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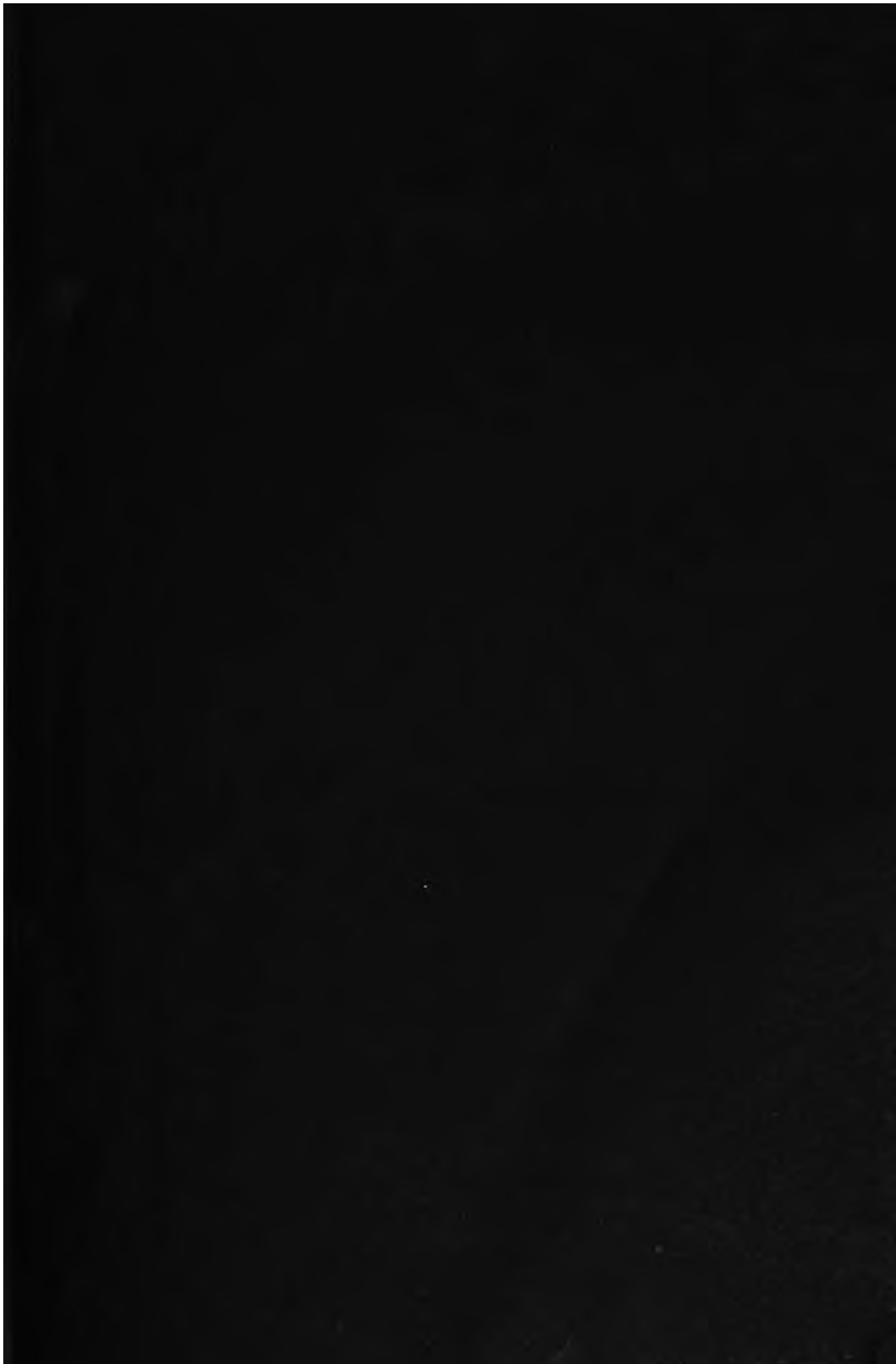
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THE  
RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST



*JOHN KENNEDY, M. A., D. D.*











The Resurrection of Jesus Christ.



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THE  
RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

An Historical Fact.

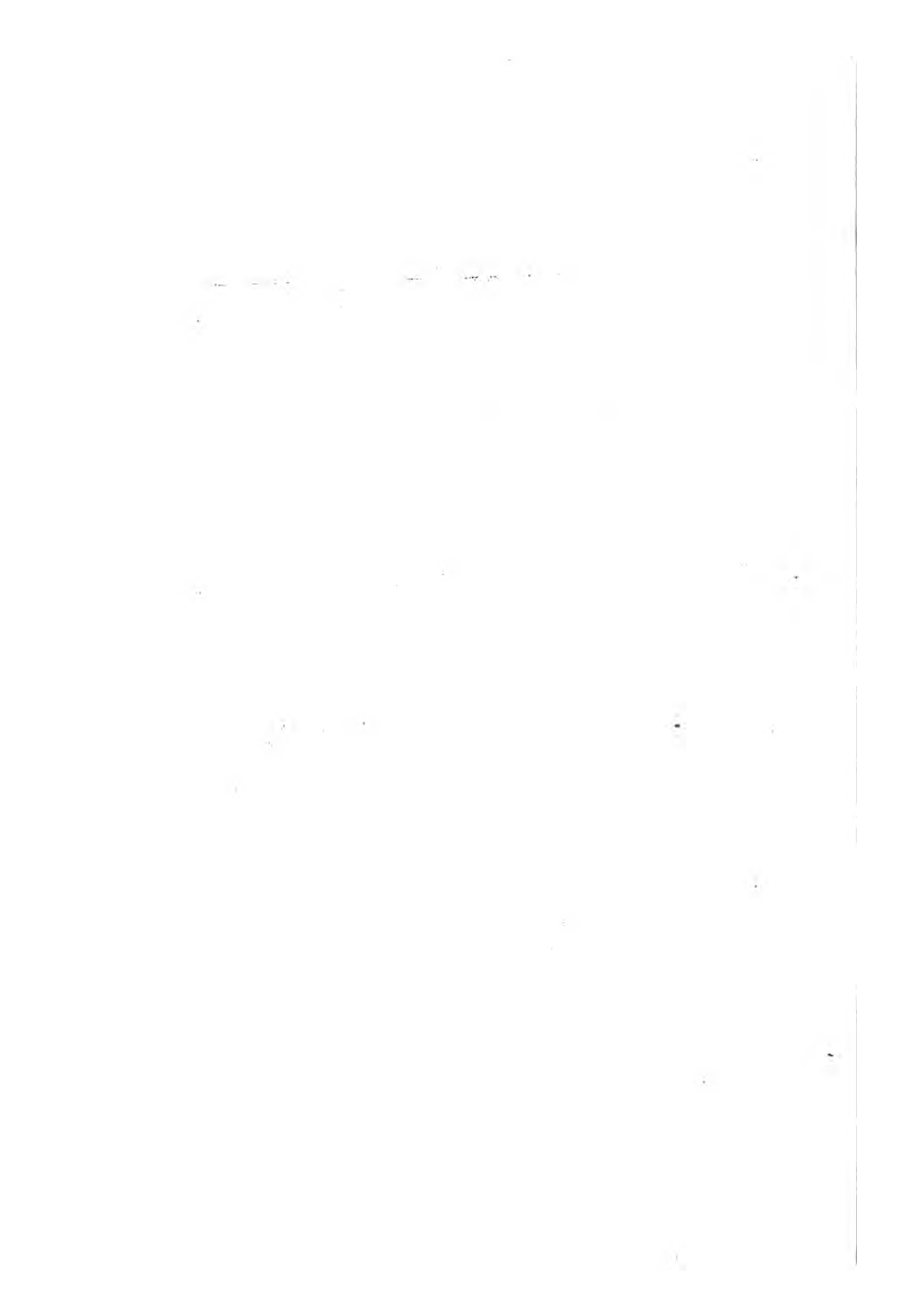
WITH  
*AN EXAMINATION OF NATURALISTIC HYPOTHESES.*

BY JOHN KENNEDY, M.A., D.D.,  
HONORARY PROFESSOR, NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.



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## P R E F A C E.

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**W**HAT might be said, by way of preface to this volume, will be found said already in the introductory chapter and in other parts. It remains only that I bespeak the candid study of the course of argument which I have endeavoured to trace. I am very far from imagining that I have done justice to the subject, or that I could, even if the limits of the volume allowed greater fulness and expansion. But such as it is, it at least indicates evidence which, in amount and character, has never yet been *fairly* met by those who have laboured to prove it invalid or insufficient. But for the *à priori* determination not to accept the supernatural as historical, the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ would be held to be overwhelming.

The importance which Christians attach to the subject has its justification in the relation in which the fact of the Resurrection stands to the religion of Christ, that is to Himself and to the mission which He professed to have, and of which His apostles were the authorised expositors. It were a sheer waste of time and reason to argue for or against the historical credit of ten thousand alleged facts which have found a place in the story of mankind. The determination of ordinary historic questions, whatever intellectual interest may attach to it, in no wise affects the moral well-being of the world. And if the question whether Jesus rose from the dead was one of *mere* history, if it had not vital and influential

relations to both God and man, we might dismiss it without much concern whether the answer should be yea or nay. But Strauss was right in describing this as a "burning question," and in rebuking critics who evade it, or who decline to consider themselves bound to answer it. To the Christian it is a question of life or death.

There is nothing the Christian advocate desires more earnestly than that men should sift and sift every part of the evidence on which his faith rests. And there is nothing he has oftener to complain of than the indifferent and superficial, and not unfrequently supercilious, way in which men skim over and reject it. If he is bound not to accept lightly so mysterious a fact as that of the resurrection of Christ, others are bound not lightly to deny it or leave it undetermined. As to the mysteriousness of the fact, the ground taken in this book is, that what we have to prove is not merely the restoration to life of *a dead man*. "We have to do with One particular Man. And we contend that when we look at the circumstances and character of *this* Man, while the wonderfulness of His resurrection remains, its unlikelihood vanishes." That HE should not rise from the dead, would be more mysterious than that He should.

It is with no misgiving that we challenge the world to find a spot in the character of Jesus Christ, or a flaw in His claims to be accepted as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. The storms of the present age around and against the Christian faith, are only such, however loud and severe, as have often raged before. "But history holds its ground. The wave with its froth passes away; the rock stands firm."

JOHN KENNEDY.

STEPNEY GREEN.

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THE  
RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

AN HISTORICAL FACT.



CHAPTER I.

*The Tests of History and the True Principles of  
Historic Criticism.*

**B**Y the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we mean what has been understood by it in all ages,—with some recent exceptions, which we shall consider before we conclude, by believers and unbelievers alike,—namely, that the body which was taken down from the cross lifeless, and was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, was restored to life, and that Jesus appeared to His disciples in that body, and remained on earth for forty days after He had left His grave. This is what the Gospels intend to set forth. Their statement is that Joseph “besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus,” and that he and Nicodemus, having wound it in linen clothes, with spices, laid it in a rock-tomb belonging to Joseph. On the morning of the third day, the stone which closed the entrance to the tomb was displaced,

and the body which had been laid in the tomb with reverent care was not to be found. The explanation of the displacement of the stone, and of the disappearance of the body, had not to be waited for long. On that same day Jesus appeared to His disciples in bodily form. They were terrified and affrighted, we are told,<sup>1</sup> and He said unto them, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have." And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and feet. This, then, whether true or not, is the averment of the Gospels,—that the body of Jesus was restored to life, and that in this restored body He conversed with His disciples.

We are not called on to determine what change, if any, the body of Christ underwent when restored to life. Whether it was still subject to all the limitations to which, like other bodies, it was subject before His death, or whether it was endowed with some new powers, anticipating, to some extent, the great change which took place when He was glorified, we need not determine. All that we are concerned with is, that it was the same body, the body that had been crowned with thorns, that had been nailed to the cross, out of whose side, when pierced by the soldier's spear, came forth blood and water,—that this body was restored to

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 37.

life without seeing corruption, and that from the lips of this body Jesus spoke to His disciples gracious words, which have been preserved, and which we now cherish as a precious heritage. *It is of this material or bodily rising again that we say: It is an historical fact.*

Now, by what means may an historical fact be established? What tests shall we apply to it?

I.

There is one test, boldly asserted by certain critics, which we consider unscientific and illegitimate—namely this, *that all that is supernatural in any narrative is legendary and unhistorical.* Before this test all the alleged miracles and revelations of both the Old and New Testaments are swept away: Judaism and Christianity perish together. The critics who adopt this test call themselves scientific, and call their ideas of history scientific, and look with something like compassion on those who will not or cannot rise to their high platform. And the air of superiority and self-complacence with which they write imposes on many. But their dogma—that what is supernatural is *ipso facto* unhistorical—is a sheer begging of the question. It has no basis in reason or philosophy. And, on this account, we, with boldness equal to their own, pronounce it unscientific. It would divert us too far from our present purpose to attempt anything like a general discussion of the question of miracles. But so long as we believe in God, we cannot believe

that a miracle is impossible. And if it be possible, it may be actual; and, if actual, it may be capable of proof. Even the improbability of a miracle may be turned into probability, by considerations arising from the character of God and the necessities of mankind.

The first duty of science is to ascertain facts. And on these, when sifted and certified, it grounds its conclusions. The critics who, offhand and *à priori*, declare they will accept nothing as historical which is supernatural, not only prejudge the great question between them and those who believe in a Divine revelation, but incapacitate themselves to fairly estimate the evidence for such a revelation. They are in no true sense free-thinkers. They are the slaves of a foregone conclusion. Having made up their minds that certain things are impossible, they are compelled to reject everything that is presented in the form of evidence in support of these things. *Per fas aut nefas*, the evidence must be rejected. It *cannot* be true, they say, for the thing itself is impossible. Better to accept the most improbable hypothesis, than to accept a statement as true which implies anything supernatural. "Hypothesis," says Renan, "is indispensable in histories of this character [the Gospels], where only the general effect is certain, and where almost all the details are more or less dubious, in consequence of the legendary nature of the authorities." The "authorities" for the life of Jesus Christ are thus *assumed* to be "legendary," because they contain supernatural narratives. And

by a "hypothesis" Renan means not what is meant by the word either in scientific or in historic investigations, but any dream or fancy which his imagination can substitute for the literal narrative which the first principle of his critical code requires him to reject. Guided by this principle, he has added fancy to fancy of the most extravagant, and, it is not too much to say, impossible kind, to get rid of the facts by which the resurrection of Christ is attested. Approaching these facts from his standpoint, he was incapable of estimating them aright, and assigning to them their proper evidential value.

This incapacity is common to all who assume that the supernatural is of necessity legendary. "The belief that a dead man rose from the dead, and appeared to several persons alive," says one of them, "is at once disposed of on abstract grounds." And having disposed, *on abstract grounds*, of the allegation that Jesus rose from the dead; being satisfied, before, and without, any examination of evidence, that the thing could not be, and that the witnesses must be either deceivers or deceived, he proceeds to consider the narrative of the resurrection and the subsequent testimony of those who believed in it, not in an impartial or judicial spirit, but with all the eagerness of a detective to discover and expose the falsity of the witnesses. It could not be otherwise. Those who believe the resurrection of Christ to be in itself a thing impossible and incredible, must reject all the evidence, of whatsoever kind, or of whatsoever degree of strength,



that may be alleged in support of it. Let twelve men say that they saw Him dead, and laid in His grave—that they saw Him rise before their eyes to a new life, and conversed with Him for many days thereafter. Let these men show moral cause why, however improbable the restoration of a dead man to life may be in itself, yet in this particular case there was no improbability, but the reverse. Let them persevere to their dying day in telling the one tale that they saw Jesus die, that they saw Him dead, that they saw Him rising, that they saw Him risen; let them assert that the circumstances in which they saw Him rendered mistake impossible; and let them die a martyr's death rather than abate one iota of their testimony. All this, and much more, would not avail to shake the convictions of those who, "*on abstract grounds,*" believe that the alleged resurrection was impossible. Even if they saw with their own eyes the grave opening and the dead coming forth, they could not believe. It was more likely, they would assert, that their eyes deceived them than that the dead should come to life again; more likely that a thousand eyes should be thus deceived, than that one dead man should live again. Some of the dilemmas which this position, at once sceptical and credulous, creates, will be considered at a later stage of our argument. The point insisted on now is, that those who, on abstract grounds,—that is on the assumption that all miracle is impossible or incredible,—prejudge the question of the resurrection

of Jesus Christ, cannot fairly examine the evidence. They are bound to find it false or faulty. And they must study it, not to know what it amounts to, but to find out wherein its assumed fault or falsity consists.

We, Christians, are willing to conduct our historical investigations without any predetermination on the subject. Instead of presuming to say what God can or cannot do, what He will or will not do, we hold ourselves prepared to receive evidence of what He has, or may have, done.

## II.

The question then returns—*By what tests shall we determine the claim of an alleged fact to be accepted as historical?* Let us hear what writers on history and historical science have said on the subject.

Dr. Thomas Arnold says :

“ In estimating whether any history is trustworthy I should not ask whether it was written by a contemporary, or by one engaged in the transaction which it describes, but whether it was written by one who loves the truth with all his heart, and cannot endure error. For such an one, we may be sure, would never attempt to write a history if he had no means of writing it truly ; and therefore though distant in time or place, or both, from the events which he describes, yet we may be satisfied that he had good sources of information at hand, or else he would not have written at all. Such an historian is not

indeed infallible, or exempt from actual error, but yet he is deserving of the fullest confidence in his general narrative ; to be believed safely, unless we happen to have strong reasons for doubting him in any particular point.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir George Cornwall Lewis says :

“Historical evidence, like judicial evidence, is founded on the evidence of credible witnesses. Unless these witnesses had personal and immediate perception of the facts which they report, unless they saw and heard what they undertake to relate as having happened, their evidence is not entitled to credit. As all *original witnesses* must be contemporary with the events which they attest, it is a necessary condition for the credibility of a witness that he be a contemporary ; though a contemporary is not necessarily a credible witness. *Unless, therefore, an historical account can be traced by probable proof, to the testimony of contemporaries, the first condition of historical credibility fails.*”<sup>2</sup>

Sir Cornwall Lewis says further :

“The credibility of a witness to a fact seems to depend mainly on the four following conditions, namely, 1. That the fact fell within the reach of his senses. 2. That he observed or attended to it. 3. That he possesses a fair amount of intelligence and memory. 4. That he is free from any sinister

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Modern History*, Lect. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Credibility of Early Roman History*, p. 16.

or misleading interest ; or, if not, that he is a person of veracity. If a person was present at an event, so as to see or hear it ; if he availed himself of his opportunity, so as to take note of what passed ; if he has sufficient mental capacity to give an accurate report of the occurrence ; and if he is not influenced by personal favour or dislike or fear, or the hope of gain, to misreport the fact ; or if, notwithstanding such influence, his own conscience and moral or religious principle, or the fear of public opinion, deters him from mendacity, such a person is a credible witness.”<sup>1</sup>

Of certain reconstructors of ancient history, Sir Cornwall Lewis says :

“Instead of employing those tests of credibility which are consistently applied to modern history, they attempt to guide their judgment by the indications of internal evidence, and assume that the truth can be discovered by an occult faculty of historical divination. Hence the task which they have undertaken resembles an inquiry into the internal structure of the earth, or into the question whether the stars are inhabited. It is an attempt to solve a problem, for the solution of which no sufficient data exist. The consequence is, that ingenuity and labour can produce nothing but hypotheses and conjectures, which may be supported by analogies, and may sometimes appear specious and attractive, but can never rest on the solid

<sup>1</sup> *On Authority in Matters of Opinion*, pp. 21, 22.

foundation of proof. There will therefore be a series of such conjectural histories ; each successive writer will reject all or some of the guesses of his predecessors, and will propose some new hypothesis of his own. It is not enough for a historian to claim the possession of a retrospective second-sight, which is denied to the rest of the world, of a mysterious doctrine revealed only to the initiated. Unless he can prove as well as guess ; unless he can produce evidence of the fact, after he has intuitively perceived its existence, we have no certainty that these 'green spots in memory's waste,' may not be mere mirage and optical delusion."<sup>1</sup>

Canon Rawlinson describes "the laws of the modern historical criticism, so far as they seem to be established" thus :

"1. When the record which we possess of an event is the writing of a contemporary, supposing that he is a credible witness, and had means of observing the fact to which he testifies, the fact is to be accepted, as possessing the first or highest degree of historical credibility. Such evidence is on a par with that of witnesses in a court of justice, with the drawback, on the one hand, that the man who gives it is not sworn to speak the truth, and with the advantage on the other, that he is less likely than a legal witness to have a personal interest in the matter concerning which he testifies.

<sup>1</sup> *Credibility of Early Roman History*, p. 10, etc.

“2. When the event recorded is one which the writer may be reasonably supposed to have obtained directly from those who witnessed it, we should accept it as probably true, unless it be in itself very improbable. Such evidence possesses the second degree of historical credibility. When the inquiry appears to have been carefully conducted, and the judgment of the writer seems sound, we give very nearly as full credence to his statements founded upon inquiry as to those of an eye-witness.

“3. When the event recorded is removed considerably from the age of the recorder of it, and there is no reason to believe that he obtained it from a contemporary writing, but the probable source of his information was oral tradition; still, if the event be one of great importance and of public notoriety, if it affected the national life, or prosperity,—especially if it be of a nature to have been at once commemorated by the establishment of any rite or practice,—then it has a claim to belief as probably true; at least, in its general outline. This, however, is the third, and a comparatively low, degree of historical credibility.

“4. When the traditions of one race, which, if unsupported, would have had but little claim to attention, and none to belief, are corroborated by the traditions of another, especially of a distant or hostile race, the event which has this double testimony obtains thereby a high amount of probability

and if not very unlikely in itself, thoroughly deserves acceptance. The degree of historical credibility in this case is not exactly commensurate with that in the others, since a new and distinct ground of likelihood comes into play. It may be as strong as the highest, and it may be almost as weak as the lowest, though this is not often the case in fact.”<sup>1</sup>

“Historical materials,” we are reminded by Canon Rawlinson, “may be divided into direct and indirect—direct, or such as proceed from the agents in the occurrences; indirect, or such as are the embodiment of inquiries and researches made by persons *not* themselves engaged in the transactions.”

We are further reminded of “the force of cumulative evidence.” “No account of the grounds of historic belief would be complete, even in outline, which failed to notice its application to this field of investigation, and its great weight and importance in all cases where it has any plan. ‘Probable proofs,’ says Bishop Butler, ‘by being added, not only increase the evidence, but *multiply* it.’<sup>2</sup> When two independent writers witness to the same event, the probability of that event is increased, not in an arithmetical but in a geometrical ratio, not by mere addition, but by multiplication. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses,’ the word to which such witness is borne is ‘*established*.’ And the agreement is more valuable if it be, so to speak,

<sup>1</sup> *Bampton Lectures on the Historical Evidences of the Truth of the Scripture Records*, Sect i.

