Isaiah as a contemporary work, the obvious rejection of such books as Daniel and Jonah, together with such an estimate of the other writings of the prophets as at once deprives them of any special claim to our attention, and places them merely on a level with the writers in the Greek anthology. And undoubtedly if such are the results, as some would have us believe, we can no longer speak of a Divine commission in any sense but that of Mohammed, or Ignatius Loyola, or Joe Smith, for, "when the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?" To dispute about

the quantity when the quality is gone is idle and useless, and if we have no special commission we have virtually none at all.

What, then, is our position with respect to these results? We put them at the extremest estimate that we may the better form our judgment. Clearly, then, to the Christian believer the value of the Gospels can never be less than infinite; but it by no means follows that the validity of his position depends upon his ability to make good this value to others. Supposing, what is absolutely impossible, that the Gospels could be proved to be forgeries of the second century, the historic reality of Christ would remain, the fact of His death would remain, the fact of the Christian commission would remain (because the simple fact that we are baptised Christians proves it), and the general features of the character of Christ would remain, because there are none that we can assign to Him, but those which are with more or less truth portrayed in the Gospels, and these are in general harmony with His known claims, and with the known conditions of His death. Consequently as belief in the person of Christ, and that alone, was the meaning of the Christian profession from the first, it follows that the actual features of His life must have been adequate to causing this profession; but men believed in Him in a twofold way, (1) that He was the Son of God, and (2) that He had risen from the dead; and they believed this about Him notwithstanding the obscurity of His birth, the lowliness of the social position He held, and the ignominy of His death. Although, therefore, the Gospels amply confirm and account for all these facts, no one can for a moment say that they created them or were the cause of them, or that these facts stand or fall with the Gospels. On careful consideration it will be seen that these facts are established by the known existence and character of the Christian society of which they are the ostensible cause; and the existence of the Christian society is a patent fact, which has asserted itself in the face of the world with unbroken continuity for eighteen centuries and a half.

Let it be noted, therefore, that though the Gospels are to us a priceless possession, and though their verbal accuracy may be most important, and the inspired nature of their teaching highly essential, it is altogether erroneous to suppose that if each or all of these positions is impugned, the stability of the Christian faith is destroyed. That does not rest on Gospels or on documents of any kind, however precious these may be as witnesses to its existence at any given time, but it rests on the historic person of Christ, whose personal character on the whole was of such a kind as to call into existence a society which has been a unique power in the world from that day to this, or, if not to call it into existence, to be the central force of its cohesion.

No one can pretend for a moment that the early Christian literature was the cause of the early Christian society; it did not create that society, but was created by it. Though, therefore, of priceless value as a witness to the character of the society, the origin of the society must be sought elsewhere than in the literature, and cannot be held to stand or fall therewith. We cannot discover what that origin was without drawing largely upon the literature which supplies almost the only materials for our investigation. But it is in the nature of certain facts to be proved by certain other facts, and the life and character of Christ may be rightly inferred from the early character of the Christian Church, in the same manner, *e.g.*, as we infer the success of the Greek resistance to Persia, from the fact that the Persians were unable to make good their hold on Greece. Herodotus and other writers may be our authorities for the battles of Marathon and Salamis, but without these authorities, be their value less or more, we may be perfectly certain that battles of a like character must have been fought and won. I am of course only trying to show the relation of our position as Christians to the speculations advanced from time to time by reckless criticism. I believe that such criticism in the long run is surely destined to confute itself, but it is desirable at times to have something else to rest on while the confutation tarries.

To pass, in conclusion, to the Old Testament. If we are to trust the confident assertions of sundry writers there is hardly anything that is left us there. The law of Moses is a fabrication of the time of Ezra. The Psalms are largely Maccabean. Daniel and Jonah are old wives' fables. Isaiah was an obscure and forgotten poet of the Return. As for prophecy, it is a misconception. Strictly speaking, there is nothing that can rightly be so-called. Modern criticism confirms the judgment of Hosea's time,—“the prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad;” while for those who still cling with greater or less tenacity to the traditional belief there is no epithet of contemptuous pity they do not deserve. But here, again, I believe we may wait with patience for the judgment of such criticism out of its own mouth. The novelty of an hypothesis is not seldom its strength, and if to novelty we add brilliance of conjecture and confidence of assertion, the popularity of the hypothesis is assured. But there is scope for emulation here, and one hypothesis begets another, each more daring than the last, until wise men are fain to ask, Is there anything we can save from the wreck, or must the Bible as a whole be given over to the critics till nothing is left that can truly be called the Word of God, and inspiration is merely used as a vague and convenient term for blinding men to the fact that the only

inspiration of the prophets is that which they shared in common with Æschylus and Sophocles, with Horace and Lucretius?