<sup>2</sup> *Analogy*, part II. chap. vii.

incidental and casual ; if the two writers are contemporary, and their writings not known to one another ; if one only alludes to what the other narrates ; if one appears to have been an actor, and the other merely a looker-on ; if one gives events and the other the feelings which naturally arise out of them ; in these cases the conviction which springs up in every candid and unprejudiced mind is absolute ; the element of doubt which hangs about all matters of mere *belief* being reduced to such infinitesimal proportions as to be inappreciable, and so, practically speaking, to disappear altogether."

Canon Rawlinson rejects, as we have done, the principle which modern Rationalism would exalt into a law of historic criticism—the impossibility or incredibility of miracles, and the consequent rejection of all supernatural narrative as legendary—a principle which would put a stop at once to any inquiry respecting an alleged revelation. Canon Mozley describes this principle as "the shallowest and crudest of all the assumptions of unbelief." It is "unphilosophical," as Dean Milman says, "because it assumes dogmatically the principal point in dispute."

To these statements of the accepted laws of historic criticism, we may add the following principles which Mr. Isaac Taylor lays down as a defence against "the artifices of sophists :"

I. Facts remote from our personal observation



may be as certainly proved by evidence that is fallible in *its kind*, as by that which is not open to the possibility of error. By *certain* proof is here meant, not merely such as may be presented to the senses, or such as cannot be rendered obscure, even for a moment, by a perverse disputant; but such as when once understood, *leaves no room for doubt in a sound mind*.

II. Facts, remote from our personal knowledge, are not necessarily more or less certain in proportion to the length of time that has elapsed since they took place.

III. The validity of evidence in proof of remote facts is not affected, either for the better or the worse, by the weight of the consequences that may happen to depend on them.

IV. A calculation of actual instances, taken from almost any class of facts, will prove that a mass of evidence which carries the convictions of sound minds, is incomparably more often true than false.

V. The strength of evidence is not proportioned to its simplicity, or to the ease with which it may be apprehended by all persons; on the contrary, the most conclusive kind of proof is often that which is the most intricate and complicated.<sup>1</sup>

### III.

While prepared to be bound even by the most stringent principles of historic evidence, in weighing the evidence for the alleged fact of the

<sup>1</sup> *On the Transmission of Ancient Books*, etc. chap. xiii.

Resurrection of Jesus Christ, it must be distinctly remembered that historical facts are not capable of demonstration. Demonstration is possible only in the science of mathematics, or of numbers, or in argument based immediately on intuitions or necessary truths. The absence of demonstration, however, does not imply uncertainty. But it admits of degrees, as Bishop Butler has said, from the lowest presumption to the highest moral certainty—a certainty on which men are prepared to stake both this life and the next.

For this very reason, that historic facts are not provable by demonstration, their evidence is necessarily of a kind that may be doubted, questioned, or denied. And it forms no presumption against any alleged fact that it has been denied, and that persistently. A persistent denial may originate in other causes than insufficiency of evidence.

Dr. Whately's well-known pamphlet, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, shows what a plausible case ingenious reasoning may make out against the most notorious facts. Dr. Johnson, talking to Boswell of those who deny the truth of Christianity, said, "It is always easy to be on the negative side. I deny that Canada is taken, and I can support my denial by pretty good arguments. The French are a much more numerous people than the English, and it is not likely that they would allow us to take it."

"But the ministry have assured us in all the formality of a gazette, that it is taken."

“Very true. But the ministry have put us to an enormous expense by the war in America, and it is their interest to persuade us that we have got something for our money.”

“But the fact is confirmed by thousands of men who were at the taking of it.”

“Ay, but those men have still more interest in deceiving us. They don’t want that you should think the French have beat them, but that they have beat the French. Now suppose you should go over and find that it is really taken ; that would only satisfy yourself, for when you come back we will not believe you—we will say you have been bribed.”

Not only must we not expect demonstration in matters of history or morals—a form of proof which is impossible—but we have no right to determine for ourselves beforehand, or *à priori*, what shall be the amount or the character of the evidence which we shall accept in any case as sufficient.

“It is not for us to say, If God willed us to believe in Him, He would have made the evidence of His Being stronger, more palpable, more conclusive than it is. If Christ was really the Son of God, He would have done what the devil urged Him to do, He would have cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and overwhelmed the worshippers in the sacred courts with the proof of His Divinity. If Christ really rose from the dead, or would satisfy the world that He did, He should have shown Himself openly to His enemies, and should have demanded an official investigation,

first to prove that He had been really dead, and then to prove that He who now called Himself Jesus was the same Jesus who had died. We have no right to determine by what evidence facts or truths like these shall be certified to our satisfaction. In each of the cases supposed the hypothesis is at least admissible—and this is enough for the present—that there may have been good reasons why such evidence should not be given. We have to deal with facts or alleged facts, proofs or alleged proofs, and it is for us to face these, to sift them, and to form our judgment on such evidence as is actually available. This is the dictate of common sense.”<sup>1</sup>

#### IV.

Our argument in proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ will be found to include much more than the mere recital of the facts recorded in the New Testament. But at this point it will be convenient to mention the historic documents on which we rely, and to state some of the grounds on which we vindicate our right to appeal to them.

We place in the forefront four universally acknowledged Epistles of the Apostle Paul: Romans, First and Second Corinthians, and Galatians. We believe the other Epistles ascribed to the Apostle to the Gentiles to be genuine and authentic, as well as these. But inasmuch as the apostolic authorship of the four named is admitted by the most hostile

<sup>1</sup> See the Author's *Popular Handbook of Christian Evidences*, Chap. I., on "Fundamental and Guiding Principles."

critics, we are content to limit our argument, so far as Paul is concerned, to the four. Now these four contain many facts relating to the character, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and for the most part the references to these facts are incidental, and such as imply that they were already known to those to whom the letters were addressed, and that they were "most surely believed by them."

"The most important documents for history," Renan says, "are those which possess in the least degree the historic form. The authority of chronicles must give place to that of an inscription, medal, charter, or authentic letter. Viewed in this light, the epistles of undoubted authors and well-authenticated dates form the basis of all the history of Christian origins." We do not admit that the Epistles of Paul form "the basis of *all* the history of Christian origins," but we believe in their extreme value, and are thankful that we possess them. We further subscribe to Renan when he says, "An old writing can make us acquainted not only with the exact epoch when it was composed, but with the epoch which preceded it. Every written work suggests, in fact, retrospective inductions upon the state of society whence it proceeded. Though dictated for the most part from the year 53 to about 62, the Epistles of St. Paul are replete with information about the first years of Christianity."

Next to the extant letters of the Apostle Paul we place the four Gospels. In what may be called

the order of nature, the Gospels should come first. But it is probable that some, at least, of Paul's letters were written before any of the Gospels were given to the world. And for this reason, and because the letters are admitted by those who do not admit, or do not fully admit, the Gospels, we place the letters first in order. Fully to vindicate our right to appeal to the Gospels as historic authorities, we should have to write a volume. But for our present purpose, a brief argument must suffice.<sup>1</sup>

The letters of Paul presuppose a history, they are based on a history, not necessarily a history *written*, but a history transacted, events widely published to the world orally, if in no other way. And we naturally inquire whether any written history of these events can be found, and where,—whether written before or after the letters which have induced our inquiry does not matter. Now, we find four narratives, bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which profess to contain the record we are in search of. We find these alone, and no others. There is no fifth, no rival history of the life of Jesus Christ.

Our first inquiry, then, is, whether these four narratives can be traced back to the age of the personal followers of Jesus Christ. We believe they can. But for the proof of this as a fact the reader must be referred to other books. There is another inquiry which can be compressed into

<sup>1</sup> See *The Gospels: their Age and Authorship, traced from the Fourth Century into the First*; by the Author.

narrower limits: Is the history of the life of Jesus, contained in the Gospels, in harmony with the incidental facts contained in Paul's letters, and we may add, with the important theological deductions which the apostle draws from them? To this question an explicit answer can be given. The Christ of the four Gospels is the Christ of Paul's four letters. So far as the Gospels and the letters refer to the same facts, they are in most entire agreement; and the facts to which they refer in common are the main facts of the great life to which they belonged; while on no one point, great or small, is there any discordance between the Gospels and the Apostolic Epistles. More than this, the details contained in the former are necessary to the full understanding of the brief statements and casual allusions contained in the latter.

It follows from all this that even if the Gospels could be proved to have been written at a period later than that to which we think they are rightfully ascribed, they would be entitled to be accepted as a true history. Being the only history extant, and being in accord with what is known from other than directly historical sources, there would be no ground for questioning it. It could not have been accepted by the universal Church, as we know it was, unless it was in general accordance with the widely published, and therefore well-known facts, of the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is self-evident that any material discordance between the written story and the known facts would at

once have discredited the story, and led to its rejection.

We may add that no written history of Christ could have been accepted by His followers as authoritative that had not, at least, an apostolic imprimatur. It was known, and it is not denied now, that Christ had chosen certain men who had been His personal disciples, to represent Him and His claims and mission to the world. When, at a later period, another was called to the apostleship in an unexpected manner, his claims had to struggle with doubt because he had not been an eyewitness of the life of Christ. And throughout his life, illustrious as his Christian labours and conquests were, this doubt was used as a weapon against him. He had the painful duty thrust upon him of defending his apostleship, not for his own honour's sake, but for the gospel's sake. The history of Paul, the history of the opposition to him, shows the importance and authority that were attached to the apostleship in the primitive Church. And in view of it we conclude that it was scarcely possible for a history of Christ to gain the confidence of the Churches without the sanction, direct or indirect, of an apostle. Such history might be in itself most credible, in perfect harmony with all that was known of Christ, but it could not claim to be authoritative. Let it be known, however, that a history was written by an apostle, or by one who had the confidence of an apostle, and this would be an immediate passport to accept-



ance as an "authorised version" of the life of the Great Master. That our four Gospels gained credence and acceptance with the first Christians, and that no others did, is certain. And the inference is obvious, both that their story was in general accordance with the facts of Christ's life as already certified by eyewitnesses, and already "surely believed" by the Churches; and that the recital of the story in these Gospels had the sanction, explicit or implicit, of some of the apostles.

A somewhat similar argument may be used in support of the historical authority of the book known as the Acts of the Apostles. The four Epistles of Paul contain, indirectly, much history relating to the spread of the Christian faith. Three of them are addressed to Churches in two of the most important cities of the Roman empire, Rome and Corinth, and one to Churches in a province of Asia Minor. They are full of references to the labours of other apostles, as well as to those of Paul. When they were written, it is evident that the Gospel, which had begun its course in the very heart of Judaism, had travelled far and wide through the empire, and had won converts to Christ in many Gentile lands. See, for example, Rom. xv. 18-29. Now where shall we find a history of the emergence of Christianity from its cradle in Jerusalem, and of its diffusion among nations, civilised and uncivilised, the Greeks and barbarians, of whom Paul speaks in Rom. i. 14? Was such

a history ever written? And if it was, where shall we find it? There is only one known book that professes to be of this character, and there is no evidence that there ever was any other. In the oldest Christian writings that have come down to us, there is not a line, not an allusion, that would suggest that their authors have ever heard of any other history of the beginning of their faith than that contained in the "Acts."

This being so, the question arises, Is the story contained in the Acts in accord with the story implied in the Epistles? The question was answered conclusively by Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, and more than answered. In this work the author traces coincidences which are manifestly *undesigned*, between the statements of the letters, and the records of the history, and builds on them an argument in favour of the genuineness of both which is little short of irresistible. He puts the matter thus: "The volume of Christian Scriptures contains thirteen letters purporting to be written by St. Paul; it contains also a book, which, amongst other things, professes to deliver the history, or rather memoirs of the history, of this same person. By assuming the genuineness of the letters, we may prove the substantial truth of the history; or by assuming the truth of the history, we may argue strongly in support of the genuineness of the letters. But I assume neither the one nor the other. The reader is at liberty to suppose these writings to have been lately discovered in the library of the

Escorial, and to come to our hands destitute of any intrinsic or collateral evidence whatever; and the argument I am about to offer is calculated to show, that a comparison of the different writings would, even under these circumstances, afford good reason to believe the persons and transactions to be real, the letters authentic, and the narration in the main to be true."

An attempt has been made, but in vain, to show that there was a radical and irreconcilable difference between Peter and Paul, and that the Acts of the Apostles was written, not as a true and impartial history, but for the purpose of reconciling the parties which had followed Peter and Paul respectively. The critics who maintain this theory have no means of information respecting the mutual relations of Paul and the three "Pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem—Peter, James, and John—that are not accessible to ordinary readers of the New Testament. And the passage to which appeal is specially made, instead of supporting the theory, is conclusive against it. In the passage Paul says, "When they [Peter, James, and John] saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; for He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles; and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas

the right hands of fellowship ; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”<sup>1</sup> And the rebuke which was administered by Paul to Peter at Antioch, as recorded in the same chapter, instead of indicating any doctrinal difference between them, is based upon the fact that there was no such difference : “ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Even if it could be shown, which it cannot, that there was any fundamental difference between Peter and Paul, they were certainly one in their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this is the subject on which at present we claim a right to appeal to the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 7-9.

## CHAPTER II.

## The Testimony of the Apostle Paul.

## I.

**T**HESE things being premised, we are now prepared to submit the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the severest tests which have been indicated by Sir Cornewall Lewis and others. For reasons which will appear, we begin with a witness who, in one respect, may be called only secondary, but whose testimony, in addition to what is personal in it, is really the testimony of many primary witnesses, and possesses, on many accounts, a value which can scarcely be over-estimated. The Apostle Paul, as is well known, was not one of the personal followers of Jesus Christ, either before His death or during the forty days which are said to have intervened between His resurrection and His ascension. But his letters tell us what he himself believed, and some of the grounds on which his belief was based, respecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ. First of all we shall quote his words:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which

also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.”—*1 Cor. xv. 1-9.*

“Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God: because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. . . . But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”—*1 Cor. xv. 12-20.*

“Knowing that He which raised up the Lord

Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.”—*2 Cor.* iv. 14.

“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”—*Rom.* i. 3, 4.

“Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”—*Rom.* iv. 23–25.

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God.”—*Rom.* vi. 8–10.

“Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”—*Rom.* viii. 34.

“Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above: or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead. The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”—*Rom.* x. 6–9.

“To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living,”—*Rom.* xiv. 9.

“Paul, an apostle,—not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.”—*Gal.* i. 1.

In all the other letters ascribed to Paul, with one or two exceptions, the resurrection of Christ is referred to as a fact which no Christian doubted :

“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.”—*Eph.* i. 19, 20.

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.”—*Phil.* iii. 10. See also ver. 21, where Christ’s “glorious body” is spoken of.

“The firstborn from the dead.”—*Col.* i. 18.

“Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.”—*Col.* ii. 12.

“To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.”—*I Thes.* i. 10.

“If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”—*I Thes.* iv. 14.

“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of



David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel."—2 *Tim.* ii. 8.

There are several points of much significance brought to view by these passages, to which reference may be made with advantage now, although some of them will require further consideration.

1. The resurrection of Christ was proclaimed by the Apostle Paul *everywhere*. There is not one Church addressed by him in the letters which he wrote, which had not received from him this fact as a part of his "gospel" to the world.<sup>1</sup> 2. This part of Paul's gospel was accepted by all the Churches as truth. The incidental manner in which the apostle refers to it in all the passages quoted, is the best proof of this. It was not necessary for him to insist upon it or to rebuke any denial of it. Even in Corinth, it was not the resurrection of Christ that was doubted, but the final resurrection of mankind. And the chief argument by which Paul repelled this doubt was, that logically it led to a doubting or denying of the resurrection of Christ Himself. 3. Paul attached the utmost importance to the fact of the resurrection of Christ. The whole fabric of the redemption which he preached must fall, if it was not true.<sup>2</sup> Paul was convinced that he could give such evidence of the fact, that men must believe it; or, if they did not, they must count him and the other apostles to be liars. "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of

<sup>1</sup> 2 *Tim.* ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> 1 *Cor.* xv. 14, 4.

God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not." "He does not leave room one moment," says F. W. Robertson, "for supposing the possibility of a mistake. There was no mistake. It was either true or it was a falsehood. The resurrection of Christ was a matter of fact; James, Cephas, the twelve, the five hundred, either had or had not seen the Lord Jesus; Thomas either had or had not put his finger into the print of the nails; either the resurrection was a fact, or else it followed with the certainty of demonstration that the apostles were false witnesses before God." This is the position which the apostle took—and he took it boldly. But we must look more clearly into the matter.

Our examination of Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ resolves itself into two questions—what is said? and who says it? What is it exactly that Paul tells us on the subject? And who is Paul? What manner of man is he? In other words, what does the testimony amount to? and who and what manner of person is the witness? We shall take the second question first.

## II.

As to the character of Paul there cannot be two opinions. Let us hear what those say of him whose theory would lead them to detract as much

as possible both from his moral trustworthiness and from his intellectual competency.

Of the Epistles of this apostle, Renan says that "they possess absolute authenticity, thorough sincerity, and freedom from legendary corruption." As are the Epistles, so, therefore, is their author—"thoroughly sincere, and free from legendary corruption." Renan being judge, then, the witness whose testimony we are about to consider is a man "of thorough sincerity," and the writings which contain his testimony are "free from legendary corruption," and "are replete with information about the first years of Christianity."

The most unscrupulous rejecter of "supernatural religion" which these times have seen, says, "Paul was singularly independent; and at every turn we perceive in his writings that he disclaims all indebtedness to the elder apostles. He claims that his gospel is not after man, nor was it taught to him by man, but through revelation of Jesus Christ." "As to the Apostle Paul himself, let it be said in the strongest and most emphatic manner possible, that we do not suggest the most distant suspicion of the sincerity of any historical statement he makes. We implicitly accept the historical statements, as distinguished from inferences, which proceed from his pen. It cannot be doubted that Paul was told that such appearances [those mentioned in 1 Cor. xv.] had taken place. We do not question the fact that he believed them to have

taken place." "That his convictions and views of Christianity were based upon the reality of the resurrection, is undeniable."

But this author finds the means of reducing the testimony of this "singularly independent" man, the "sincerity" of whose historical statements is above suspicion, and who, he alleges, "concentrates all interest in the death and resurrection of his Messiah," to an absolute nothing. And these means are twofold.

1. We find in Paul a "keenly impressionable nature, apt to fall into the ecstatic state when brought under the influence of active religious emotion." The proof alleged is his rapture into the third heavens, recorded in 2 Cor. xii. "If a person making such an affirmation [as the restoration of a dead man to life], although of the highest honour, were known to suppose himself the subject of constant revelations and visions, and if, perhaps, he had a constitutional tendency to nervous excitement and ecstatic trance, his evidence would have no weight at all." And such being the Apostle Paul, according to this writer, his evidence must go for nothing!

Paley and Lord Lyttelton formed in their time a far more correct estimate of the character of the apostle. The former says: "St. Paul's letters furnish evidence—and what better evidence than a man's own letters can be desired?—of the soundness and sobriety of his judgment; and his morality is

everywhere calm, pure, and rational ; adapted to the condition, the activity, and the business of social life, and of its various relations ; free from the over-scrupulousness and austerities of superstition, and from what was more perhaps to be apprehended, the abstractions of quietism, and the soarings and extravagances of fanaticism. His judgment concerning a hesitating conscience, his opinion of the moral indifferency of many actions, yet of the prudence and even the duty of compliance, where non-compliance would produce evil effects upon the minds of the persons who observed it, is as correct and just as the most liberal and enlightened moralist could form at this day. The accuracy of modern ethics has found nothing to amend in these determinations.”<sup>1</sup>

To the same effect is the judgment of Lord Lyttelton : “ In his First Epistle to the Corinthians [xiii. 1-3], St. Paul hath these words, ‘ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.’ Is this the language of enthusiasm ? Did ever enthusiast prefer that universal benevo-

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Paulinæ*, chap. xvi.

lence which comprehendeth all moral virtues, and which, as appeareth by the following verses, is meant by charity here ; did ever enthusiast, I say, prefer that benevolence (which is attainable by every man) to faith and to miracles, to those religious opinions which he had embraced, and to those supernatural graces and gifts which he had imagined he had acquired ; nay, even to the merit of martyrdom ? Is it not the genius of enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely below the merit of faith, and, of all moral virtues, to value that least which is most particularly enforced by St. Paul, a spirit of candour, moderation, and peace ? Certainly neither the temper nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatic delusions can be found in this passage.”<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely necessary to point out that the root of the inference respecting Paul which the author of *Supernatural Religion* draws from the rapture into Paradise is the assumption, which we cannot allow, that Paul’s “revelations and visions” were not of God, but were the fruit of his own “constitutional tendencies.” “Now,” says Lord Lyttelton, “had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that in so long a period (fourteen years) he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind ? Would not his imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven, as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St. Catherine, were carried by theirs ? And if vanity had been predominant in him, would he have

<sup>1</sup> *Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul.*

remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the Divine favour? No, we should certainly have seen his Epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all that we read in the works of sainted enthusiasts. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teachers who had disputed his apostolical authority, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all.”<sup>1</sup>

2. The other method by which the author of *Supernatural Religion*, following closely in the steps of Strauss, would nullify the testimony of the Apostle Paul, is by ascribing to him an amount of indifference and carelessness which is simply incredible.

“It might have been reasonably expected,” we are told, “that Paul should have sought out those who could have informed him of all the extraordinary occurrences supposed to have taken place after the death of Jesus. *Paul does nothing of the kind.* He is apparently quite satisfied with his own convictions.” The ground of this statement is that he did not return at once from Damascus to Jerusalem, and did not see any of the apostles for three years after his conversion.<sup>2</sup> “Is there,” we are asked, “that thirst for information regarding the facts and doctrines of Christianity displayed

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 1-5, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 18.

here, which entitles us to suppose that Paul eagerly and minutely investigated the evidence for them? We think not," is our author's reply. "Paul having made up his mind in his own way, and, having waited three years without asking a question, it is not probable that the questions he then asked were of any searching nature." But on what authority, we demand, is it alleged that Paul "waited three years without asking a question" respecting the death and resurrection of Christ, and that, as to "seeking out those that could inform him," he "did nothing of the kind"? The facts of the case are plain enough. Paul's call to the "apostleship" did not need the confirmation of those who were apostles before him, and he began to exercise it without waiting for their consent. But the apostles in Jerusalem were not the only persons who could tell him of the "facts of Christianity." There were many in Damascus who "called on the name of Jesus," and to one of them he was instructed by the Lord, who had appeared to him in the way, to go, by whom it should be told him what he was to do.<sup>1</sup> Thus while the revelation he received on the way to Damascus gave him assurance that the Jesus whom he was persecuting was indeed the Christ, he was left to be further instructed by those who were in Christ before him. And the things with reference to which such instruction was possible, and which did not need to be communicated by revelation, were the facts concerning the life and

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 6, 10.



death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—facts which were the common property of all Christians, not the peculiar property of the apostles—facts respecting which Ananias and others could give him the fullest and most minute information. Now, is it credible that a man who is confessed to have been “singularly independent,” and the “sincerity” of whose “historical statements” is above all suspicion, could have contented himself with passively listening to any hearsay tale that might come to his ears? and that all he could say to the Corinthians or to others on the subject was, that he “*had been told*” that Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions after His death?

The author who would have it so, may be answered by himself. “We can well imagine,” he says, “the conflict which went on in the ardent mind of Paul when doubts once entered it; his resistance and struggle for the faith of his youth; the pursuance as duty of the course he had begun, while the former conviction no longer strengthened the feverish energy; the excitement of religious zeal in the mad course of persecution, not to be arrested in a moment, but become, by growing doubt, bitterness and pain to him; the suffering inflicted sending its pang into his own flesh. There was ample preparation in such a situation for the vision of Paul.” On which we remark that there is no evidence of any such “preparation” for the vision, or whatever it was, by which Paul was converted. But the man whose spirit could be de-

scribed in the words just quoted, to whom "growing doubt" of his position as an enemy to Christ and a persecutor of His followers, could be "bitterness and pain," was not the man to listen idly to what might chance to be "told" him respecting Christ, and to receive it credulously, without asking any questions.

"Paul," according to our author, "eminently combined works with faith in his own life. When he believed Jesus to be an impostor, he did not content himself with sneering at human credulity, but vigorously persecuted His followers. When he came to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, he was not more inactive, but became the irrepressible Apostle of the Gentiles. He acted upon his convictions in both cases; but his mere persecution of Christianity no more proved Jesus to be an impostor, than his mere preaching of Christianity proved Jesus to be the Messiah. It only proved that he believed so. He was as earnest in the one case as in the other." Our contention is, not that Paul's or any other man's preaching of Christianity, irrespective of the circumstances, proves Jesus to be the Messiah,—but, that a man, such as Paul is here described to have been, "earnest" and "irrepressible," could not have contented himself, as this author represents him to have done, with mere hearsay, and without asking questions of those who could give him information. This would be an utter anomaly in the experience of human nature. On his conversion he preached Jesus in the syna-

gogues of Damascus, that He was the Son of God.<sup>1</sup> Now, according to the letter written long afterwards to the Romans, it was by His resurrection from the dead that the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God was finally established.<sup>2</sup> Paul the persecutor must have known that the disciples of Jesus declared everywhere, and boldly, that their Master had risen from the dead. And the supernatural appearance of Jesus to him as he approached Damascus must have satisfied him at once that their testimony was true. But this, instead of superseding all further inquiry, would be to his soul, confessedly "earnest" and "irrepressible," the beginning of inquiry, minute and thorough, respecting a fact on which must rest before the world the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

In Keim, we have a more candid and appreciative, though still rationalistic, critic of Paul as a witness of the resurrection. His words contain an explicit answer to the attempt which the author whom we have just quoted makes, to detract from the evidence of one whom he acknowledges to have been "singularly independent." In reply to "subtle critics who have objected to arguments based upon Paul's writings, on the ground that such arguments translate scraps of thought into facts," Keim says: "Paul was not indifferent to historical facts. It should be remembered that information concerning

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 4.

the life of Jesus sometimes forced itself upon him, in Jerusalem, in Damascus and Antioch, in the person of an Ananias, a Barnabas, a Silas, a Philip, a Mnason, as well as in the persons of the apostles and Christians of the Holy City; and it is by no means a proof of a long-continued indifference to the history with which he had from the beginning been partially acquainted, that at the close of the third year after his conversion, he travelled to Jerusalem with the express object of becoming acquainted with Peter, and of learning from him, certainly not merely his principles, but the details of his intercourse with Jesus. It is, however, quite enough to know what his Epistles reveal. In them importance is attached to Christian tradition; from them it appears as if he was by no means satisfied with the general facts of the crucifixion, the burial and the resurrection. Upon the most decisive points of Christian doctrine—the questions as to the significance of the death of Jesus and the reality of His resurrection—Paul has given such an amount of faithful historical information and weighty historical evidence, that his contributions rank with the Gospel histories, and are superior to the earliest conceptions of the apostolic age concerning the death of Jesus. The life of Jesus must have been far more richly at his command than is now apparent; for, in his Epistles, he always assumes that the elements of tradition, the delineation of the figure of Christ, stand before the eyes of his readers.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. I. p. 50.

Again Keim says: "It would even be easy to show that Paul was *compelled* to satisfy his own mind, historically and critically. His conversion had to struggle into existence through *doubt and denial*, and his mental character was pre-eminently logical; he was never happy until his ideas were firmly established, until he had arrived at positive conclusions, and had anticipated all objections. *Shall we suppose that he believed in the Messiah, and yet had troubled himself either not at all, or only superficially and generally, about those facts which must support or overthrow his faith?* We are thus led to two important conclusions. In the first place, the apostle's faith must have rested, not upon the meagre notices of the person of Jesus which we find in his writings, but upon a knowledge of His life sufficiently comprehensive to justify all the results of his reasoning, and to present to his mind, either on the ground of his own observation or that of others, the picture of a character without spot and full of nobility. And, in the second place, this knowledge of the apostle is not the fruit of a blind acceptance of unexamined Christian tradition, picked up here and there, but, as the case of his inquiry into the evidences of the resurrection shows, was arrived at by means of a lucid, keen, searching, sceptical observation, comparison, collection and collation of such materials as were accessible to him."

How the man who can maintain all this, and much more which we cannot quote, should fall

short of a full acceptance of Paul's Gospel, it is not for us to divine. But his position as only a semi-believer renders his tribute to Paul as a competent and trustworthy historical witness all the more important. Even in Paul's theological system he sees only an additional sign of the concern with which he must have scanned the traditional, that is, the historical facts of the life of Jesus. "The apostle's independent system of ideas," he says, "resting as it does upon the traditional facts of the life of Jesus, is itself a new and eloquent testimony to the immense interest felt in the person of Jesus immediately after His departure, and even while the bloody traces of a criminal death were still fresh."

Setting aside both friendly and unfriendly critics, the ordinary reader of the extant letters of Paul can judge for himself what manner of man the apostle was. "Seeing we have this ministry," we read in 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2, "as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

That he was justified in speaking thus of his own absolute honesty and sincerity, his whole life attests. Nor does that life, nor do his writings, allow us for a moment to entertain the idea that there was any weakness about him which would leave him in any

danger of being imposed on by others. Everything we know of him points the other way. And Keim does not speak too strongly when he says that the knowledge he possessed respecting the life of Jesus Christ "was arrived at by means of a lucid, keen, searching, sceptical observation, comparison, collection and collation of such materials as were accessible to him."

Here, then, we have a witness who comes up to the standard set by Dr. Thomas Arnold, a man "who loves the truth with all his heart and cannot endure error"—a man of whom "we may be satisfied that he had good sources of information at hand, or else he would not have written at all." And we have now to examine what he says respecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### III.

Paul's personal testimony to the fact must be examined first. In the passage already quoted he says: "Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God."<sup>1</sup>

The occasion referred to, when the risen Jesus "was seen" by Paul, must have been at the very commencement of his apostleship. For it was essential to the apostleship that he who held the office should be a witness of the resurrection. So said Peter.<sup>2</sup> And Paul acknowledges this, when,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Acts i. 22.

defending his own apostleship, he says: "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"<sup>1</sup> This "seeing" of Jesus, which must have been at the beginning of his ministry, and without which he could not have been an apostle, is, therefore, not to be confounded with spiritual "revelations," such as those to which he said he owed his knowledge of the gospel,<sup>2</sup> or with such events, visions or trances, as are referred to in 2 Cor. xii., when he was rapt up into the third heavens, and Acts xxiii. 11, when the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul," and Acts xxvii. 23, 24, when the angel of God brought him a Divine message on the eve of the shipwreck at Melita. On none of these occasions is it said that he "saw" Jesus. *This was his privilege once, and only once.*

The occasion referred to can be identified beyond reasonable question. It is that which is related in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The same story is related in Paul's own words in the twenty-second and twenty-sixth chapters of the Acts; on the first of these occasions to a tumultuous crowd in Jerusalem, and on the second to King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus at Cæsarea. Between these several accounts there are minute differences, which, instead of militating against the truthfulness of the narrative, serve, as do the unimportant differences of independent witnesses, to confirm it. It would have been easy

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 11, 12.



for an author, or editor, who had the slightest consciousness of error, intentional or unintentional, to remove, by a touch of his pen, the slightest appearance of discrepancy. But the historian writes in the ninth chapter, and Paul speaks in the twenty-second and twenty-sixth, with the freedom of men who were conscious of truth. The only variations which can with any reason be called discrepancies, are these: First, we are informed that the men who journeyed with Paul stood speechless; whereas Paul says in ch. xxvi. 14, that they all fell to the ground. Secondly, we are told that they heard the voice, but saw no one; whereas, according to ch. xxii. 9, they saw the light, but heard not the voice of Him who spoke.

Now, in cross-examining witnesses who are presumptively honest, we are content to accept any reasonable hypothesis which will reconcile what at first sight may seem contradictory. In this case we have not far to go for such hypotheses. As to the posture of Paul's companions, we have only to suppose that the phrase, "they stood speechless," does not refer to posture at all, but merely intimates that they became speechless, that they remained fixed, were panic-struck, were overpowered by what they heard and saw. It is only natural to suppose that they would all fall to the earth through fear; and Paul informs us that they actually did so. The second apparent discrepancy relates to the voice from heaven. Luke says, "hearing the voice,"<sup>1</sup> whereas Paul says, "they

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 7.

heard not the voice of Him who spoke to me.”<sup>1</sup> The solution of this difference is very simple. According to Luke, those who travelled with Paul heard the sound of the words that were spoken, but according to Paul they did not understand what was spoken. The words spoken by the Lord were heard both by Paul and his companions, but were understood only by Paul. We have a similar circumstance in the life of Christ; where a voice from heaven to Him was heard in a threefold manner; those who were believers recognized it as the voice of God, and heard the words; some, hearing it, said it thundered; others, hearing it, said an angel spake to Him.<sup>2</sup>

When two narratives which are manifestly independent of each other, supplement the one the other, and thus throw light the one upon the other, they furnish mutual confirmation. Thus the historian in the Acts tells us that a light shone round about Saul on his way to Damascus, and that Saul heard a voice; and he reports the words which the voice addressed to Saul, and which Saul addressed to Him from whom the voice came. But he does not say expressly that Paul *saw* the person who spoke to him. But Paul himself tells us that he “saw” Jesus. The words which Luke reports, then, were spoken, not by an unseen, but a seen person. And when Paul said, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” he spoke to one whom he was seeing. The voice to Saul did not come out of a cloud, but from the lips of One who was

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> John xii. 28-30.

visible at the time to the eye of Saul. This is implied not only in the words of Paul in 1 Cor. xv. 8, but in the words addressed to him by Ananias in Damascus—"The Lord, who appeared to thee [literally, who was seen by thee], in the way as thou camest."<sup>1</sup>

The argument of Paul to the Corinthians, the personal testimony which he bears to the resurrection of Christ, would have no force or relevancy, if there was no corporeal manifestation of Christ to him,—as real, though in circumstances very different, as those to the other witnesses whom he names. Of the form in which Christ appeared to him we may gather something from his own words. In Phil. iii. 21, he speaks of Christ's "glorious body," the "body of His glory," the body in which He is now manifested in glory, as the body like unto which ours shall be fashioned at the last. And in 1 Cor. xv. 49, he says, that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." It was in His glorified body that Jesus was seen on the way to Damascus. It was a real body, though with those differences between the "body of our humiliation,"<sup>2</sup> in which Christ condescended to live on earth, and that body "that shall be" when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, which are described in 1 Cor. xv. It was the risen body of the Lord Jesus, perfectly and permanently "transfigured" when He ascended to heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 21.

This, and nothing less, is what Paul says, whether truly or not. He gives himself forth to the world as a personal witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so confident is he in the reality of his own seeing of the risen Christ, that, as we have shown, he will listen to no explanation which implies that he might possibly be mistaken. If it was not true that Jesus was risen, he and others were false witnesses : in plain words, they were liars.

But, now, is it possible that after all Paul was mistaken? Can any reasonable explanation be given of the alleged circumstances of his conversion, without acknowledging the reality of Christ's appearance to him? Those who *will not* believe in miracles, whose philosophy binds them to reject everything that cannot be accounted for *naturally*, *must* find some such explanation—an explanation that shall not compromise the honour of Paul on the one hand, or on the other admit anything that is supernatural.

The attempt, as commonly made, is to this effect—Saul of Tarsus was moved to resist the growing power of Christianity by seeing all that he held most dear and most holy endangered. He undertook the journey to Damascus with all the fiery zeal of his nature. But he had been staggered in his faith by what he saw of the calm spirit and forgivingness of the martyr Stephen. His Pharisaism did not bring tranquillity to his spirit. But in the Christians he saw a state of mind which put

to shame his own restless and joyless zeal. Still, he felt it his duty to persecute, and by increased ardour hoped to quiet the doubts which haunted him. It was in this spirit he left Jerusalem—in moments of despondency asking himself, “Who, after all, is right, thou or the crucified Galilean, about whom these men are so enthusiastic?” but resolute to do what he still believed it his duty to do. Before he reached Damascus, he was thrown *somehow* into an “ecstasy,” to use the words of Strauss, “in which the very same Christ, whom up to this very time he had so passionately persecuted, appeared to him in all the glory of which His adherents spoke so much, showed him the perversity and folly of his conduct, and called him to come over to His service.”

To strengthen this explanation, it is argued, in vague and general terms, that Paul was given to seeing visions. Suggestions are gravely made as to his being possibly subject to convulsions, perhaps to epilepsy. And his constitution, it is asserted, was manifestly nervous. All which may have aided in producing the “vision” which led to his conversion! Readers may be excused if they resent such suggestions as an insult to their understanding. But we are content to say that how a convulsion or an epileptic fit, or even a nervous constitution, could contribute to the conversion of Saul, or to the circumstances in which it took place, passes our knowledge. It may be, however, it is said, that there was a sudden flash of lightning and

a sudden peal of thunder, "which, coinciding with the inward struggles of his mind, was considered by the apostle as the appearance and angry voice of the Christ whom he persecuted." We can understand how a thunderstorm might produce awe and lead to solemn reflection, as in the case of Martin Luther; but how Saul could convert the sound of thunder into a conversation between himself and Jesus Christ, we cannot understand.

#### IV.

On this whole attempt to account on purely natural principles for the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we remark—

I. There is no historic authority for the supposition that Saul's faith in his Judaism had yielded to doubt and struggle before, or at the time of, his journey to Damascus. All the references to his state of mind which we find in his own letters, and in the Acts of the Apostles, point rather to the fact of an undoubting and unwavering conviction that he was in the path of duty. His zeal against the Christians was inspired not by their affirming that Jesus was the Messiah, but because he saw "the law" endangered by their teaching. "I was the more exceedingly zealous of the traditions (*i.e.*, the law) of my fathers."<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis of mental struggles in Saul, when he left Jerusalem for Damascus, is not only without historic foundation, but is contrary to all that he tells us himself of his

<sup>1</sup> Galatians i. 14.

state of mind in this great crisis of his life. See especially Acts xxii. 3-6; xxvi. 9-13, and Gal. i. 13, 14.

2. The suggestion of convulsions and epilepsy does not deserve any serious refutation. As to Paul's being "of a nervous constitution," the notion is based on his statement respecting speaking with tongues, in 1 Cor. xiv., such speaking with tongues being regarded as a mere hallucination or the effect of a blind fanaticism. The nervousness inferred from this gift of tongues can mean only excitability. And yet in none of the apostle's writings do we find clearer evidence of a sober, sound, and self-possessed mind than here. "I thank my God," he says, "I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding; . . . but in understanding be men." Inculcating orderliness in the worship of the Church, he says, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not the author of confusion." In all this we have the very opposite of nervousness or excitability, which could make him an easy prey to his own imagination, or to any form of delusion. Here, as everywhere else, he appears as a man gifted with the clearest perception and the most perfect self-control.

3. Those who ascribe the conversion of Paul to a "vision," or who regard the event which took place near Damascus as a "vision," use the word

in a sense altogether different from that in which Paul uses it. Paul *does* speak of himself as having had "visions." "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord," he says, in 2 Cor. xii. 1. But whatever may have been the mental state of the apostle in a vision, this is common to all his visions that they had, or at least that he believed they had, an external cause, or were produced by an agency external to himself. Thus we read: "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace."<sup>1</sup> And again: "A vision appeared to [or was seen by] Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."<sup>2</sup> From this vision the apostle "gathered assuredly" that the Lord had called him to preach the gospel in Macedonia. So in Damascus, after the conversion of Saul, we have two visions—one to Ananias, and one to Saul.<sup>3</sup> In all these visions, and in all others, there was an external or objective cause. In no case was the vision the mere outcome of the man's own mind. But it is in this latter sense that the term is employed by unbelievers, when they ascribe Saul's conversion to "a vision." There was no external cause for it, they suppose, no external occasion even, unless it be the imaginary thunderstorm. The vision was, though unconsciously to himself, his own act, the product of his own inner life. We need not trouble ourselves with any inquiry into either

<sup>1</sup> Acts xviii. 9.<sup>2</sup> Acts xvi. 9.<sup>3</sup> Acts ix. 10-12.



physical or metaphysical explanations of visions of this order. One thing is certain—that what the vision-seer, if the vision is of himself, sees and hears, must have lain previously within him.

“The vision-seer’s imagination produces nothing wholly new, it only reproduces that which lived before in his consciousness. What he sees is nothing new; it is only the embodying of that which he had long been meditatively carrying about with himself; and what he hears is only the voicing of that with which he was long inwardly agitated.”

It is not pretended, it cannot be, that the vision ascribed to Saul was a reproduction, in this peculiar form, of what was already in him. This would be equivalent to saying that his conversion was the fruit of his conversion, he being already inwardly that which he became manifestly after his vision. The utmost that is pretended is, that his soul was in a state of conflict, that he was agitated between the old and the new, the subject of contradictory emotions. But it has been well said that such a thing as a self-originated vision can occur only when one thought with full certainty fills the whole soul. “Doubtful-minded persons have no visions, but believers who with their whole souls are wrapped up in what they believe. Because the Maid of Orleans already believed with the fullest certainty in her mission, she saw sights and heard voices which conveyed the mission to her.” To bring the event with which the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is connected within the possi-

bility of being catalogued among natural visions, it must be proved, not that doubts had entered his mind respecting the course he was pursuing, but that all doubt had yielded to a full persuasion that he was wrong, and that Jesus of Nazareth was all that the martyr Stephen and other Christians believed Him to be,—in other words, it must be proved that he was already a converted man.

4. Paul distinguishes the one "seeing" of Christ by which he was called to the apostleship, as something entirely different from the "visions" with which he was favoured. His "visions" were regarded by him not as in any sense the product of his own imagination, but as Divinely produced. But even then he makes a grand distinction between what happened to him on the way to Damascus, and the most Divine, if the expression may be used, of all his visions. What happened to him on the way to Damascus was never repeated. He "saw" Christ then; he never saw Him after. "Last of all," he says, "He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." This, as Meyer says, "concludes the series of bodily appearances, and thereby separates these from later appearances in visions or some other apocalyptic way."

With deep humility the apostle speaks of himself as "born out of due time," not born either into the faith or into the apostleship as the other apostles were, during the earthly ministry of the Saviour, but still really born into both by his having "seen" the Lord as certainly as Cephas and the

twelve had seen Him. Paul distinguishes the appearances of Christ to the apostles which he sets forth as evidences of the resurrection, from all revelations of Christ to them after His ascension. And in like manner he distinguishes his own "seeing" of Christ, without which he could not have been an apostle, from all after "revelations and visions of the Lord."

Accept the apostle's own version of the great crisis of his life, and all is plain. All other explanations fail. Baur, the founder of the Tubingen school, found himself necessitated to acknowledge, that "by no analysis, psychological or dialectic, can the inner mystery of the act in which God revealed His Son in Paul be disclosed." Nothing but such an event as the appearance of the glorified Christ, as an objective actual fact, can explain the change or the circumstances in which the change took place. For be it remembered (1) that this strong-minded and sober-minded man *believed*, most unhesitatingly, and to the end of his life, that he had *seen* Jesus, and that he had heard words from His lips. So much is admitted by the most sceptical. Be it remembered (2) further that with this belief, as a consequence, was connected an entire revolution of conviction and life.

Admit the history, and you have a perfect solution of both those facts. And the only reason why the history is not admitted is that it records a miracle—a reason which has no force with those who believe in the living God.

## CHAPTER III.

## The Testimony Reported by the Apostle Paul.

**W**E must recall the words in which the Apostle Paul reports the testimony of the personal followers of Christ to the resurrection of their Master :

“ Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand : by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ; and that He was buried ; and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures ; and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve : after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James ; then of all the apostles. And last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”<sup>1</sup>

## I.

Before examining the particulars of this witness-bearing, we must dispose of certain preliminary objections.

<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians xv. 1-8.

1. First of all, it is alleged that Paul regards the appearances of Jesus to Peter, to the apostles and others, as of the same character as His appearance to himself. And inasmuch—such is the allegation—as the appearance of Jesus to Paul was in a vision, a vision, moreover, begotten of his own soul, such, and such only, were His appearances to the earlier apostles. The visionary hypothesis, as an explanation of the facts recorded in the Gospels, will be matter for discussion at a later stage of our argument. Meantime we admit that Paul treats the appearances of Christ to the apostles and to himself as of the same character. That is, in their case as in his, and in his as in theirs, there was a real seeing of the person of the Lord Jesus. *They* saw Him; *he* saw Him. And so assured was he of the fact, that he said, as will be remembered, that whoso denied their word called them and him together liars. *To this extent* the appearances were alike in all the cases specified. But when it is further alleged that in Paul's case it was a visionary seeing, and then inferred that it was a visionary seeing in the other cases as well, we deny both the allegation and the inference. We have shown, we think conclusively, that it was not in a vision, in any sense of the word, that Paul saw Jesus, but that the appearance of Jesus to him on the way to Damascus was a real objective fact. And if it was, the inference that it was in visions Jesus appeared to the other apostles falls to the ground.