Now, to my mind there is one word which may serve as a corrective of substantial and positive value to the ever varying and uncertain results of the criticism of the Old Testament, and that is the word Christ. It is undeniable that Christianity takes its name from that Christ whom the early disciples believed Jesus of Nazareth to have been. They to a man believed in Him as the Christ. This is why they believed in Him, and what they believed about Him, and this their belief is independent of the Gospel history, though of course fully confirmed by it. The name of Christian is to the believer what circumcision was to the Jew—it is the voucher for his faith; it is unalterable and indelible. If he was a Christian he believed in a Christ. What was this Christ? He was a person holding a particular office, whose coming was expected by the Jews. This expectation was national and characteristic. Their expectation had penetrated to other nations, but *they* did not hold it in the same way as the Jews. The expectation of a Messiah was peculiar to the Jews; it was their national heritage. How came they to have this expectation? There is only one answer: Because for long ages their prophets and psalmists and great writers had begotten it in their national imagination. They believed their sacred writings were full of it. They had gathered and learnt it from them. But the impression produced by this literature upon the Jews was a unique impression; there is nothing to compare with it in other nations. Neither do we find in the case of the world's greatest men that there has been for ages before their birth an expectation in vogue that they would arise and fulfil a certain office. Nothing of the kind preceded the birth of Alexander, of Cæsar, of Hannibal, of Napoleon. We can see for ourselves now how the expectation had grown, though not how it had arisen; what justification there was for it in the time of Christ. We may decide that the cause was inadequate to the result: that does not matter. It is undeniable that this was the cause; it is no less undeniable that the result was produced; while, as a matter of fact, the simple belief that a particular Person had arisen who realised in Himself the promises of this expectation has been the producing cause of the mightiest historical movement that the world has ever known. These are facts of a broad, patent, and far-reaching character, the significance of which, I take it, is beyond the power of the narrow cavillings and carpings of critical objection here and there to destroy. It is impossible to deny that the Christ expectation existed; it is impossible to account for it but as the effect of the sacred

writings. And it is useless to affirm that individually the statements of the prophets did not and could not mean that which they were supposed to mean; for, as a matter of fact, this is how they were understood. Am I right, then, or not, in pointing to this as an indication of the presence in the sacred literature of the Jews of a foreseeing and prophetic spirit as far above the natural ability of the writers to beget or cherish as it was above the power of the disciples to order the events of their own and subsequent ages so as to appear in their combination to be the Divine fulfilment of a Divinely-ordered expectation.

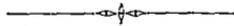
It is not merely the rise of Christianity as an historic fact that we have to account for, but the fact that for ages before Christ came there was a literature in existence of which the most conspicuous feature was its uniform tone of expectation, and that so far from this expectation being the natural cause of the coming of Christ, nothing is more certain than that His actual coming was in direct contrast and contradiction to the form that the expectation had at that time assumed; and it is only by the bringing in of another element—that, namely, of spiritual illumination—that we can see how clear and minute the correspondence was, notwithstanding the actual disappointment and the apparent failure that attended its production.

A certain kind of criticism has done its best to obliterate all the Christ features of the Old Testament—to prove that they do not exist; but here the verdict of history is conclusive. Were it not for the existence of these elements, there would have been no New Testament and no Christianity. The germ of Christianity may have been sown in error and misconception, but the vitality and permanence of the plant that sprung from it shows, at all events, the vitality of the germ, while the natural tendency of the plant is to disengage itself more and more from the error and misconception that surround it. The soil in which it grew may, indeed, have been barren and dry, but the vitality of the seed is proved by the strength and magnitude of the growth that sprung from it.

Whether this strength, magnificence, and vitality may be interpreted as the handiwork of God must depend upon the spirit in which we view it. There are those who can see no tokens of God in nature, and still less in grace. The recognition of the grace of God is the work of the Spirit of God. If it could be proved with the accuracy of mathematical demonstration that Jesus was the Christ, there would be no room for the work of the Spirit of God in bringing about that certainty of moral conviction which is intended to supply the place of it. But where this conviction exists it is felt that logic and reason are its willing and loyal servants, whose

natural function is to do nothing against the truth, but for the truth, and that in contending for the faith we are contending, not for error, but for truth. And though the Christian commission rests upon other grounds and looks to other sources than physical science for its authority, it cannot, from the nature of the case, if true, be disproved by the advancement and discoveries of science; while the broad and patent features of the Old and New Testament are such as to be independent of suppositions as to the authorship of this or that book, seeing that the net result of either Testament as a whole is a unique and unparalleled phenomenon, and the testimony of the one to the other a fact of marvellous significance, which, as it was in no sense the work of human ingenuity and design to produce, so neither is it in the power of critical analysis to destroy or of conjectural theory to supersede.

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#### ART. II.—THE REPORT OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSION.

THE Education Act of 1870 was, in some respects, “a leap in the dark.” Previous educational legislation had recognised only a single system of supplying school-machinery; Mr. Forster’s Act was a new departure, and introduced a dual system. When School Boards were called into existence no one could clearly foresee the extent of their development, the expense they would involve, the effect they would have on the voluntary system, or the line they would take in the matter of religious education. Compulsory attendance was an equally novel experiment, the results of which not even its advocates could clearly forecast. Since 1870 other important educational questions have been raised, such as free education, technical education, manual training, modes of examination and making public grants, the pupil-teacher system, and day training colleges. It was not without good reason, therefore, that the present Government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts.

The Commission was unusually large, and fairly representative of the various interests concerned, though somewhat weak in educational experts capable of judging the *desirability* and *feasibility* of proposed changes from the point of view of the child to be educated. The results of its inquiries and its recommendations are now before us in a series of huge