While the appearances of Jesus to the earlier

apostles and to Paul were of the same kind, so far as their *reality* is concerned, there were manifest differences in the circumstances. And Paul recognises these. He had not been a disciple of Jesus during His earthly ministry. And it was not till long after Jesus had finished His earthly ministry, and was no longer the visible associate of men, that His person was seen, and His voice heard by Paul. It was otherwise with the other apostles. They had been His personal followers for three years; they could identify His person; and they saw Him at times and in ways which left no doubt on their minds that He who had died and who was buried had returned to life. Their testimony, therefore, was more significant and convincing to men than his. And satisfied, as he was beyond all doubt, that he had himself seen Jesus, his testimony was but an appendix to theirs. He was "born out of due time."

It should not be overlooked that from the time when Jesus ceased to be seen by the apostles as recorded in the Gospels, till the time of Paul's conversion, no human eye on earth had seen Him. And from the time of Paul's conversion to the time when he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, no eye had seen Him. There were no events in the history of the Church, as known by Paul, that could be classed with his own one seeing of Jesus, and with the seeings of Him by the apostles immediately after His resurrection. His and theirs were alike, we repeat, in their reality,

but different in time and circumstances. It was "last of all" that Paul saw Him.

2. After all, it is said, all we know is that Paul *was told* that Jesus appeared to Cephas and to others. We have answered this objection by anticipation. It was simply impossible that a man of his cast of mind, and in a matter which involved such tremendous issues to himself and to mankind, should receive idly and unquestioningly what chance might bring to his ears. As to his opportunities of inquiry, they were abundant, even before his first visit to "them that were apostles before him." During that visit he spent fifteen days with Peter and James "the Lord's brother." During those fifteen days the whole story of Christ's life must have been talked over—Peter and James delighting to tell it and Paul to hear it. In his intercourse with Peter and James on this occasion, these brethren would naturally speak with special interest of the Lord's appearing to themselves. And hence, doubtless, the special mention which Paul makes of Cephas and of James—of which more hereafter.

3. It is further objected that Paul gives us no particulars of the appearances of the risen Christ, by which, it is said, we might form some judgment of their credibility. To which we answer, that there was no reason why he should enter into particulars on the subject *in this letter*. He had done so, we are entitled to infer, when he had preached the gospel in Corinth. He had now only

to remind the Corinthians of what he had already "delivered unto them," touching the death and resurrection of Christ, and the appearance of the risen Christ to Cephas and others. He must have been strangely and mysteriously reticent if, when he "preached" to the Corinthians that which they "received," and "by which they were saved," he merely announced in a single sentence, and without any explanation, "Jesus was seen by Cephas, by the twelve, by five hundred brethren, by James, and by myself." This sentence, it is evident, is but the barest summary of what he had "preached;" and it was all that the circumstances in which he wrote required.

We find elsewhere the particulars of several of the appearances of Christ to which Paul refers; and those who complain that Paul does not give them, try to get rid of them by suppositions so fanciful that it is difficult to suppose that their authors themselves consider them credible. We have seen how they deal with Christ's appearing to Paul on the way to Damascus. And we shall soon see how they trifle with the statements in the Gospels respecting His appearances to others.

## II.

Let us now look at the instances which Paul mentions.

I. *"He was seen of Cephas."* Paul, after spending fifteen days in the company of Peter, could not have made this statement if he had not been told



the fact, and with the fact the circumstances, by Peter himself. To Peter, who had so recently denied his Lord, the appearance of Christ to him personally must have been an unspeakable privilege. And on the mind of Paul the impression of Peter's tale must have been deep and lasting. The appearing of Christ to Peter is mentioned in the Gospels only in the most incidental manner; and yet it is in the very position in which Paul places it, as occurring before His appearing to the apostles generally or collectively. When the two disciples returned from Emmaus, they found the eleven gathered together, and were at once informed,—“The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.” And, according to the Gospel,<sup>1</sup> while the Emmaus travellers were in the act of telling their tale, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them.

How absolutely certain Peter was that the Lord had risen—his certainty not grounded on the one special manifestation to himself, but on all His appearances, we know. The one idea predominant in his mind, in his subsequent addresses to the Jews and their rulers, seems to be the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Every speech that he utters proves that of this one great event his mind was full. The fact seems to haunt him in every place, before every audience, in every argument.<sup>2</sup> When the apostles meet to advise respecting a successor to Judas, Peter is the chief speaker; and he defines the qualification necessary

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 36.    <sup>2</sup> See Blunt's *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 225.

for a twelfth apostle to be that he should be a witness with the eleven, of the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> On the day of Pentecost, after quoting from the sixteenth Psalm what he regarded as a prediction of the resurrection of the Christ, he said, "*This Jesus hath God raised up*, whereof we all are witnesses."<sup>2</sup> When the people are wondering at the cure of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Peter said to them, "Ye killed the Prince of life, *whom God hath raised from the dead*; whereof we are witnesses."<sup>3</sup> This is the turn which his argument always takes, be its beginning what it may. On the day after this cure, Peter maintains before the council what he had asserted to the multitude: "Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel! be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, *whom God raised from the dead*, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole."<sup>4</sup> And we are told soon after, that "with great power gave the apostles witness of *the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*: and great grace was upon them all."<sup>5</sup> Still heedless of the threatenings of the council, when charged with disobeying the command to speak no more in the name of Jesus, Peter's reply is prompt: "The God of our fathers *raised up Jesus*, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Acts iii. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Acts iv. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Acts iv. 33.

repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”<sup>1</sup> To Cornelius and his friends, Peter said: “We are witnesses of all things which Jesus did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. *Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.*”<sup>2</sup> Thus is the resurrection of Jesus the beginning and the end of every speech of Peter, the single theme that eclipses every other. And the fact is the more striking that it was with Sadducees that Peter had chiefly to contend, and that it was before men who believed in no resurrection that he persistently declared that Jesus had risen from the dead.<sup>3</sup>

Nor was Peter’s interest in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ limited to those early days when the memory of it was fresh. In the very beginning of a letter written twenty years after the conversion of Cornelius, we read: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*”<sup>4</sup> And we do not proceed far in the letter when we read: “Christ, a Lamb without blemish and without spot, manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that *raised Him up from the dead*, and gave

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 30, 31.<sup>2</sup> Acts x. 39-41.<sup>3</sup> Acts iv. 1, 5, 6.<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter i. 3.

Him glory.”<sup>1</sup> And in the same letter there are at least two other references to the resurrection of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Such was the hold which this great fact took of the mind of Peter, and such his certainty of its literal reality: “Jesus *was seen* of Cephas.”

2. “*Then of the Twelve.*” Paul says, “The Twelve,” which is evidently a designation of the apostolate as a whole, although the number was reduced to eleven when the risen Lord appeared to them. Of the Lord’s appearances to the apostles it will be more convenient to speak when we examine the narratives of the Evangelists.

3. “*After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once,* of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.” This is no random statement. Paul must have had good grounds for his assertion. His character forbids the supposition that he credulously accepted some idle rumour that Jesus had once been seen by a great multitude simultaneously. His specification of the number, “above five hundred,” and his distinction between the “greater part” of this number who were still alive to attest the fact, and the “some” who had fallen asleep, points to the exactness of the knowledge which he had of the circumstance. The only occasion mentioned in the Gospels which can be that referred to by Paul, is that mentioned by Matthew: “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter ii. 19, 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter iii. 18, 21.

saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted.”<sup>1</sup> In the original there is no note of time such as is indicated in “then”—the proper translation being “but,” sometimes “and.” The original, too, says, not “a mountain,” but “the mountain.” The narrative in Matthew suggests other appearances which it does not record, for it contains no record of any appointment by Jesus to meet Him in a specified mountain in Galilee. As for the omission of all reference to the five hundred who were present, it seems to arise from the object which Matthew had in view, namely, to record the commission which Jesus gave to “the eleven.” It was with the eleven and their commission that Matthew was concerned. But one does not see why Jesus should appoint the eleven alone to meet Him in a mountain. It is more natural to suppose that Jesus chose a central place, one probably where the multitude had often heard Him, among the mountains of Galilee, for the convenience of “brethren,” believers in Him, scattered through the villages in which He had so often preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. This most natural supposition accounts both for Matthew’s description of the place, and for Pāul’s statement of the number.

Here, then, we have an averment on which the character of Paul justifies us in relying, that more than five hundred brethren saw Jesus on one occasion after He was risen, and that the greater

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xxviii. 16, 17.

part of the five hundred were alive when he wrote. The statement of Matthew, that on that occasion "some doubted," instead of suggesting any reason why *we* should doubt the reality of Christ's appearance, increases our confidence in the candour and truthfulness of the historian. There is here an entire absence of any attempt to make out a case. Matthew could afford, if the expression may be used, to tell the whole truth. The fact of the resurrection was so well attested and so universally believed, that it was not necessary to conceal the first uncertain impression of some of the five hundred or of the eleven, when they saw Jesus approaching. And some uncertainty having been felt, it was only after the manner of all the Gospel writers to mention it, without troubling themselves as to how it might be interpreted. In our mind it creates no difficulty at all. The doubt may have arisen when Jesus was seen drawing near from a distance, or before "some" had the opportunity of distinctly recognising Him. But it is not suggested that the doubt continued, or survived that interview of Christ with His disciples on the Galilean mountain. It is certain that all the eleven of whom Matthew speaks preached boldly and in no hesitating terms, that their Lord had risen to die no more; and equally certain that the five hundred of whom Paul speaks believed, according to him, that they had really seen the risen Christ.

4. "*After that He was seen of James.*" The appearing of Christ to James personally, after the

appearing to the five hundred, and before a later appearing to the apostles, is mentioned only by Paul. But Paul cannot have been mistaken in the matter. He must have received the information from James himself during that visit of fifteen days to Jerusalem. And if James himself had not told a fact of so much interest and significance, we cannot believe that Paul would afterwards have accepted the tale from any one else. As there was a special reason why Jesus should grant to Peter a personal or private manifestation of Himself—namely, to assure him of forgiveness and to restore his faith, we can imagine a special reason in the case of James likewise. The “brethren” or “brothers” of Jesus, whether they were the sons of Joseph and Mary, or only near relatives, were slow to believe in Him as the Christ of God. And a personal manifestation to James, called His “brother,” would be, as it was to Peter, a sign of forgiveness and a means of increase of faith. Godet remarks well, “If tradition had invented, would it not, above all, have imagined an appearance to John?”

5. “*Then of all the apostles.*” This must allude to, or at least, include, Christ’s final appearing to the apostles when He led them out towards Bethany, and was parted from them. It will come to be examined when we turn to the Gospels.

### III.

The words of Sir Cornewall Lewis and Dr. Thomas Arnold may be recalled with advantage

at this stage of our argument. "Unless," says the former, "a historical account can be traced by probable proof, to the testimony of contemporaries, the first condition of historical credibility fails." We have more than "probable proof" that the historical account which we are now examining "can be traced to the testimony of contemporaries." The writing which contains it is admitted by all to be the writing of Paul, who was not merely the contemporary but the fellow-labourer of those whose testimony he records. "In estimating whether any history is trustworthy," says Dr. Thomas Arnold, "I should not ask whether it was written by a contemporary, or by one engaged in the transaction which it describes, but whether it was written by one who loves the truth with all his heart, and cannot endure error. For such an one, we may be sure, would never attempt to write a history if he had no means of writing it truly; and, therefore, though distant in time or place, or both, from the events which he describes, yet we may be satisfied that he had good means of information at hand, or else he would not have written at all." Now, we venture to say that no man has ever lived who might be trusted more implicitly as a truth-seeker and truth-teller, than the Apostle Paul. Though not himself one of the original witnesses, in the sense in which those were who had seen Christ before His death, he was in the most intimate association with them. He had not to ransack old documents, or to sift traditions which had been



handed down through the uncertain medium of many generations. The witnesses were all around him, and from their own lips he heard the unvarying tale that the Lord had risen, and that they had seen Him and conversed with Him.

The testimony of Paul, it should be observed, is not to be dated from the date of his extant letters. It goes back much farther. His conversion is now generally believed to have taken place between A. D. 36 and A. D. 38. According to Keim's opinion Jesus died in the year 35, and Paul was converted in the year 37, only two years lying between. But even if we place three or five years more between the death of Christ and the conversion of Paul, his testimony carries us back to the very morrow of the alleged resurrection. From the hour of his conversion his lot was cast among those who could say,—“That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, declare we unto you.” Now, as to what became of their Master after He was laid in His grave, there was but one story,—“The Lord is risen indeed.” And from the beginning of his ministry to the year 64, the year of his death under the Emperor Nero, Paul preached Jesus, the risen Christ, to the Roman world, from Damascus in the east to the shores of Spain in the west, with the most perfect conviction that the fact of the resurrection was one which could not be challenged, and which it greatly concerned the world to know.

## CHAPTER IV.

*The Testimony of the Gospels and of the Acts.*

**T**HE directly historical account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to be found in the four Gospels and in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>1</sup> The Book of the Acts is a continuation of the Gospel by Luke; and there has been not a little speculation expressed on the question why the Evangelist did not relate in his Gospel the facts which he relates in the Acts. Some imagine that when he wrote the Gospel, Luke was under the impression that the ascension took place on the day on which Jesus first appeared to His disciples,<sup>2</sup> and that the version given in the Acts was designed to correct this impression. But it is simply impossible that a writer who had taken pains to acquire "a perfect understanding of all things from the first"<sup>3</sup> should have fallen into any mistake in the matter. The facts narrated by Paul, whose companion he was, must have been well known to Luke; and in his second book he refers to the first, not as incorrect, but as being in itself complete. "Is it probable," Godet asks, "that an author, when beginning the second part of a history, should

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. ; Mark xvi. ; Luke xxiv. ; John xx. xxi. ; Acts i.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Luke i. 3.

modify most materially, without in the least apprising his reader, the recital of facts with which he has closed his first? Would it not have been simpler and more honest on the part of Luke to correct the last page of his first volume, instead of confirming it implicitly as he does in Acts i. 1, 2?" May it not be supposed that Luke, having reached the end of the first part of his history, and having the intention of repeating those facts (regarding the forty days) as the point of departure for his second, thought it enough to state them in the most summary way? From ver. 44 of the last chapter of the Gospel, Luke abandons the exact form of narrative, to give, as he closes, the substance of the last sayings of Jesus, reserving to himself to develop later the historical account of those last days.

### I.

The reader will be able to verify for himself the following summary of the facts recorded by the four Evangelists.

1. They all record that Joseph of Arimathæa asked, and obtained possession of, the body of Jesus, when it was taken down from the cross.
2. They all record that the body of Jesus was wrapped in linen clothes, preparatory to burial; John adding that Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathæa in thus tenderly caring for the body of Jesus, and that with the linen clothes "spices" were used, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

3. They all record that the body of Jesus, thus hurriedly prepared for burial, was placed in a sepulchre, described by one as Joseph's "own new tomb;" by two as a tomb "wherein man before was never laid;" by two as a tomb "hewn out of a rock;" by one as "hewn in stone," more literally, "stone-hewn," or "rock-hewn;" and by one as a "new sepulchre" in a garden.

4. Two Evangelists, Matthew and Mark, record that there was a "great stone rolled unto the door of the sepulchre," that is, to the passage or entrance-aperture that led into the sepulchre.

5. Three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record that certain women beheld where Jesus was laid; Matthew and Mark naming Mary Magdalene and another Mary.

6. One Evangelist, Matthew, records how that the chief priests (who were Sadducees) and the Pharisees asked of Pilate that precautions should be taken, lest the disciples should come by night and steal the body of Jesus. And precautions were taken accordingly.

7. They all record that on the morning of the third day the tomb in which the body of Jesus had been laid was found open—the great stone having been rolled away—and empty; the body which Joseph and Nicodemus had placed in it not being there.

8. They all record that certain women went to the grave of Jesus at daybreak of the third day; one Evangelist specifying their intention to complete

the embalming, which had been hastily performed when the body was taken down from the cross ; another specifying their anxiety as to how they should be able to remove the stone from the door of the sepulchre ; all recording the fact that they found the stone removed and the grave empty.

9. Matthew records a "great earthquake," and the descent of an angel from heaven, who "came and rolled back the stone."

10. Matthew, who records the precautions which were taken to prevent the surreptitious removal of the body of Jesus, tells us that some of the watch who had been set to guard the grave, went into the city and told the chief priests "the things that had been done," the earthquake, probably, the removal of the stone, the resurrection of Jesus, and perhaps the vision of angels ; and they were bribed to say that the disciples of Jesus had stolen His body by night.

11. The whole narrative shows that the disciples were utterly unprepared for the resurrection of their Master. The women who went to the grave on the morning of the third day expected to find the body of their Lord there. When Peter and John went to the sepulchre, they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.<sup>1</sup>

12. Before the close of the first day of the week, the third day after His death, the disciples were satisfied that the Lord had risen indeed, all but Thomas, who was not with his brethren when Jesus

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 9 ; Luke xxiv. 24-26.

appeared in the midst of them. And before He finally departed from them, He gave them what Luke calls "many infallible proofs,"<sup>1</sup> sure signs of His resurrection.

13. Jesus did not live with His disciples after He was risen, as He had done before. The expression, "while I was yet with you,"<sup>2</sup> proves that His separation from them was, if not consummated, at least begun. He was with them only exceptionally—His abode was elsewhere.

14. But while Jesus did not now live with His disciples as He had done before, when He led them from place to place, and was always with them, "He showed Himself openly" to them, sometimes to individuals, sometimes to the disciples collectively.

15. The order of Christ's appearances to His disciples, especially of the earlier of them, those on the morning of the resurrection, cannot be stated with absolute certainty,—no one Evangelist recording them all. But this creates no real difficulty as to the truthfulness of the separate narratives—the difficulty being only such as is inevitable when several honest historians or witnesses report only parts of a whole. Putting all the narratives together, the following is at least a probable order in which the events recorded by the Evangelists took place. Jesus appeared—

(a) To the women returning from the sepulchre. Reported only by Matthew.

<sup>1</sup> The Revised Version says, too feebly, "many proofs."

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 44.

(*b*) To Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre. Reported by Mark<sup>1</sup> and John.

(*c*) To Peter, perhaps early in the afternoon. Reported by Luke and Paul.

(*d*) To the two disciples going to Emmaus towards evening. Reported by Luke and Mark.<sup>1</sup>

(*e*) To the apostles (except Thomas) assembled at evening. Reported by Mark,<sup>1</sup> Luke, John, and Paul.

These five appearances all took place at or near Jerusalem, upon the first day of the week, or the Lord's day, the same day on which Christ arose.

(*f*) To the apostles, Thomas being present, eight days afterwards, at Jerusalem, *i.e.*, again on the Lord's day. Reported by John.

(*g*) To seven of the apostles on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias. Reported by John.

(*h*) To the eleven apostles, and to five hundred other brethren, on a mountain in Galilee. Reported by Matthew and Paul.

(*i*) To James, probably at Jerusalem. Reported by Paul.

(*j*) To the eleven at Jerusalem, immediately before His ascension. Reported by Luke in Acts, and by Paul.

Put into a consecutive narrative form, the events

<sup>1</sup> We do not here discuss the authenticity of Mark xvi. 9-20. The order, as above given, is unaffected by this critical question; only, we may add, it is not possible that the original Mark ended with chap. xvi. 8. It must have contained some reference to the events which followed.

of the resurrection-morn may, by a comparison of the Gospels, be stated thus: "The resurrection took place at or before early dawn on the first day of the week, when there was an earthquake, and an angel descended and rolled away the stone from the sepulchre and sat upon it, so that the keepers became as dead men from terror. At early dawn, the same morning, the women who had attended on Jesus, namely, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Salome, and others, went out with spices to the sepulchre in order further to embalm the Lord's body. They inquire among themselves who should remove for them the stone which closed the sepulchre. On their arrival they find the stone already taken away. The Lord had risen. The women, knowing nothing of all that had taken place, were amazed; they enter the tomb, and find not the body of the Lord, and are greatly perplexed. At this time Mary Magdalene, impressed with the idea that the body had been stolen away, leaves the sepulchre and the other women, and runs to the city to tell Peter and John.

"The other women remain still in the tomb; and immediately two angels appear, who announce to them that Jesus is risen from the dead, and who give them a charge in His name for the apostles. They go out quickly from the sepulchre, and proceed in haste to the city to make this known to the disciples. On the way Jesus meets them, permits them to embrace His feet, and renews the same charge to the apostles. The women relate



these things to the disciples ; but their words seem to them as idle tales, and they believe them not.

“Meantime, Peter and John had run to the sepulchre, and entering it had found it empty ; but the orderly arrangement of the grave-clothes and of the napkin convinced John that the body had not been removed either by violence or by friends ; and the germ of a belief sprang up in his mind, that the Lord had risen. The two returned to the city. Mary Magdalene, who had again followed them to the sepulchre, remained standing and weeping before it ; and looking in, she saw two angels sitting. Turning round she sees Jesus, who gives to her also a solemn charge for His disciples.”<sup>1</sup>

## II.

The later appearances of Christ to His disciples are recorded with details which bring their significance and evidential force into bold relief. Two disciples go to a village called Emmaus, and as they go they “commune together and reason.” Their reasoning has to do evidently with the sad event which had disappointed their hopes of the Messiahship of Jesus, and the rumours which are afloat that Jesus had been seen alive. A stranger overtakes them, and inquires into the cause of the sadness which he sees depicted on their countenances. And when they tell him, he says to them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ; ought not the Christ to

<sup>1</sup> Robinson's *Harmony*.

have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" He further expounds to them the Scriptures which were prophetic of the Christ. They do not however recognise their fellow-traveller. Their incredulity regarding His resurrection may have contributed to this; and then the person of the Lord may have undergone a mysterious change which sometimes hid His identity. But at Emmaus as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave to them, and then "their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." Whatever the causes were which had hitherto prevented their recognition of Him, they were now removed,—while His conversation by the way, and the manner in which He blessed the bread and broke it and gave it to them, were sufficient in ordinary circumstances to recall the well-known form and voice. Jesus is no sooner recognised than He vanishes out of their sight. His sudden disappearance has evidently a supernatural character. But this is in keeping with the whole story of His risen life; and that whole story is, in this respect, in keeping with the relation in which Jesus now stood to heaven and earth, no longer of the earth, but not yet ascended to His heavenly glory.

The Evangelist Luke informs us that the Emmaus disciples hastened back to Jerusalem to tell the good news that they had seen the Lord. They are met at once by the news that the Lord had been seen by Peter. And immediately Jesus

Himself stood in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be unto you." They were affrighted, and supposed that they saw a spirit. The sudden and evidently miraculous manner of His entrance would naturally create this impression. But Jesus at once asserts His identity—"It is I Myself;"—and His corporeity;—"Handle Me and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have." While they yet believed not for joy and wondered, He said, "Have ye here any meat?" And He ate before them. Strauss imagines a contradiction between the corporeity ascribed to Jesus and the mysterious power ascribed to His body. But the body of Jesus was now in a transition state. On the one hand it was terrestrial; on the other it was being raised to a higher condition. "We have no experience to help us in forming a clear idea of this transition, any more than of its goal, the glorified body."

Thomas was not present on this occasion. When his Master proposed to return to Judæa, on occasion of the illness of Lazarus, he intimated his expectation that he should fall into the hands of His enemies. "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."<sup>1</sup> The event was as he expected, and his absence from the assembly of his brethren when Jesus appeared, was the result, most probably, of the despondency into which he had fallen, the bitter hopelessness of his soul. This is confirmed by the manner in which he received the testimony

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 16.

of his brethren,—“Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

John, who reports this first appearing of Jesus to the assembled disciples more briefly than Luke, tells us that one week later He appeared to them again. Thomas was now with his brethren. And Jesus said to him, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side, and become not faithless but believing.” Thomas was startled by this almost literal reproduction of his words, and “said to Him, My Lord and my God.” Jesus saith to him, “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

“What produces so profound an impression on Thomas,” says Godet, “is not merely the conviction of the reality of the resurrection, but also the proof of omniscience which the Lord gives him by repeating the words which he thought he had uttered in His absence. It is this immediate contact at once with the Divine attribute of omniscience, and with victory over death, which inspires him with the cry of adoration which goes forth from his heart. This scene recalls that of Nathanael.<sup>1</sup> As in the case of that disciple, the light shines at this supreme moment with sudden splendour to the very depths of Thomas’s soul; and by one of

<sup>1</sup> John i. 43-50.

those reactions frequent in the moral life, he rises at a single bound from the lowest depths of faith to its very pinnacle, and proclaims the Divinity of his Master in a more categorical form than had ever passed from the lips of his colleagues."

Christ's response to Thomas has a significant bearing on our present argument:—"Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed." "The contrast which he indicates is between a faith which, to accept the miraculous part, insists on *seeing* it, and a faith which consents to accept it on the foundation of *testimony*. In the first way, faith would be possible for the world only on condition of miracles being renewed unceasingly, and appearances of Jesus being repeated to every individual. Such was not to be the course of God's operation on the earth, and hence Jesus calls those blessed who shall believe by the solitary means of that faith to which Thomas insisted on adding the other."

The next, the third occasion on which Jesus appeared to "*the disciples*" collectively,<sup>1</sup> was by the sea of Tiberias. He had sent instructions to His disciples to meet Him in Galilee; but their departure from Jerusalem was delayed, not improbably by the absence of Thomas from their assembly when Jesus first showed Himself, and by his tenacious incredulity. They are now in Galilee awaiting their Lord. And necessity is laid upon

<sup>1</sup> John xxi. 14.

some of them to resort to their old occupation. How they toiled all night, and caught no fish ; how Jesus called to them from the shore, and said, " Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find ;" how the result at once reminded John of a former similar occasion, and led him to the conclusion that it was the Lord who stood there on the shore ; how Peter at once, with his usual impulsive energy, cast himself into the sea, impatient to reach the land ; and all that followed, is reported in the last chapter of the fourth Gospel. Then follows a memorable conversation between Jesus and Peter, in which Jesus asks Peter three times, " Lovest thou Me ?"

A fourth appearance of Jesus to His disciples collectively was that of which we have already written, on the mountain in Galilee, when five hundred brethren were assembled ; and a fifth, when Jesus led them forth from Jerusalem over Mount Olivet towards Bethany, and was taken up from the midst of them, a cloud receiving Him out of their sight.<sup>1</sup>

### III.

On all these occasions there are two things that should be noted.

First, that there was a certain mysteriousness, in fact, supernaturalness, in connection with Christ's appearances to the disciples after His resurrection.

<sup>1</sup> Acts i.

The son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, and Lazarus were, after their restoration to life, just what they had been before—nothing more, nothing less. Their resurrection was a purely personal blessing, with no bearings upon, or relations to, mankind. And they were raised to die again. Jesus rose to die no more. He was to ascend to heaven a complete man, body as well as spirit. But the body that should be fit for a place in heaven must be “changed;” and during His temporary stay on earth, this change may have begun.

There is another explanation which may be given of Christ’s miraculous manner during the forty days. It is a notable feature of His earthly life that He did not use His miraculous power for His own comfort and convenience. He would multiply a few loaves into food for thousands, but He would not command stones into bread for the satisfying of His own hunger. But now the days of His humiliation were past. He had reached the lowest point of His humiliation when He was laid in His grave. Now that He rose, He was entering on His life of glory. There was no longer reason why He should deny Himself the use of the power which was inherently His. To One who could walk on the sea the laws of nature were all subject, and there is nothing recorded of Him during the forty days that can in any wise be regarded as unnatural to Him, however supernatural.

If it be said that in all this we are assuming a

great deal which will not be granted, our reply is that in order to understand what the Gospels say, we must regard their representation as a whole, and judge of it in the light of its entirety. They do not profess to tell us the story of a common man, one of the innumerable hosts of men that have been born, who, after having been crucified and buried, lived again, and possessed, after his restoration, strange powers which he had not possessed before. They profess to tell the story of One who indeed was a man, but a man of men, a man of His own order, "the Christ of God," who died for our sins, and when He rose, rose to save and to reign. Men may doubt or deny this representation of the Gospels. But they cannot estimate the probability of what the Gospels say respecting the risen Christ but in the light of it. What would be very improbable, almost incredible, if told of an ordinary man, one merely of the many, becomes probable when told of One, such as the Gospels represent Jesus to have been.

As to the mysteriousness which we associate with an *occasional* instead of a *habitual* intercourse with His disciples after the resurrection, there is really no mystery, but there is much significance, in the matter. Jesus had told His disciples it was expedient for them that He should go away. They must henceforth live by faith, not by sight. They should soon know Him "after the flesh" no more. And He would now train them mercifully for the condition in which they should soon find them-



selves,—without a visible head. This, if not *the* reason why Jesus no longer lived with His disciples as before, is an explanation in part at least, and quite sufficient to satisfy all questioning on the subject.

*Secondly*, on the review of the appearances of Jesus Christ to His disciples, we note another fact which may be regarded as the counterpart of that on which we have just remarked—namely this, that while there was a certain degree of mysteriousness in the way in which He appeared to them, He gave them abundant evidence of His identity as the Jesus whom they had known before, and of His being now in the body in which He had been laid in His grave. There was the natural as well as the supernatural. The witnesses whom He chose to convey to the world the assurance that He was risen, were those who had been in intimate converse with Him for three years, who had been His companions when “He went about doing good, and healing them that were oppressed of the devil.”<sup>1</sup> And to these God who “raised Him from the dead, showed Him openly,”<sup>2</sup> or, *lit.*, “gave Him to be made manifest” or known. And of these witnesses Peter says that they “did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, during His interviews with them, He discoursed to them of the things which concerned His kingdom. And in these discourses He gave the best possible proof of His identity. There were not only the lips and

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Acts x. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Acts x. 41.

the voice—far more than these, there was the substance of the teaching in continuation of the teaching He had given them before His death. All the evangelists bear witness to this fact. Not only were their senses of touch, sight, and hearing witnesses to His identity and to His corporeity, but their minds and hearts, brought again into communion with their old Master, became witnesses that it was He indeed. No wonder that their conviction on the subject was such that they could not, and would not, accept the suggested possibility that they had been somehow unconsciously deceived. The only alternative to the reality of the resurrection which they admitted, was, as we have seen already and shall see again, that their testimony was consciously false.

Their minds and hearts, we have just said, were brought into communion with their old Master. This fact deserves to be made more emphatic. The past and the present were connected in a way which furnishes that proof of mental identity on which a high judicial authority laid stress in a late celebrated trial.<sup>1</sup> The themes on which the risen Jesus, or He who was supposed to be such, discoursed, were those on which the living Jesus had discoursed. And both the substance and spirit of

<sup>1</sup> "I now pass from the question of identity of person as based on the opinion of witnesses, to a question which is of quite equal or of greater importance, and that is, how far there is, not outward identity or resemblance, but inward identity of mind."—*The Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, in his summing up on the Tichborne Trial.*

the discoursing left no doubt that it was the same Jesus. To the disciples on the way to Emmaus he said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" To the assembled disciples, on the evening of the same day, he said: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me. . . . Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."<sup>1</sup> In the same strain he spake till He was "parted from them." The teaching of the forty days was the consummation of the teaching of the three years which went before. If there had been any such change in the bodily appearance of Christ as to render it difficult to identify His person, the difficulty would have been completely overcome by the evidence of identity which was supplied by His conversation. "Never man spake like this man," was as true of Him now as it had been before. With the same subjects, and the same spirit, there was the same calm assumption of Divine authority. And those who remembered

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 25-27, 44-48; Comp. Matt. xx. 17-19; Mark x. 32-34; Luke xviii. 31-34.

the marvellous claims which He had been wont to assert, could not but feel that it was the same Jesus who now said : " All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xxviii. 18-20.

## CHAPTER V.

## Corroborative Evidence.

**Q**UR case, we conceive, is fairly made out. The tests by which Sir Cornwall Lewis would try the validity of historical evidence are met and satisfied. But this is not all. While we claim that the alleged fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ be tested as other alleged facts are, and maintain that when thus tested it is proved to be historical, we are willing to admit that so extraordinary a fact needs to be supported by extraordinary evidence. While we hold that miracles are a legitimate subject of historical inquiry, we hold likewise that to justify their admission into history, they need stronger evidence than do natural events. Mere prodigies which are only like meteors blazing for a moment in the heavens, and then expiring in darkness,—prodigies that are morally meaningless and fruitless, may and should be dismissed as scarcely worthy of consideration. But the great miracle of the resurrection of Christ is full of meaning and of fruit. It has relations to all mankind and to all ages. And the direct evidence of the witnesses is corroborated by collateral evidence of the most conclusive character.

## I.

We appeal, first of all, to the wonderful change which took place in the disciples when, as they said, Jesus rose from the dead. We need not pause to prove that the Gospels and the Acts are worthy of credit in their representation of it. The whole story of the thoughts of the apostles, first before, then after, the resurrection, is so natural and so self-evidently truthful, that it is seldom challenged. What their thoughts were after the resurrection, or after what they alleged to be the resurrection, is known from their own writings. And it would be strange indeed if either they or their friends should invent for them, and ascribe to them, thoughts and a character before the resurrection, which reflected greatly on their intelligence and on their capacity to appreciate the Christ. That the resurrection, or what they believed to be such, forms a historic dividing line in their mental and spiritual condition, is certain. What the *Annus Domini* is to the history of the world, and more, the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus is to the history of Peter and John and their fellow apostles. One who regards the resurrection of Christ as "spiritual," not "bodily," speaking of what the disciples are said to have been before the resurrection, says, "If any one can believe that the disciples invented incidents and discourses, and a whole narrative of lies, on purpose to give the impression that the apostles were

dull, gross, selfish, and timorous, while in reality they were wise, faithful, and brave, I should regard such person as so singularly credulous that it would matter little what he believed."

Speaking of what the apostles seem to have become, this writer says: "If any one admits the change, but says, 'There was no cause for it,' such a man appears to me to admit a miracle, for I know scarcely any miracle in the records of the miraculous that would be a greater miracle than the production of a change so marvellous, and so world-wise in its effects, without any definite cause."

Now that this change dates from that great third day on which the disciples said their Lord rose from the dead is certain, and may be illustrated, both in itself and in its cause, by the history of Peter. Before the death of his Lord, we find him perplexed by what Jesus said of Himself and of the events that were coming, often falling into gross mistakes respecting His character, sometimes obtaining a glimpse of its glory; but to the very last a timid, indecisive, halting disciple. What is he after the resurrection and final departure of Jesus? "No longer the reed shaken with the wind; no longer the disciple of doubtful mind, faithful and faithless by turns, now the apostle and now the apostate; but the sure and steadfast rock, teaching and preaching Jesus Christ with all boldness; appealing to the prophets; resorting to the temple openly in the face of day; avowing the authority, the hateful authority, by which he could

make the lame walk, and glorying in the avowal; charging his countrymen, even the highest and haughtiest among them, with the murder of the Just One, braving the prison-house rather than hold his peace upon a subject touching which his heart was hot within him; for, says he, we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard; released, and again in prison for the same offence; once more delivered from the stocks, and no sooner delivered than again in the courts of the Lord's house, lifting up his voice as before, in defiance of priests and council, who could only marvel at the strength of a conviction which they could not understand, that seemed to blind its victim to all prospect of danger, that could not be lulled or alarmed out of a public confession of a name, which if it led to chastisement and chains as it did, still cheered the sufferer with the brave consciousness that he was counted worthy of shame."<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen that throughout this new phase of the character of Peter, the one predominant idea in his mind was the resurrection of his Lord. This great event was the beginning of his new life and new thoughts. And in this he did not stand alone. The other apostles are changed with him. They are all henceforward new men.

We do mean to say that the resurrection alone, or taken by itself as an isolated event,

<sup>1</sup> Blunt's *Hulsean Lectures*, pp. 225, 226.



wrought the change which followed it. Taken alone, it did prove that Jesus was what He said He was, the Son of God. Peter had once confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. What he believed or did not believe when Jesus lay in His grave, we do not know. We may safely say that he did not himself know. He was too completely stunned, too much bewildered, to have any distinct conception in his mind on the subject. But howsoever the disciples might reconcile this ending of His life, as it seemed to them, with what they had previously thought and believed, the rulers and the multitude who cried "Crucify Him" were satisfied, not only that they should see Him no more, but that His pretensions were for ever discredited. Had He been the Christ, He would have come down from the cross and saved Himself. But now the sentence of the rulers was reversed by God Himself when He raised Him from the dead, and the faith of the disciples was revived and restored. They had still, however, some lingering expectations of an earthly Sovereignty, associated, no doubt, with spiritual blessings, but still a sovereignty in which Israel was to be supreme among the nations. This hope survived to the very eve of Christ's departure; but when they saw Him removed finally from their society it must have died within them. They could now only "wait" for further instructions, and these according to the history in the Acts, came with the baptism of the Holy Ghost on the day of

Pentecost. Such is the story of the training of the apostles for the service to which they were designated by their Master. And in the light of it we can understand why it was, as Peter told Cornelius, that Jesus did not appear after His resurrection to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, the disciples who had been intimate with Him during His life, and who had now again the opportunity of eating and drinking with Him after He rose from the dead. In the great change which they underwent *after* His resurrection, we see the fruit both of the great fact itself and of the Divine teaching which illumined the fact,—making known to them all its significance and all the significance of the death which had staggered their faith, and fitting them intellectually and morally for the mission in which henceforth they lived and for which they died.

## II.

The historical character of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is further corroborated by the place which that fact found in the Christianity of the apostles.

1. First of all, it is the very foundation of their Christianity. Their own faith in Christ was, in its last conclusive form, founded upon the fact. And on the evidence which the fact furnished, they called on the world to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, who had come to seek and to

save the lost. "Jesus and the resurrection" was the companion theme of "Jesus, and Him crucified." This was well understood by Gentiles as well as Jews. Festus telling Agrippa of his difficulties respecting the questions, strange to him, which had been brought before him by the arrest of Paul, says they were connected with "one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."<sup>1</sup> Paul made this affirmation everywhere, and on the strength of it demanded that all men should confess that He is Lord.

The force of this argument is evaded by the assertion that Christianity was founded not on the *fact* that Jesus had risen, but on the *belief* of the apostles that He had risen. It is admitted that the origin and growth of the Christian Church cannot be explained without admitting likewise that the apostles *believed* that He had risen; but it is said that this *belief* is itself, without the assumption of its being well founded, a sufficient explanation of all that followed the preaching of the apostles.

It is a mere truism to say that a thing is not necessarily true because an honest man believes it to be true. But in this particular instance our contention is that the belief of the apostles involves the reality of the fact. They had the means of knowing whether or not Jesus was risen from the dead, and if they believed that He was, it was because they knew it. As already maintained, no

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxv. 19.

middle term can be found between the reality of the fact and conscious falsehood on the part of the witnesses.

As an abstract question it may not be easy to determine how far mere belief may produce the moral effects of truth. We should soon find ourselves "speaking into the air," or "beating the air," if we attempted to discuss it. But when we leave the abstract question, and come to the actual case before us, we can boldly aver that a mere belief, without truth or reality as the ground of it, could not produce the moral change which is traceable in the apostles after, and, as we hold, in consequence of, the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise, nothing of all that is said to have followed—especially the illumination of the disciples' minds by the Divine Spirit—took place. And this illumination, we have seen, is an essential element in accounting for the change which the apostles underwent. Without it, the utmost that a mere belief in the resurrection could effect would be to restore the disciples to the state of mind in which they were before Christ's death—a state of faith in Christ indeed, but mingled with an ignorance of the nature of His kingdom and work, and a moral feebleness, which quite disqualified them for the mission which we know they afterwards undertook and performed.

With equal confidence we affirm that the mere belief of the apostles in the resurrection of Christ, apart from the fact, is not sufficient to account for the conversion of the world to the faith of Christ,

and the rise and growth of the Christian Church. The world's conversion under the ministry of the apostles was not the fruit of their mere assertion that their Master had risen from the dead; *it was the fruit of that whole body of teaching which clustered around the death and resurrection of Jesus.* And that teaching could have had no existence and no moral power, if both the death and resurrection of Jesus were not realities.

If the belief of the apostles was not the belief of a real fact, the foundation on which they built the Church was less substantial than a shadow—it was a falsehood. And the Christendom of these eighteen centuries and a half has been built on—a lie! The generations which have drawn holy inspirations from the apostolic assurances of the resurrection of Christ, have drawn these inspirations ultimately from—a lie! Wondrous fountain of blessing, this lie has been! What truth has ever wrought so much good in the world? If the reader should prefer to substitute “error” for “lie,” he may. Our surprise will be the same, that the error of those old Galileans who came somehow to believe that He was alive who was really dead, should have proved such a singular blessing to the world, the beginning of a new era both to themselves and to mankind.

The relation of the resurrection of Christ to Christianity, as its foundation, is such that some who are predisposed to reject the evidence for miracles in general, confess themselves shut up to

faith in this one. Thus Dr. Carpenter says: "I regard the historical evidence of the resurrection of our Lord as of quite a different character from that (*e.g.*) of the raising of Lazarus or of the widow's son at Nain. Looking simply at the narratives in the Gospels, and comparing them with the narratives of similar miracles in the writings of the early Fathers, I see no more ground for trusting the former as historically true, than I do for accepting the latter. But on the other hand, looking at the unquestionable fact—for such it appears to me—that the resurrection of our Lord was the foundation of the preaching of Paul and (so far as we know) of the other apostles, and was universally accepted by the early Church as the cardinal doctrine of Christianity ('if Christ be not risen, then is our faith vain') the Gospel narratives derive from that fact a support that is given to none other of the miracles either of Christ or of His followers."

Reserving a remark on the relation of the miracle of the resurrection of Christ to the other miracles recorded in the Gospels, the principle of Dr. Carpenter's argument is undeniable. The difference which he notes, between any single miracle recorded in the Gospels and the great miracle of the resurrection of Christ, is a very obvious one. We have no such evidence for the restoring to life of the widow's son at Nain, or of Lazarus, as we have for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Cancel any particular miracle ascribed to Christ from the record, and the loss of it will not affect the claims

of Christ or of Christianity. Cancel the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the record, and the claims of Christ and Christianity perish with it—you undermine the very foundations of the faith. The credit of this especial miracle does not rest merely on the written history which records it,—it is supported by an amount of corroborative evidence which in ordinary circumstances would render incredulity almost an insanity.

2. But not only was the resurrection of Christ the foundation on which the apostles built the Christian faith and the Christian Church,—it is so incorporated both with their historic and with their doctrinal teaching that it cannot be separated from either. To do justice to the relations and bearings of the historic fact of the resurrection would require a separate treatise. We should have to discourse on the reflex light which it throws on Christ's person, character, life, and work; and on the prophetic light which, according to the apostles, it throws on the future destiny of mankind. But on these themes we can touch but very lightly.

The historic fact of the resurrection of Christ throws a reflex light on the supernatural life which is ascribed to Him, and the supernatural works which He is said to have wrought. The fact that He rose from the dead does not prove that He raised Lazarus from the dead, that He healed the sick, that He walked on the sea, that He quelled the storm. But it removes every objection that

can be raised against such miracles on the ground of a supposed improbability. More than this, it turns improbability into probability. Christ's resurrection demonstrating Him to be the Son of God,<sup>1</sup> it demonstrates at the same time all the extraordinary claims which He asserted for Himself. Now, if these claims were true, if it was indeed God Incarnate that trod the earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, it would have been a wonder if no signs of His glory shone through the veil of His humiliation in works of might and beneficence. If He rose from the dead it is far more probable that other miracles were performed by Him than that they were not. "This one great miracle being established," as Prebendary Row says, "the truth of the others requires no stronger attestation than the ordinary events of history, but may be accepted without the necessity of pointing out who were the witnesses in each particular case, or proving that they were competent judges as to its really miraculous character."<sup>2</sup>

This does not exhaust the reflex light which the resurrection of Christ sheds on what went before. The Gospels inform us that the birth of Christ was miraculous, and that His character was sinless. The sinlessness of His character—or, as some would prefer to express it, His perfect purity—is admitted by most; His miraculous birth is of course denied. But there is an obvious intimate

<sup>1</sup> Romans i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 416, 417.



connection between the two. We do not mean to say that Christ's resurrection proves directly that He was born supernaturally, and that He was sinless. But at the least there is a singular harmony and consistency between all these facts. Assured that He rose from the dead to die no more, we are not surprised to be told that He was distinguished from mankind in this, that He alone of all born of woman was born miraculously, and that He alone was sinless. Moreover, if He was sinless, death was not His due; and if, from any cause or for any reason, He suffered death, it was only right that His sinlessness should be attested by the reversal of the sentence which doomed Him to the cross. The great event of the third day was Heaven's answer to the question which man would not answer—Which of you convicteth Me of sin? Man condemned Him as a sinner. God raised Him from the dead as sinless.

This brings us to another and the most important aspect of this subject—the reflex light which Christ's resurrection sheds on His *work*. The mission of Christ and the great object of His resurrection, according to some, was to reveal, and place beyond all question, a future state and the immortality of man. Philosophers had argued on the subject. There seemed an instinct in the human soul which would not be satisfied with mortality. But now the hope which man had cherished on grounds of reason, or through the force of instinct, was turned into certainty.

We would not make light of the answer which the resurrection of Christ thus gives to the old question, If a man die, shall he live again? But this manner of answering it seems altogether out of proportion to the necessity of the case. One does not see why an existence beyond the grave, and the immortality of man, should not be made certain by the life and teaching of a prophet without the prophet's death and resurrection. Let him be well accredited as commissioned to speak in the name of God, and it would suffice. Those who could evade the force of such evidence as might sustain the teaching of a prophet, could easily evade the conclusions drawn from his resurrection. And in point of fact we find that they do. They deny both that Jesus taught with Divine authority and that He rose from the dead. The Apostle Paul's words—"Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,"<sup>1</sup> mean a great deal more than that Jesus Christ dispersed the clouds which hung over the future destinies of mankind. The assurance that man survives death is not an "abolishing" of death, nor is it even a bringing life and immortality (incorruption) to light. Both these words are associated by the apostle with the word "Saviour," and with a far profounder meaning of the word than can be found in the idea of instruction and revelation.

We have still to go in search of the *special work*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

of Christ as indicated and illuminated, according to the apostolic witnesses, by the fact of His resurrection. And we shall discover it if we observe how they connect our Lord's resurrection with their teaching on the subject of "Salvation" or "Redemption." Let the reader examine these Scriptures: Rom. iv. 23-25; viii. 34; x. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 14; xv. 17. They teach these things:— 1. That salvation is somehow connected with faith in the resurrection of Christ. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." But why or how should salvation be made to depend on faith in the resurrection of Christ? The glory of this miracle, as a miracle, furnishes no explanation of its being singled out from all other miracles as an object of *saving* faith. 2. The salvation which Paul connects with the resurrection of Christ is, or at least includes, pardon of sin or deliverance from the condemnation which, he says, has passed upon all men. "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." But why should this be? Why should we be unpardoned and unsaved in the event of Christ not having risen from the dead? If we are not to suppose that the connection between Christ's resurrection and the forgiveness of our sins is purely arbitrary, that it has no ground in the reason of things, and is only an appointment of the

Divine will, we must look for some further interpretation of the work of Christ. And this leads us to a third remark. 3. The resurrection of Christ is connected in these Scriptures with a particular aspect of His death. It is not as a mighty miracle it is set forth, it is not as supplying fresh evidence of the immortality of the soul, it is not even as the Divine attestation of His claim to be the Son of God. It is, to use a technical phrase, as the corollary of His atoning death, as the complement or complement of that death. Jesus was delivered (to death) *for our sins*, according to the Scriptures, and was raised again the third day, according to the Scriptures. If therefore He be not raised, ye have believed in Him in vain, ye are yet in your sins; He has made no atonement for them, or His atonement has not been accepted of God. We have here the key to the meaning of Christ's resurrection and its relation to His death. As sinless, death was not His due, and His resurrection attested His sinlessness, and explained or at least suggested why He died. As sinless He voluntarily bore the sins of others and died for them, and His resurrection attested the sufficiency of His death for the end for which it was suffered.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "This is not the place to develop the work of expiation referred to in the first proposition of this apostolic saying, 'Christ was delivered because of our offences, and was raised again for our justification' (Rom. iv. 23), or to set forth its wisdom, its holiness, its moral sublimity, even its justice. We confine ourselves to showing that, according to the first half of the verse, three facts appear to the apostle to be inseparable—man sins; God condemns;

Let it not be supposed that in all this we are assuming the truth of what needs to be proved, the truth of the apostolic system. We are only explaining how they interpreted the resurrection of Christ who professed to be the witnesses of the fact, and how this fact was incorporated by its original witnesses in the faith which they gave to the world and which we call the Christian faith.

According to these "witnesses" and "preachers," the apostles, the resurrection of their Lord not only shed a reflex light on His character and work, but also a prophetic light on the future of those whom He saves. It set the Divine seal on the extraordinary assertions of Christ respecting His power over the grave as in John v. 25-29, and in His words to the sister of Lazarus,—“I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul says—“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order;

Christ dies. And, similarly, according to the second proposition of this verse, parallel with the first, three other facts are quite as closely bound together in the view of St. Paul—Christ expiates; God absolves; Christ rises again.”—*Godet's Lectures in Defence of the Christian Faith*, p. 44.

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 25, 26.

Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."<sup>1</sup> The barest analysis of these Scriptures, so far as we have to do with them at present, would be this: 1. The resurrection of Christ is not only a revelation of a future existence, but a revelation, a prophecy, of the resurrection of His people—what the apostle calls the "redemption of the body."<sup>2</sup> 2. The resurrection of Christ is not only a prophecy of our resurrection, but its guarantee, its earnest and pledge, its first fruits. Such is Paul's teaching, and it was Christ's own: "Because I live, ye shall live also."<sup>3</sup> 3. Our resurrection is to be the work of Christ, the now risen and glorified Head of His body, the Church. It is His voice that shall awaken them that sleep. "We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our humiliation," the body which we possess in our present low estate, which is liable to decay and exposed to suffering and death, "that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."<sup>4</sup>

Many questions may be asked respecting the change which Paul anticipated, when our bodies shall be fashioned in the likeness of the glorified body of Christ, which Paul himself probably could not answer, which we certainly cannot answer, or in answer to which we can appeal only to imperfect natural analogies. But they who are most likely

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. xv. 20-23.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. iii. 20, 21.

to object to Paul's hopes of a perfected existence, body and soul, because we cannot answer their questions, are those who have least right to ask these questions. They who are hoping some day to find in *matter* "the promise and potency of all terrestrial life," and to discover in matter attributes which will account for the wonders of this great universe without calling in the notion of creative wisdom and power, are surely the last that should perplex us with the question, With what body do they come? If the possible capabilities of matter are such as they suppose, they must be far more than will justify the apostle's triumphant prophetic assurances: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Rightly or wrongly, such is the place which the fact of the resurrection of Christ held in the Christianity of the apostles. Not only did they found their proclamation of the gospel to the world on the fact of the resurrection, but the fact became so incorporated with their gospel that the two must stand or fall together. Strauss saw this clearly.

He calls the resurrection of Christ "the centre of the centre, the real heart of Christianity as it has been until now." "Does not Paul say, 'If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain.' This apostolic saying (he adds) cannot be explained away."

It will not do to say that this Christianity is the work of Paul—that he caught up the popular tradition about Christ and the resurrection, and moulded it into the Christianity which his epistles expound. If from such slender materials, and these mythical, Paul fashioned the Christianity which has been accepted by the world since his day, he is more entitled to be called *Wonderful* than the Master whose servant he professed to be. But then in the pages of Peter and John we find substantially the same Christianity that we find in the pages of Paul. Are we to suppose that these three men, either by combination, or by their separate thinking, distorted the beginnings of which they could not be ignorant, into a shape, with alleged facts and doctrines, of which Christ Himself had never dreamt, and which He would have repudiated with a "Get thee behind Me, Satan?"

Explain it as we choose, the resurrection of Christ, we now see, was far more than a fact in the faith of its witnesses, far more than one of the many things which they believed concerning their Lord, a part of their creed which might be dropped without damage to the rest. It was not, as one has well said, "a stray and solitary boulder cast



upon the earth, but the keystone of a mighty arch." If you take it away, you not only take away the foundation of the fabric, but you take away something which enters into the very essence of the system, and without which the system loses both its symmetry and its cohesion.

### III.

Now, what bearing has all this on the evidence of the *fact* that Jesus rose from the dead?

1. The men in whose minds the resurrection of Christ, confessedly believed in by them, took so supreme and all-engrossing a place, could not but take the utmost pains to be assured of its reality. All their ideas respecting the person of Christ, respecting His character, His mission on earth, His relation now and hereafter to mankind,—and all their personal hopes beyond the grave, were bound up in their minds with their belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. Can we suppose for a moment that that belief was "lightly or thoughtlessly" entertained? That they attached an infinite importance to the truths, as they judged them to be, which they preached to the world,—that they regarded these truths as essential to their own salvation and that of others, is certain. And by their sense of the importance of the gospel which they preached we measure the intensity of the concern they must have felt respecting the reality of that without which their gospel was only

an *ignis fatuus*, which could only lead men on to disappointment and death.

2. We should find it very difficult to convince ourselves that a mistaken belief in the resurrection of Christ could by any process be worked up into the system of which Paul, Peter, and John are the exponents and representatives. Suppose for a moment that these three and all the other witnesses who avouch the resurrection, were mistaken, that in some way to us, at present inconceivable, they had been led to believe that Jesus had risen, although He had not risen,—we find it very hard to understand how their mistake could develop itself or be developed into the Christianity which they held in common. Even accepting the alleged resurrection as real, we cannot sufficiently account for the Christianity which was based upon it, and which is pervaded by it, without looking beyond the natural and spontaneous reasonings of their own minds. There are no signs of invention, and no signs of effort or elaboration, on their part. Their faith seems to have *grown* into what it became, but not without the action of some cause or causes foreign to their own minds. We have seen that the mere fact of the resurrection is not sufficient to account for what they became in faith and spirit after it. The history supplies an additional cause, in the Divine illumination which attended and followed Pentecost. Now, if the mere fact of the resurrection is not sufficient to account for the

differences which distinguish the disciples after from the disciples before the event, much less would a mere belief in it, a mistaken belief, explain the change. On the supposition of a belief without reality, there could have been no such Divine illumination as the history records; for a Divine illumination sanctioning and using an error for Divine ends, is not to be thought of. And without such illumination, an ungrounded belief in the resurrection of Christ could only confirm them in the faith which they had before the death of Christ. And the development of this faith could, at best and at most, result only in a modified and somewhat spiritualised Judaism. The Christianity which is not more Pauline than it is Petrine and Johanne, could not have grown by any natural process out of the Messianic beliefs and expectations, which were common to Peter and John and the other apostles before they sank into the grave in which they saw their Master laid. There might be a revival of these beliefs and expectations by a mistaken belief that their Lord was risen—but nothing more. Every seed produces after its kind.

3. The place which the resurrection holds in the Christianity of its witnesses helps to correct one impression which the deniers of the resurrection seem incapable of getting rid of, or which at least they will not get rid of—namely, that what we have to prove is only this, that an event so

extraordinary and improbable as the restoration to life of a dead man has really taken place. On this point we must be excused if we give "line upon line,"—repetition is unavoidable. We admit the wonderfulness and unlikelihood of such an event in ordinary circumstances. But we have to do not with ordinary circumstances, nor with an ordinary man. We have to do with one particular Man. And we contend that when we look at the circumstances and character of this Man, while the wonderfulness of His resurrection remains, its unlikelihood vanishes. The place which His resurrection took at once in the faith of His followers strengthens this argument. It raises the question out of a mere wrangle about the probability or improbability, the possibility or impossibility, of a dead man living again, and invites us to look at it in other and broader aspects.

4. The place which the resurrection of Christ found in the Christianity of its witnesses suggests still another thought—the presumption which may be drawn from the harmony of all the parts of that Christianity. This remark has been somewhat anticipated. We have seen that the resurrection has relations to the past and future, which bind past and future into one historical spiritual whole. And that as to Christ Himself, it is in keeping with all else that is known or asserted concerning Him. In His life we have not a conglomerate of things, rare and beautiful it may be, but unconnected

and unrelated except by their being gathered around His name. There is a harmony and connection between them which no principle of chance can account for, which must be the growth of an inward life, not the product of an artificial grouping or of a human purpose and endeavour. From the miraculous beginning to the miraculous ending of Christ's earthly history, the details, natural and supernatural, are in perfect keeping. We may take our stand where we will to survey all the rest, and may test all by that with which we begin, and we shall find nothing but harmony—all related to all in perfect consistency. Let our stand be taken for example on the fact of His resurrection, assuming it to be a historic fact, and let us study all else pertaining to Him in the light of it. Our conclusion will be, as our survey of the place which the resurrection holds both in the personal history of Christ and in the doctrinal system of the apostles, shows, that part corresponds with part, and that the parts form a consistent whole, the unity of which may be accepted as no mean evidence of its truth. The presumption which arises out of this harmony and unity, in favour of the claims of the resurrection to be regarded as a historic fact, cannot easily be set aside.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Exceptions taken to the Evidence.*

**Q**UON what grounds, we now ask, can exception be taken to the testimony of the "chosen witnesses" of Christ's resurrection?

## I.

There is one general ground which, if admitted, would throw doubt on all history. Put briefly, it is this: the age of Christ and His apostles was an age of ignorance and superstition; therefore its historic traditions are untrustworthy. The argument, if sound, should go a great deal farther. It involves these conclusions: the Christianity which has come down from that age is the fruit of ignorance and superstition, and the Christ, the idea of whom originated in that age, is the product of "ignorance and superstition." Seen in these conclusions, the argument answers itself. Those who declaim against the age, and find in its darkness a "short and easy method" of getting rid of, or evading, the Gospel histories, confess the marvellous singularity of the character of Jesus Christ; "a unique figure," one calls Him, "not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even

those who had the direct benefit of His teaching.” “One,” says another, “who presented the rare spectacle of a life, so far as we can estimate it, uniformly noble and consistent with His own principles, so that ‘the imitation of Christ’ has become almost the final word in the preaching of His religion, and must continue to be one of the most powerful elements of its permanence.”

Now, to declaimers on the dark age in which Jesus lived, we may allow an alternative, a choice of two hypotheses.

First: Jesus Christ and His religion were the products of the age, the natural products of the age; not God-originated in any sense except that in which all genius and goodness are God-originated. No other age has ever produced a character so pure and lofty as that of the Nazarene Carpenter, or a system which, whatever objection may be made to its supernatural features, may compare with it for sublimity and moral truth. To this one age belongs the high honour of *naturally* producing Christ and Christianity. Let this hypothesis be accepted; and surely the argument is a fair one, that the age which has accomplished this great result was capable of the lesser achievement of raising up trustworthy historians of “the Man and His doings.”

The second hypothesis is this, that Jesus Christ and His religion were not the natural productions of the age, that they are to be ascribed to the operation of laws and causes unknown to nature,—even to the will and love of God Himself. If it

be so, the argument is a fair one, that the Divine favour which gave Christ to the world could secure to the world a trustworthy history of what Christ was and did. The more dense the darkness and corruption of the age, the more improbable it is that such a character and system as that of Christ should originate naturally in the self-taught and self-cultured soul of a Jewish peasant, and the stronger the evidence that Christianity is of God and not of man.

The attempt to discredit the Gospels by references to the superstition of the age in which they originated may be met in other ways. It would be easy to prove that every age of the world is chargeable with ignorance and superstition. Even so late as the seventeenth century, men, enlightened and famous, like Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Matthew Hale, believed in the reality of witchcraft. We fear that even the nineteenth century is not sufficiently enlightened to escape the charge of ignorance and superstition, and to be thus qualified to render its testimony of any value to the centuries which are to come. For the sceptics of the future will be able to adduce abundant proof that many of "the best educated and most enlightened of the community" of our times, believe in superstitions as great as any in which Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Matthew Hale believed,—witness the pilgrimages to Paray-le-Monial and La Salette. And we are landed in the strange conclusion, that the only persons fit, by their enlightenment, to bear witness to the



supernatural, are those who believe the supernatural to be antecedently incredible, and who would not believe it though one rose from the dead before their eyes!

Besides, in describing the age of Christ as one of ignorance and superstition, another aspect of the same age is forgotten. Dean Milman devotes many pages to a picture of the decadence of belief, and the prevalence of Sadduceeism, in the heart both of Gentilism and Judaism, in the days of the Son of man. Christ's whole life, we know, was scanned by the most hostile eyes. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots, whose character in Josephus accords entirely with their character in the Gospels, all opposed Him resolutely, on separate grounds peculiar to each sect; and they would have exulted in the discovery of any flaw in His words or works. But such flaw was never found.

As to the histories of Christ which have come down to us, it is acknowledged even by those who talk of the superstition of the age to which they belong, that there is nothing "puerile or ignoble" in them. So that those who handed down the story of Christ were not, after all, incurably incapacitated for being witnesses of the purest and noblest life ever lived. But they were incapable of inventing or imagining the majesty and beauty of that life. And the only sufficient explanation of the Gospels is their own: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

## II.

Further, it is objected specially that no one saw Jesus coming out of His grave—none of the apostles, not even the watch that were set to prevent the stealth of the body. It is only an assumption that none of the watch saw Him coming forth from the sepulchre. There is nothing in the narrative to imply that they did not; and the contrary might legitimately be inferred. "They showed to the chief priests all the things that were done."<sup>1</sup> It is implied that they reported truly all that had happened. They were not asleep when Jesus rose. They were conscious of what took place. They saw the angel who rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and for fear of him they did shake and became as dead men.<sup>2</sup> That Jesus was seen of them coming forth, is the most natural inference.

But it is admitted that none of those who were the witnesses of His resurrection to the world, actually saw Him rising. We hold, however, that the history is all the more worthy of credence, because it does not say that they did. If the history of the actual appearances of Christ after He was risen owes anything to legend or myth or invention, we may be sure that legend or myth or invention would have given us a great deal more. On the coming forth from the grave, it would especially have expended its fancy or its ingenuity.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 11-15.<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxviii. 4.

Our imagination could even now invent sights and sounds, words and impressions, natural to so august a scene and so august a conqueror over death. But we have nothing of the sort in the history, because it is a history and not a romance.

The demand for witnesses who should be able to say that they had seen Christ come forth from His grave, overlooks the fact that the disciples did not expect Him to rise. After they had seen Him risen they remembered and understood what He had foretold. But until He was actually risen their hopes were buried in His grave. And they had no inducement on the morning of the third day to gather around a spot which, though very sacred to their hearts, could only deepen the gloom of their spirits. The love of the women who had ministered to Him of their substance during His life brought them early to the grave; but it was not to see Him rise, it was to perform an office which implied that He was gone from them for ever.

But let us suppose that Jesus had distinctly commanded His disciples to gather around His grave on the morning of the third day to see Him rise, that they saw the angel rolling away the stone, and that Jesus with a loud voice and outstretched arms had said: "I spoil death, I live again to die no more:" let us suppose such to be the Gospel story, how would those receive it who object to the story as it is? They labour now to prove—to prove by hypotheses that have no foundation—that the disciples, after the death of Jesus, and before

the dawn of the third day, had remembered His prediction, and understood it literally; that they had rapidly argued themselves out of their dependency, and had come to the conclusion, which the Gospel ascribes to His after teaching, that the Christ must needs have suffered before He could enter into His glory. By a sudden revulsion of feeling and a sudden illumination, they were now, we are asked to believe, before the third day dawned, in a state of fervid expectancy, and therefore easily imposed on by their own imaginations. They thus became the victims of illusions which were to them certain as realities. Such being the construction which unbelievers put on the experiences of the disciples, in spite of the historic fact that the disciples had no expectation of their Lord's resurrection,—we can perceive how triumphantly they would reject the evidence of the disciples if the history represented them as really expectant, and assembled around the grave to witness the restoration of the dead to life. The whole scene is too theatric to be historical, some would say,—and naturally enough. It bears on the face of it marks of invention, others would say,—and naturally enough. While those whose faith in the power of imagination removes all the mountains which history now places in their way, would be able to argue, with some show of reason, that the disciples, through the force of sheer excitement and expectancy, became the victims of an illusion which they could not themselves explain.

The absence of the disciples when Jesus came forth from His grave is thus fully accounted for. But were it not, it could in no wise damage or render doubtful the positive evidence of those who saw Him after He was risen. Let Peter and John and James, and others who knew Him intimately, tell us: "We saw our Master with our own eyes; we heard Him with our own ears; we conversed with Him, and He with us; and He gave us a commission to the whole world in His name;—all this after His death and burial." It would be no sufficient answer to these witnesses to say, "You did not see Him rise." Their reply might be equally brief,—“No; but we saw Him Risen.”

### III.

Exception is taken to the fragmentary character of the history of the Resurrection which the Gospels contain. To certify so extraordinary an event, we should have, it is said, a full and minute narrative of all its circumstances. That we have not such a narrative is admitted. But let us suppose that we had. The four Evangelists report all the appearances of Jesus Christ, in their order, to individuals, the Marys, Cephas, James, the Emmaus disciples, and to the apostles collectively, in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and on Mount Olivet. The story is exact and complete. We see and hear all that took place during the forty days of His revived earthly life. All this we shall suppose we have from all the Evangelists. Would this satisfy

those who are not satisfied by the story as it is? Would they not, rather, argue that in the perfectness of the story there is clear evidence of concert, if not of conspiracy, on the part of the writers? They have agreed together, it would be said, to tell the same tale and how to tell it. Or if only one or two of the four gave the tale in full, it would be said that the others, who had as good means of information as they, were not acquainted with the facts which they did not report. And their silence, or assumed ignorance, would be held to invalidate the statements which they did not themselves report. This is the style in which objectors argue now. And we cannot imagine a form of history to which, with their pre-conception that the story cannot be true, they would not object.

But let us take the narrative as it is, and, though in a sense fragmentary, it will be found to possess a special evidential value. We have four narratives, none of them full or complete. On reading them our first impression is that they are independent of each other, written independently, without mutual concert, no one borrowing from any other. The fourth Gospel was written long after the earlier three, and with a knowledge of their contents, but it borrows nothing from them, and is as independent of them as they of it. Our next impression is that though thus mutually independent, and though each has its own peculiarity, they all bear witness to the same main facts of death, burial, and resurrection. They occupy very

much the position of four witnesses brought into court, one by one, who have not conferred together on the testimony they are to offer, and who do not know what each has said until they retire from the presence of the judge. They report different facts, and when they report the same facts, one does it with more fulness than another. And on comparing their statements certain diversities are discovered, which it may not be easy to explain. These diversities, however, awaken no doubt of their honesty and truthfulness, they only prove their independence. Amidst diversity the main facts in question are attested by all. And being thus attested, the evidence in support of them is accepted without suspicion.

Our four witnesses, the Gospels, thus agree as to all the main facts of the history of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, while they do not disagree as to its details.<sup>1</sup> Their agreement

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Greg utterly mistakes the case when he says (in the *Creed of Christendom*), "*It will be seen that they [the Gospel narratives] agree in everything that is natural and probable, and disagree in everything that is supernatural and difficult of credence.* All the accounts agree that the women, on their matutinal visit to the sepulchre, found the body gone, and saw some one in white raiment who spoke to them. *They agree in nothing else.*" (The italics are Mr. Greg's.) The very opposite of this is the truth. The Gospels vary (not disagree) in the circumstantial details which they record; but with one voice, and with unmistakeable positiveness, they record the great supernatural fact, the Resurrection itself. Dr. Godet (in his *Defence of the Christian Faith*) states the matter correctly: "Let us note in these evangelic records two characteristics: the variations in the details, and the agreement in the substance of the story. The substance is the fact of the Resurrection. On this the accounts are

as to the main facts, writing independently as they did, can be accounted for only on the supposition that the facts were as alleged.

unanimous. The diversity in the details is the consequence of that between the witnesses who communicated the facts to the writers, or who themselves drew up these records. *It proves that no previous agreement, no ingenious calculation, guided them in drawing them up.*" Another instance—one of many that might be given—of the unfairness with which Mr. Greg treats the Gospel narratives, may be cited. He concludes a long sentence which begins, "All that we can say is this," with these words: "And that some of the disciples doubted, and others long after disbelieved the fact." To say that "some of the disciples doubted," is not true. There is neither fact nor doctrine in regard to which there was a more absolute unanimity. Matthew, with characteristic honesty, speaks of a momentary doubt on the part of "some," when Jesus was seen by the eleven, and, as we believe, by the five hundred, on the mountain in Galilee. But Jesus "came and spake to them," and the doubt could not possibly have survived the charge which He then gave them (see page 75). The further statement "that others (other disciples) long after disbelieved the fact," is recklessly untrue. The reference is to those in the church in Corinth who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. But these Corinthians should not be described as "other disciples," as if they were persons who had followed Christ, and who could therefore have personal knowledge of the events of Christ's life. And what they disbelieved was, not Christ's resurrection, but the future resurrection of the dead. Mr. Greg says: "It would seem as if Paul considered the truth of the resurrection of Christ to depend upon the correctness of the doctrine of the general resurrection." Just the reverse. Paul did not seek to prove the resurrection of Christ by the general resurrection, but proved the general resurrection by the resurrection of Christ. He took his stand on the fact that Christ was risen, a fact which he expects the Corinthian nationalists to admit, and which they could not deny without these two consequences—first, Paul and the other apostles must be accounted liars; secondly, the Christian redemption which they preached was all a vanity (1 Cor. xv. 17).



## IV.

It is further objected that the witnesses of the Resurrection, and indeed of almost all that we know of Christ, were all friends, all Christians. But this, rightly regarded, is the strength, not the weakness, of the evidence. The witnesses were Christians; of course they were. This proves their sincerity. They were themselves convinced that it was true that Jesus rose from the dead; they knew that it was true, and therefore they said it was true. Their testimony, instead of being rendered doubtful by their being Christians, acquires its consistency from this very fact. To doubt a man's word because he himself believes it, and submits to every imaginable sacrifice because of it, is a strange proceeding. And this is how they argue who object to the testimony of the disciples of Christ, because it is the testimony of friends and Christians.

Besides, we must again recall the mental attitude of these disciples when it was first announced to them, or surmised, that Jesus had risen. They had been told by Himself that the Son of man should rise from the dead. But they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask Him,<sup>1</sup> and questioned among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean. We need not wonder at this in their circumstances, and with their then ideas of the kingdom of the Christ, seeing there are still, even after the event, who question one with

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 9.

another what the rising from the dead does mean. On the morning of the third day certain women, whose affection to Jesus overcame all fear of the public authorities, repaired to the tomb to anticipate, if possible, the decay of the precious body, and to anoint it with the costly spices which they had bought for the purpose. They did not even dream of His restoration to life. The hope that it was He who should have redeemed Israel was, according to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, extinct. The spices and ointments the women had prepared, were for a body that was to perish. And even when they found the grave empty, it did not occur to them that He had risen from the dead. They were bewildered and grieved, and the first communication of one of them to Peter and John was, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him."<sup>1</sup> On the part of the disciples, then, there were no prepossessions, no expectations, that would render it easy for them to be satisfied with insufficient evidence that He was risen. Quite the contrary. Their conviction that He was gone from them for ever had to be overcome. And it was,—but only by evidence which was irresistible. And then, but only then, they went forth, witnessing, unto bonds and death, what their eyes had seen and their ears had heard. Better witnesses there could not be.

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 9.

## V.

But it is asked, why did not Jesus, if He really rose from the dead, show Himself openly to His enemies as well as to His friends? Why did He not present Himself before His Jewish judges and the Roman procurator? Why did He not appear in the streets of Jerusalem, and in the courts of the temple, before the people who had been so basely deceived by their rulers respecting Him? We answer, first of all, that so far as His appearing only to His disciples may be regarded as a limitation of the evidence of His Messiahship, it was in perfect keeping with the manner in which He had dealt with men during His ministry. His character and works were more than sufficient evidence of His claim as "the Christ." But scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, ignoring the real and sufficient signs which He gave, demanded of Him that He would show them a sign from heaven, some portent from the skies, or some marvellous and overwhelming display of supernatural power, such perhaps as the dividing of the Red Sea, or the tempest and trumpet and voice of Sinai. But Jesus resisted the demand; it was not only unreasonable, but ignorant, if not malignant. In one of His parables He represented Abraham as saying to the rich man respecting his brothers, "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead." The Pharisees and Sadducees who did not find sufficient evidence

of His Messiahship in works of might and mercy, which no other man had ever wrought, would not have believed if they had seen a meteor streaming forth from the skies at His bidding. No meteor, even if it blinded their eyes through excess of light, could change the evil heart which dominated their whole being.

If it be asked, then, why did not the risen Christ show Himself to Jewish unbelievers, we answer, with Christlieb, "Why did He refuse, on the demand of His enemies, to give them a sign from heaven? Why did He not, at the very beginning, hold an audible conversation with His Father up in heaven, to stop the mouths of all doubters and adversaries, and make it easy for every one to believe in Him? Why did He not come down from the cross to prove His Divine Sonship?"<sup>1</sup> Whatever else is clear, this is clear, that His manner of appearing after His resurrection is in keeping with His manner of dealing with men before His death. Had it been told us that He made a public show of Himself before His enemies, we should have reason to doubt the veracity of the records which contained such a statement,—for it would have been entirely out of keeping with His other miracles, His general teaching, His character, and His works. That He did not do so, only adds to the credibility of the Gospel narrative.

Moreover, if Jesus had shown Himself to His enemies or to the Jewish multitude, it would have

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Doubt and Christian Belief*, p. 459.

been but a few days' wonder, and, possibly enough, would have produced tumult. The spirit which showed itself before in Galilee, the spirit which would have taken Him by force to make Him a king, would be the most natural consequence, giving fresh trouble to both the ecclesiastical and civil rulers; without spiritual good to any; and not improbably enraging the Sadducean authorities to fresh measures against Jesus and His disciples. Besides, if Jesus had appeared before them, nothing was easier for them than to deny His identity, and to take measures against this new-comer as an impostor. They were not in any sense the men to be witnesses of His resurrection. They were not capable of conviction; they were not morally qualified to appreciate the fact and its bearings; they would not have become new men by the sight of the Risen One. Only those who had been chosen before of God, who had knowledge of Him and love to Him, and were spiritually susceptible of the lessons which His resurrection taught, were fit to be witnesses to the world of an event in which were wrapt up the moral destinies of the world.

## VI.

When all other objections fail, or at least in order to strengthen other objections, there is a demand made for more evidence. If so extraordinary a thing happened, as the restoration of a dead man to life, we should have it better attested! It is perversely said by Strauss, that "we have not the

statement of an eye-witness with regard to the appearances upon which the belief in the resurrection of Jesus originally rested," and yet he confesses that "the Apostle Paul received his information from the lips of eye-witnesses." What he seems to demand is, that we should have a formal document signed by each of the apostles for himself, by the women, and by the five hundred. But if he had such a document he would find no great difficulty on his principles, of proving it to be spurious. "No single Gospel (he says), nor all the Gospels together, can claim that degree of historical reliability which would be required in order *to make us debase our reason to the point of believing miracles.*" This goes far beyond the incredulity of Thomas. He would not believe that his Lord was risen *except* he saw with his own eyes the marks of the wounds of the cross. Strauss would not believe even then. To believe in a miracle, under any circumstances, or by the force of any conceivable evidence, would be a "debasing of his reason." And if this principle be incompatible with all faith in "history," it is, we are told, justified by "philosophy." "So much of philosophy," Strauss says, "as is required here and elsewhere to disprove a miracle is indispensable for the historian." Philosophy must rule history, not history philosophy. The historian must begin with the philosophical principle that a miracle cannot be, and whatever amount of evidence his researches may bring before him in proof of the occurrence of a miracle, he must reject it!

Are we wrong in saying that this principle is as fatal to a true philosophy as it is to a true history?

It is not needful that we repeat the argument of our first chapter on this subject. Our reason for recurring to the matter is to point out that the spirit which demands more evidence for the resurrection of our Lord, is a spirit which would reject more evidence if it were forthcoming, which would reject every conceivable amount and variety of evidence. The demand is practically hypocritical, for, if conceded, the additional evidence must still be rejected. This is the inexorable law of the critic's "philosophy."

That some, not governed by this law, might honestly desire to have more evidence of the great fact which we are maintaining, is true. But it is equally true that they might desire to have more evidence of the being of a God and of every other principle of natural religion. And the point of wisdom, as we have already argued, is that we examine the evidence which is actually available, and not waste our strength over imaginable possibilities and vain wishes. Besides, those who honestly desire more evidence, have very probably failed to study, and do not sufficiently appreciate, the actual evidence which is within their reach. Regarded in all its aspects, it could scarcely be stronger than it is.

## CHAPTER VII.

## The Exhaustion of Sceptical Hypotheses.

**W**E have endeavoured to expound the evidence on which we believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact, and to show that the exceptions taken to the evidence are groundless. It remains that we examine the hypotheses by which it is attempted to account for the belief of the early Christians in Christ's resurrection, without admitting its reality. And if these are found to be insufficient, and therefore inadmissible, we have no alternative but to fall back on the hypothesis which they are designed to supersede, namely this, that Jesus did in very deed rise from the dead.

Strauss boldly accepts the obligation that is laid upon him as a denier of the "miraculous resurrection of Jesus," to "make out the possibility of the result of the accounts in the Gospels, *i. e.*, the origin of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus, without any corresponding miraculous fact." He "pledges" himself to do so, and complains of those who would evade the question of the reality of the event. He speaks of theologians who are "not hampered by faith in the mere letter," as "developing



their powers of saying nothing in many words, or of saying something quite different from what the words mean." "Here, a Hase distorts phrases in order to conceal his inclination to assume that the death of Jesus was only apparent; an Ewald veils his thoughts under the most bombastic language, in order to prevent its being observed that on this point, the most important of all, he is of the same opinion with the author of *The Life of Jesus critically considered* [Strauss himself], for whom he is incessantly expressing his contempt. All this is only what we might expect. But even Baur himself has vouchsafed to declare that the real nature of the resurrection of Jesus lies outside the limits of historical investigation, and has accordingly, at least in words, avoided the burning question."

Whether the boldness with which Strauss faces "the burning question," and demands that others should face it, is justified by the success of his own theory or not, he is right in maintaining that the reality, or non-reality, of the resurrection of Christ is a question which must not be evaded, but determined.

"That the disciples firmly believed that Jesus had risen," is fully acknowledged. This is the starting point of the enquiry; it is the fact which has to be explained by those who say He did not rise. Admit the "firm belief" of the disciples in the resurrection of Christ, and you must admit their perfect sincerity and honesty. They were no

parties to any fraud or deceit in the matter ; they had no knowledge or suspicion of fraud on the part of others. More than this ; being sincere and honest, they could not fabricate evidence in support of what they believed, or mould or modify the evidence so as to make it appear stronger than it really was. Either of these courses would be inconsistent with thorough honesty ; it would be offering "the unclean sacrifice of a lie" on the altar of what they deemed most sacred truth. This remark may seem so obvious as to be unnecessary. But there are critics who admit that the disciples sincerely believed that Jesus had risen, but who, when they cannot otherwise neutralise a narrative, ascribe its force to its "artistic setting," in other words, to an endeavour on the part of the writers to make more of the facts than they were conscious the facts would bear. More artless writers than those of the Gospels there could not be. It is difficult to read their compositions without feeling that, so far as they knew it, they meant to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. To ascribe the setting of their narratives to "art," or to a desire to strengthen weak evidence by the manner of its presentation, is practically to withdraw the concession that the disciples firmly and sincerely believed that Christ had risen.

This concession further involves in it that the Gospel narratives are to be accepted at least as honest. That these narratives contain the substance

of what the disciples preached respecting the resurrection of Christ, is made certain by the support which they receive from those statements of the Apostle Paul, the genuineness of which is universally admitted. The Gospels, as we have already argued, must have been rejected by the primitive Christians, if their statements were not in substantial harmony with what these Christians knew, either from personal observation, or from the observation of trusted witnesses, concerning Christ.

On what hypothesis, then, shall we find it possible to account for the belief of the disciples of Christ, that the body which was laid in Joseph's tomb was restored to life, if it was not really so ?

“ Three different suppositions may be adopted,” says Mr. W. R. Greg, “ each of which has found favour in the eyes of some writers. We may either imagine that Jesus was not really and entirely dead when taken down from the cross, a supposition which Paulus and others show to be far from destitute of probability ; or we may imagine that the apparition of Jesus to His disciples belongs to that class of appearances of departed spirits for which so much staggering and bewildering evidence is on record ; or, lastly, we may believe that the minds of the disciples, excited by the disappearance of the body, and the announcement by the women of His resurrection, mistook some passing individual for their crucified Lord, and that from such an origin multiplied rumours of His re-appearance arose and spread.”

Mr. Greg does not commit himself "definitely" to any hypothesis. His task is to destroy, as far as he may, the evidence on which our faith rests. But yet he feels he must attempt some explanation. As to the belief of the disciples he has no doubt. "The conduct of the apostles subsequent to the death of Jesus," he says, "the marked change in their character from timidity to boldness, and in their feelings from deep depression and dismay to satisfaction and triumph, as depicted in the Acts, affords far stronger evidence in favour of the *bodily* resurrection of their Lord, than any of the narratives which have recorded the event. It seems to us certain that the apostles *believed* in the resurrection of Jesus with absolute conviction. Nothing short of such a belief could have sustained them through what they had to endure, or given them enthusiasm for what they had to do; the question, therefore, which remains for our decision is, whether the apostles could have believed it, had it not been fact."<sup>1</sup>

The records, it is admitted, "are quite sufficient to prove that *something of the kind* occurred, *i. e.*, that some occurrence took place which gave rise to the belief and the traditions." "What was this something, this basis, this nucleus of fact?"<sup>2</sup> Only this, that "when the women went early to the sepulchre, they found it open, the body of Jesus gone, and some one in white garments who assured them that He was risen." And this tale, especially

<sup>1</sup> *Creed of Christendom*, II. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 143.

acting on minds which believed in a future resurrection, was "amply sufficient to make a belief in the resurrection of Jesus spread with the force and rapidity of a contagion." If causes are to be measured by their effects, the "something" supposed in this hypothesis is ludicrously insufficient to explain the "absolute conviction" which the apostles had that the Lord was risen indeed, and "the marked change" not only in their character but in their conceptions of the kingdom and mission of their Lord. An idle tale might lead to a popular and temporary belief, but could not be the source of the persistency and self-sacrifice with which the apostles attested unto death that they *knew* their Lord had risen: nor could it become the basis of the Christianity which they henceforward preached. One wonders at the credulity of scepticism which can ascribe such vast, and more than human results, to a "something" which might be better described as "nothing." Besides, this explanation arbitrarily rejects all the accounts which the Gospels contain of the resurrection, except the one meagre fact of the early visit of the women to the tomb. If we should admit with Mr. Greg that the three first Gospels were not written till between A. D. 60 and A. D. 70, still the faith of the apostles, as we have seen, dates from the very morrow of the resurrection itself; and if the story of the appearances and conversations of Christ was not genuine, if it was either legendary or fabricated, it would have been, as has been

oftener than once remarked already, at once rejected both by such of the apostles as were still alive, and by the churches which knew well what the apostles had preached on the subject from the beginning.

But we must examine the hypotheses suggested by Mr. Greg and others more closely.

### I.

It was once a favourite hypothesis, boldly asserted and maintained, that the supposed resurrection was only a "natural revival," a re-animation out of a swoon. Jesus was not really dead when He was laid in the grave. "Crucifixion," it was said, "even if the feet as well as the hands are supposed to have been nailed, occasions but little loss of blood. It kills, therefore, but very slowly, by convulsions produced by the straining of the limbs, or by gradual starvation. So, if Jesus, supposed indeed to be dead, had been taken down from the cross, after about six hours, there is every probability of this supposed death having been only a deathlike swoon, from which, after the descent from the cross, Jesus recovered again in the cool cavern, covered as He was with healing ointments and strongly scented spices." This theory ignores the narrative which tells us of the means that were taken to ascertain whether Jesus was really dead, and which tells us of the great stone which would render it impossible for Him to find egress from His grave, even if He did awake to consciousness

while in it. On other and stronger grounds this theory is utterly untenable. For once, we agree with Strauss, who says :

“ It is quite evident that this view of the resurrection of Jesus, apart from the difficulties in which it is involved, does not even solve the problem which is here under consideration : the origin, that is, of the Christian Church by faith in the miraculous resurrection of the Messiah. It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still, at last, yielded to His sufferings, could have given to His disciples the impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life,—an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice ; but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.”

This theory is now so generally rejected even by unbelievers that we might almost leave it unnoticed, but that there are some who, proving to their own satisfaction that it is “ untenable,” yet declare that rather than believe in a miracle they would fall back upon it as the only solution of the problem. Such men are the slaves or victims of a “ philosophy,” as they call it, whose falsity is demonstrated

by the necessity which it imposes upon them of rejecting the most irrefragable evidence.

## II.

The hypothesis on which Strauss and the greater part of unbelievers now rely, is the visionary hypothesis, not to be confounded however with a newer visionary hypothesis which we shall consider presently. The disciples were the victims of their own imaginations. They believed that Jesus had risen, but their belief was a pure hallucination of their own brains. The error which took possession of them originated with Mary Magdalene. "Divine power of love!" exclaims Renan. "Sacred moments in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God!" More calmly, Strauss says, "In a woman of such a constitution of body and mind, it was no great step from inward excitement to ocular vision." Even in Paul "mental conditions" may be traced which render him liable to be self-deceived. And if the story of Peter's trance at Joppa could be accepted as any thing better than a legend, it would prove the same of him. But whether that story be true or not, Strauss thinks "we may assume, in the days after the death of Jesus, in the narrower circle of His adherents a common tone, an elevation of mental and nervous life, which overrode the particular disposition of the individual." And this is the key by which Strauss fulfils his "pledge," to explain the honest belief of the disciples without admitting a miraculous resurrection.



But to accomplish his object Strauss has to re-make the entire history of the event. 1. He assumes that the disciples were in a state of high expectancy that Jesus would rise from the dead, or that, after the first moments of confusion and despondency occasioned by the death of Christ, the study of prophecy, combined with their high conceptions of their Master, produced the conviction that He must rise and reign. All this, as has been already shown, is in direct contradiction to the Gospel history. The disciples were despondent and unexpectant up to the very moment of Christ's appearance to them.

2. In order to find time for the recovery of the disciples from their despondency, their study of prophecy, and the growth of their conviction that the Messiah must die and rise again, Strauss and his followers have to blot "the third day" out of the history; to suppose that the disciples went into Galilee immediately after the death of Christ, and returned to Jerusalem only after some considerable stay in their own country. But "the third day" is an essential part of the history. The resurrection itself was not more firmly and universally believed in, than was the third day as the time of its occurrence. And the theory which overlooks this as a part of the problem to be solved must be rejected as insufficient.

3. As to the detailed narratives of Christ's appearances, they must be taken out of the way of this theory, it matters not by what amount of fancy or

violence. The person who accosted and accompanied the disciples on the way to Emmaus, was not Jesus, but some "person unknown," in whom "when he separated from them in the dusk, they thought they recognised their own Jesus." "The stranger was a pious man, well versed in the Scriptures, quoting Moses and the Prophets." The remembrances awakened by His gesture in breaking bread "took such hold upon them, that they scarcely perceived that their companion, anxious to continue His journey, had left them." And they jumped to the conclusion that they had seen Jesus.

So with the alleged appearance of Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. "Certain disciples being in a ship (says Strauss), in the twilight of the early morning, on the Sea of Galilee, met an unknown person on the shore, who gave some advice on the subject of throwing out their net: in consequence of the surprisingly fortunate result, they consider it to be 'the Lord,' without one of them having had the confidence to ask Him whether He were really so."

One can scarcely help exclaiming, What simpletons these disciples of Jesus were! So easily deceived, founding their faith on less than a shadow! And these are the men who, by a faith thus unsubstantial and groundless, turned the world upside down! And yet they were something more than simpletons,—not, however, to their credit. Strauss forgets the conversation of Jesus with Peter and John by the Sea of Galilee, but Renan remembers the memorable interview with "the well-beloved

phantom," and explains it thus. One day, Peter, dreaming perhaps, thought that he heard Jesus ask him, "Lovest thou Me?" The question was thrice repeated. Peter, altogether under the influence of tender and sad feelings, imagined that he replied, "Oh! yea, Lord! thou knowest that I love thee;" and on each occasion the apparition said, "Feed My sheep." On another occasion Peter confided to John a wondrous dream. He had dreamt that he was walking with the Master. John was coming up a few steps behind. Jesus spoke to him in very obscure language, which appeared to tell him of a prison or a violent death, and repeated to him at different times, "Follow Me." Then Peter, pointing to John who was following, with his finger, asked, "Lord, and this man?" Jesus said, "If I wish that this man remain until I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me." After the martyrdom of Peter, John recollected this dream, and saw in it a prediction of the kind of death by which his friend suffered. He told it to his disciples; and they on their part fancied that they had discovered an assurance that their master would not die before the final advent of Jesus. And so, to save the visionary hypothesis from being wrecked on the facts recorded by John, we are to believe that the venerable apostle, the follower of Him who was "the Truth," has converted his recollections of Peter's dreams into a narrative of facts, prefacing his narrative by the statement that "Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee,

and on this wise showed He Himself,"—while the narrative is followed by these words: "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and we know that his testimony is true." The interpretation thus put on the significant story in the last chapter of John is not only utterly unhistorical, but grossly insulting to the character of John, and altogether inconsistent with the admission, so often and ostentatiously made, that the disciples were perfectly sincere in their belief that the Lord had risen.

The appearances of Christ to the assembled apostles on the day on which He is said to have risen, and on the following first day of the week, are treated by Strauss as of no evidential value, because of the commingling of the natural and supernatural in the action of the risen body:—the supernatural powers ascribed to the body being regarded as incompatible with the fact that it was the same body, subject to the necessities of an ordinary human body. On this subject we have given what seems to us a sufficient explanation. Renan allows his imagination to run riot as usual. "During a moment of silence, some slight breath passed over the assembly. At these decisive periods of time, a current of air, a creaking window, or a chance murmur, are sufficient to fix the belief of peoples for ages. At the same time that the breath was perceived they fancied that they heard sounds. Some of them said that they had discovered the word *shalom*, 'happiness' or 'peace.' No possi-

bility of doubt—Jesus is present—He is in the assembly.”

We wonder that it did not occur to the inventor of this scene to say, that it all happened in the darkness of midnight, when the disciples were trembling through superstitious fear, and were, in consequence, susceptible of any amount of self-deception. But worse than this occurred to him. “Some pretended (he says) to have observed on His hands and His feet the mark of the nails, and on His side the mark of the spear which pierced Him.” It is only by this double charge of folly and deceit that the “visionary” hypothesis can set aside the plain historic statements of two Evangelists, one of whom tells us that he had obtained “a perfect understanding of all things from the very first,”<sup>1</sup> and the other of whom professes to have been present on the occasion.<sup>2</sup>

It is with the like wilful imaginings that the appearance of Christ to five hundred brethren at once, is turned from a fact into a vision, a mental impression, without any objective cause. “One day (says Renan), when following their spiritual chiefs, the faithful Galileans had climbed up one of the mountains to which Jesus had often led them, and *they fancied* that they saw Him again. The air on these mountains is full of strange mirages. The same illusion which had previously taken place in behalf of the more intimate of the disciples, was produced again. The whole assembly imagined

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 3 ; xxiv. 36-49.

<sup>2</sup> John xx. 19-29.

that they saw the Divine spectre displayed in the clouds; they all fell on their faces and worshipped. The feeling which the clear horizon of these mountains inspires is the idea of the immensity of the world and the desire of conquering it. (!) On one of these neighbouring points Satan, pointing out with his hand to Jesus the kingdoms of the earth, and all the glory of them, it is said, proposed to give them to Him if He would fall down and worship him. On this occasion it was Jesus who, from the top of these sacred summits, pointed out to His disciples the whole world, and assured them of the future. They came down from the mountain persuaded that the Son of God had commanded them to convert the whole human race, and had promised to be with them to the end of the world." And this persuasion they never lost. "St. Paul saw many of those who were present at this extraordinary scene. At the expiration of twenty-five years (when 1 Corinthians was written) the impression on their minds was still as strong and vivid as it was on the first day."

Any attempt to show the hollowness of this version of the evangelical story must be superfluous. It is difficult to suppose that its author imposed on himself so far as to believe it. Matthew tells us that Jesus came and spake to His disciples on that mountain, saying, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;

teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." It is admitted that they were persuaded that they heard these words, and that, on the strength of this persuasion, they never ceased to regard themselves as having a commission to convert the world to Christ. But we are asked to believe that the words were never spoken. Jesus never "came" to them. They only saw a divine spectre in the air. And all the rest was the work of their imagination. Eleven men—to say nothing of the five hundred who were witnesses of the scene—imagined simultaneously that they heard One with whose voice they were familiar, giving them a great commission in articulate words which they understood, and which one of them has recorded, while in truth no such words were ever uttered! This concurrence of the imaginations of eleven men, and the inspiration of faith and zeal which it originated, is a mental phenomenon more unaccountable than any material phenomenon recorded in the Gospels.

4. This reminds us of one of the insuperable difficulties in the way of the visionary hypothesis. Apart from the special test to which Jesus submitted His corporeal identity, in condescension to the doubts of Thomas, Jesus, on all the occasions of His appearance of which we have any details, *spoke* to His disciples, conversed with them, sometimes discoursed to them. This is true of His appearance to Mary Magdalene, to the two dis-

ciples on the way to Emmaus, to the assembled apostles on the day of His resurrection, and a week later, to the five apostles by the Sea of Galilee, to the eleven on the Galilean mountain, and to the apostles when He led them forth to Mount Olivet to be parted from them. On not one of these occasions have we an appearance of a kind which could possibly have been a mental illusion,—not a distant, mysterious, shadow, “spectre,” or “phantom,” which excited minds could mistake for a reality; but a near corporeal presence, with intelligible speech and earnest conversation.

5. There is another insuperable difficulty in the way of the visionary hypothesis: what became of the body while the disciples were deceiving themselves, or allowing themselves to be deceived, by visions and dreams which they mistook for realities? Did it never occur to them to ascertain whether the body was still in the grave? Or did it never occur to their enemies to produce the body, when the disciples asserted it had been restored to life? Various answers have been offered. “It is possible (says one) that the body was taken away by some of the disciples, and by them carried into Galilee. The others, remaining in Jerusalem, would not have been cognisant of the fact.” But if this be “possible,” it is not possible that the fact should have been long unknown to the disciples in Jerusalem; and the fact once known, the disciples could not themselves believe, or ask others to believe, that the Lord was risen from the dead.



As to confronting the assertors of the resurrection with the body of Jesus, it is said that the body, hastening to a state of "corruption," could not be taken out of the grave and publicly exhibited. True. But the grave could be visited and evidence given that the body was still there. And thus, without a public exhibition of the corpse, the assertion of the disciples that Jesus was risen might be convicted of audacious falsehood. How, moreover, as Strauss himself says, "could the disciples come to make this assertion, when they could examine the neighbouring cavern in order to convince themselves of its groundlessness?"

To meet the difficulty created by the disappearance of the body, Strauss must as usual re-make the whole story. The history says that Jesus was laid in Joseph's new tomb. But Strauss says, "if Jesus was, as is probable (!), buried with other condemned criminals in a dishonourable place, His disciples had not from the first the tempting opportunity of looking for His body. And if some time elapsed before they came forward proclaiming His resurrection, it must have been more difficult for their opponents also to produce His corpse in a condition still to be recognised." On the supposition that Jesus was not laid in Joseph's tomb, the history is deliberately false, and all about the visit of the women and of Peter and John to that tomb on the morning of the third day, must be deliberately false. That the public ministry of the apostles did not begin till the

day of Pentecost, we know. But their own faith in the resurrection of Christ dates from the third day. And what the supporters of this visionary hypothesis have to prove is, how they could from that day be deceived by their own mental impression into the belief that Jesus was risen, when that belief could be corrected at any time by ascertaining what had become of His body if He was not risen. That they had not stolen it by night is certain,—for in that case they could not themselves believe that He was risen. If any of their enemies had removed it, these enemies would not have been slow, at any period between the third day and the day of Pentecost, or at any period thereafter when the apostles persisted in the face of death in saying Christ had risen, to explode the entire ground of the assertion by a declaration of the true facts of the case.

The "pledge" of Strauss to account for "the origin of the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of Jesus without any corresponding miraculous fact," is not fulfilled, we conclude, so far as the hypothesis we have now examined is concerned,—and it is on this hypothesis the author of the pledge relies. He uses two weapons arbitrarily and unsparingly—his philosophy, to destroy the Gospel history, and his imagination, to reconstruct another history out of its ruins. But his philosophy, the denial of miracles under all conceivable circumstances, is, as has been shown a thousand times, a flagrant begging of the question. And the structure which

his imagination rears in the stead of that which he sets aside, is literally but the baseless fabric of a vision—only the vision is his, not the apostles'. *They* were not the victims of any illusion. That which they had seen and heard, they declared to the world.

### III.

There is still another hypothesis, likewise called "visionary," but which differs essentially from that which we have been considering. It is that Jesus, after death, made spiritualistic communications to His disciples which naturally led to the belief that He was risen, or justified them in saying that He was risen. This hypothesis must be distinguished from the older "visionary hypothesis," according to which the disciples, in their enthusiasm, imagined that they saw their risen Lord, and were the victims of a mere hallucination. The newer hypothesis supposes that the appearances of Jesus after His death were real, objective occurrences, apparitions, or communications from the spirit world, to assure the disciples that Jesus was glorified. It necessarily supposes likewise that the *body* that was laid in Joseph's tomb was not restored to life, but "saw corruption." Though less violent, and more respectful to Gospel story, this theory is really as groundless as that against which we have already shown reason.

I. The term "resurrection" is utterly misapplied in this hypothesis. As well speak of the resur-

rection of the malefactor when he entered Paradise with his Saviour; or of the resurrection of Stephen, when, having said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he passed out of the hands of his murderers into the presence of Christ. All that can be fairly demanded of "believers in a spiritual resurrection," they say, is that they should explain that they use the word "in a spiritual and not in a natural sense." But we think not. It may be fairly demanded of them that they do not use this consecrated Biblical word in a non-natural sense, and that they do not put a construction upon it which is not the truth. "Material" language may be used "spiritually" or figuratively, and the word "resurrection" is no exception to this rule. Apostles used it figuratively. But it was not as "in a figure" that they represented Christ to have risen from the dead. Peter's argument on the day of Pentecost excluded the possibility of any such construction of their testimony. David, he argued, foretold the resurrection of the Christ in the 16th Psalm: "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hades, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." For, said Peter, "it is not David that has ascended into heaven" in fulfilment of this prediction, but David's Lord. David, he said, "is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." Jesus was dead and buried, but His sepulchre was His no longer; He left it on the morning of the third day. The prophecy of David was fulfilled in Him—"He was not left in hades, neither did His flesh

see corruption"—for God raised Him up, "whereof we all are witnesses."<sup>1</sup> Paul understood the 16th Psalm in the same sense. And if a rationalist should question his and Peter's interpretation, there can be no question of the fact which they meant to illustrate and confirm by it. "David," says Paul, "after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. But He whom God raised again, saw no corruption."<sup>2</sup>

If Christ rose from the dead only in the sense that His Spirit was glorified, David rose from the dead and "ascended into heaven" in the same sense. All the saints now in glory have risen from the dead in the same sense, and Paul was wrong in speaking of Christ as "the first fruits of them that sleep." We might go through the books of the New Testament, and show that the modern idea of the "spiritual resurrection" of Christ had not then dawned on writers or readers. Paul might have saved his faith from the scorn which it excited in Athens, if, instead of speaking of "Jesus and the resurrection," he had chosen a word which would have shown that he was preaching only that glorious doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which was one of their own favourite themes of speculation. But Paul meant a great deal more by the word "resurrection," and we may fairly demand that the word be not used except in Paul's sense.

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 24-36.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xiii. 36, 37.

2. The theory which would substitute a "spiritual" for a physical or bodily resurrection of Christ, is as irreconcilable with the Gospel narratives as is the more "visionary hypothesis" which we have already considered. The disciples, in their bewilderment, were at first disposed to think as the upholders of this theory think now. But it was only in their bewilderment. When Jesus stood in the midst of them,<sup>1</sup> they were "affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, he showed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb; and He took it, and did eat before them." Not only so, but He opened their understanding to understand the Scriptures, that thus "it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead on the third day."

They are bold men who, in the face of all this and other narratives, say, that it was a "spirit" that appeared to the disciples. They can support their position only by the arbitrary and wholesale rejection of the Gospel history. But even then they have to get rid of the Apostle Paul as well.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 37.

He preached everywhere that "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day." Now if the dying and burying are to be understood in a natural sense, so must the rising again. For those who deny this, there is no resting-place but in the ancient Docetic heresy, which held that the body of Jesus was a phantom, that His bodily existence was a mere semblance, that He had only the shadow of corporeal life. And then they must square accounts with the Apostle John, who said, "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God."

3. This new theory, like the former, leaves the final destination of Christ's body altogether unaccounted for. If His resurrection was only "spiritual," the glorification of His spirit in heaven, His body did not rise to a new life. And we again demand to know what became of it. That it was laid in the tomb is not doubted. That it was not there on the third day may be accepted as equally certain. What had become of it? That it ultimately "saw corruption" is involved, as we have seen, in this theory; and this is conclusive evidence against it. But how had it disappeared? By whom was it removed, and whither was it taken? The question need not be re-argued. It is asked now only to show that it is as real a difficulty in the way of the "spiritualistic," as in the way of the old "visionary" hypothesis.

4. We may add that this theory, even if accepted, fails of the object for which it is preferred to the common belief that the resurrection of Jesus was a bodily resurrection. That object is to reduce, if not altogether to eliminate, the supernaturalness of the occurrence. That a body really dead should be restored to life seems too much for belief. And the endeavour is put forth to lead us "through *Nature* to Christ" — without any aid from *supernature*. How is this to be accomplished in the matter of the Resurrection,—the resurrection, *in some sense*, not being denied but insisted on? "The disciples," it is admitted, "continually protested their belief in Christ's resurrection; St. Paul makes it the corner-stone of his teaching; the assailants or critics of the Church, from the earliest times, regarded it as an accepted dogma of the followers of Christ; and, most important of all, the life of Christ is inexplicable without the supposition that He anticipated His resurrection; lastly, it is not possible, on any other hypothesis, to suppose that the disciples could have been lifted from hopelessness to confidence, from despair to successful energy." The author from whom we quote these words, believing all this, promises to explain it all without asking the sceptic "to believe anything in the least unnatural." And he ends with asking him to believe, not in the restoration to life of the bodily frame of Christ, but in a series of "apparitions," or "visible manifestations," of a Being who was now in His heavenly home, "at the right hand



of the Father." Well may Godet say—"As to this glorified Jesus, who appeared spiritually to the apostles, did He, or did He not mean to produce on them the impression that He was present bodily? If He did, this heavenly Being was an impostor. If not, He must have been very unskilful in His manifestations. In both cases He is the Author of the misunderstanding which gave rise to the false testimony given involuntarily by the apostles." Apart from this fatal difficulty, it will be seen that the promise to explain the disciples' belief in the resurrection, without a miracle, ends in the assertion of a miracle.

The "apparitions" or "visible manifestations" of a Being whose home was in the unseen world, which this theory supposes, could not be "natural." There are no natural forces that could produce them, and no natural laws that could regulate them. They must have been distinctly miraculous or supernatural. And thus, the "spiritualistic" theory of the resurrection of Christ does not help us to get rid of that dreaded thing, the supernatural. "It is not," says Godet, with reference to Keim, from whom this hypothesis has been introduced into England, "worth while combating the Biblical accounts, when such enormous concessions are made to them; to deny, for example, the miraculous birth, when we admit the absolute holiness of Christ, or the bodily resurrection, when we grant the reality of the appearances of the glorified Jesus,"

It may be supposed, however, that this hypothesis is at least harmless. It admits *a* resurrection and the change in the apostles which follows it; it admits that Jesus is glorified in heaven. If it be not the true explanation of the rising again of the Lord Jesus it will do no harm; if it rejects the letter, it retains the spirit. Not so judged the Apostle Paul. He did not say, "If Christ be not glorified," but, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." "The Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Atonement, the Ascension," says one, "are to me not mere historical facts, nor theological dogmas requiring mere otiose assent, but profound spiritual realities." But deny the "historical fact," and you have no "reality," spiritual or unspiritual, left. Sublimate the facts into ideas, and you turn them into myths or allegories, and rob the ideas of their foundation.

Those who deny the "letter" of the story of the resurrection, do not retain its "spirit," for its spirit consists in its meaning in relation to Christ and His Gospel. And what that is we have endeavoured to show. Let the reader<sup>1</sup> substitute an "apparition" of Christ for an actual "resurrection," and he will soon find that all we have said touching the moral significance of the resurrection, and its relations and bearings, will fall to pieces. (a) The apostles averred that the resur-

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. v. p. 108, etc.

rection of Christ proved that He was that for which He was condemned for saying He was, the Son of God. Let them, however, confess that Jesus did not rise from the dead, only they had seen His spirit, His ghost, and therefore they believed that He was the Son of God! Could we blame the world if they laughed at the simplicity which expected men to be convinced by such an argument? (b) In the resurrection we see a proof of the completion and Divine acceptance of the sacrifice, which, the apostles said, was the true meaning of His death. He was sinless, and death was not His own due. "He died for our sins." His resurrection was an attestation of His sinlessness, and of the accomplishment of the end for which, though sinless, He consented to die. But say He did not rise, only His spirit was seen in some mysterious way by His apostles, and you rob the apostolic teaching of its meaning. (c) In the resurrection we have, according to the Apostle Paul, the pledge and earnest of our own resurrection, "the redemption of the body." But say that Christ did not really rise; only His glorified spirit was seen by the apostles! What then becomes of the grand argument of the 15th of First Corinthians? It is left without any foundation; worse—it is based on a falsehood.

The theory which reduces the history of the resurrection of Christ to a mere "ghost story," we have seen already, is utterly inconsistent with the solemn and persistent averments of those who profess to

have seen the risen Christ with their own eyes, and to have heard Him with their own ears. And now we see that in rejecting the literal and historic fact, it does not retain, as some think it may, the spirit of the fact. All the meaning which the apostles found in it disappears. The process by which the literal fact is evaporated, is equally fatal to the spirit of the fact. "It leaves not a wrack behind."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## Conclusion.

**I**N conclusion, we submit that the evidence on which the historical character of the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ rests, is amply sufficient to justify our faith in it. We have not consciously evaded one objection that can be taken to it with any show of plausibility. And we have endeavoured to examine impartially every hypothesis which has been suggested to account for the facts which are now universally acknowledged. Recurring to the principles which were illustrated in our first chapter, on the authority of Dr. Thomas Arnold, Sir G. Cornwall Lewis, and others, we cannot discover any flaw in our arguments. The documents on which we rely belong to the age in which the event took place. "The Epistle of Paul (to the Corinthians)," Mr. Greg admits, "was written, probably, about the year A.D. 57; the first three Gospels between the years A.D. 60 and 70." And these documents, written by contemporaries, and for contemporaries, represent to us not merely what was known and believed some twenty-five or thirty years after the departure of Christ, but what was known and believed from the

beginning, from the time, that is, when Jesus ceased from an earthly life. We shall not repeat what has been already said of the form in which the testimony of the personal witnesses of the "Risen Christ" has been preserved in these documents,—except thus far, that it is a form far less liable to suspicion than any other which objectors have demanded, such as a legal attestation "signed and sealed" by the eleven or by the five hundred. That testimony has been preserved to us, in a history to which few deny the credit of guilelessness and artlessness. And the four conditions on which Sir G. Cornwall Lewis says that the credibility of a witness mainly depends, are perfectly met in the apostles and others who said they saw Christ after His resurrection. "1. That the fact fell within the reach of the witness's senses. 2. That he observed and attended to it. 3. That he possesses a fair amount of intelligence and memory. 4. That he is free from any sinister or misleading interest; or, if not, that he is a person of veracity." All this and much more is true of those witnesses who declared to the ancient world, in the face of scorn and death, that they saw and heard, and conversed with the Jesus whom Pilate crucified, after He had been raised from the dead.

One other sentence may be quoted from our Introductory chapter. Of "the laws of the modern historical criticism, so far as they seem to be established," the following, according to Canon Rawlinson, is the first; "When the record which we

possess of an event is the writing of a contemporary, supposing that he is a credible witness, and had means of observing the fact to which he testifies, the fact is to be accepted, *as possessing the first or highest degree of historical credibility.* Such evidence is on a par with that of witnesses in a court of justice, with the drawback, on the one hand, that the man who gives it is not sworn to speak the truth, and with the advantage on the other, that he is less likely than a legal witness to have a personal interest in the matter concerning which he testifies." Our entire argument is a comment on these words, and justifies us in claiming for the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that it "*possesses the first or highest degree of historical credibility.*"

The utter collapse of all attempts to explain the facts which unbelievers acknowledge, while denying the main, the supernatural fact, adds not a little to the force of the evidence. These attempts have their origin avowedly in the foregone conclusion that the thing *could not* be. And it requires no small degree of charity towards those who make them, and who rely on them, to suppose that they really believe in them. Such explanations and arguments as are adduced by those who deny that Jesus rose from the dead, if presented before "a court of justice," would only excite the wonder of the judge. And in view of them we can understand the exclamation ascribed to a French *savant*, "In truth, I am not credulous enough to be an unbeliever,"

We have not denied, rather have we insisted, that so exceptional an event as the restoration of a dead man to life, requires exceptional evidence to authenticate it. And such evidence we have.<sup>1</sup> It is to be found not only in the remarkable change which took place in the character of the apostles, and in their conceptions of the work and mission of their Master, after His resurrection, or what they asserted to be such, but in the entire essence and structure of the Christianity which they preached from the day of Pentecost till the day of their death, and of which we have the record in their letters to the churches which they founded. This Christianity could not have existed if Jesus had not risen from the dead, not merely in that this fact supplied the crowning evidence that Jesus was what He had claimed to be, the Son of God, but in that it was essential to the redemption which the apostles, without exception, set forth as the especial purpose and mission of their Divine Lord.

The corroboration which the evidence of the resurrection of Christ as a historic fact thus receives, is not to be confounded with what is called circumstantial evidence. Circumstantial evidence, especially if there is an accumulation of points, although they may be separately very minute and insignificant, often justifies most material conclusions. But the arguments to which we appeal, as corroborative of the direct testimony of the witnesses who saw and heard and conversed with the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter v.



Risen Christ, are not at all of the character of circumstantial evidence. They are not adduced to strengthen testimony which without them would be weak or insufficient. They constitute a part, a most important part, of the ground on which we believe and preach, with all the boldness of Peter and John before their Sadducean judges,<sup>2</sup> that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and that the stone which the builders rejected thus became the headstone of the Church of God. We call them corroborative only because the evidence which they furnish is not direct, but indirect.

Though indirect, this evidence is not the less conclusive. We have indicated the light which the resurrection of Christ sheds on His own character and mission, and on the future of redeemed men, and have shown the grand harmony of both historic and doctrinal Christianity which results from it. In the same spirit Dr. Godet says: "If the resurrection is a fact, it cannot be an isolated one; this Divine act must contribute something essential to the *ensemble* of a great work of God. Considered apart from that which went before and that which followed it, such a miracle would seem even stranger and more out of harmony with reason than it is in its own nature. *It is in virtue of the place which it occupies in a harmonious whole that, without ceasing to be supernatural, it becomes at the same time logical and natural.* It is therefore freed from that character of abruptness which it would otherwise

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 10-13.

wear. It is a mountain-top in the middle of the chain of which it forms one of the main connecting links. And this chain, if we wish to discern it, it is not difficult to make out, it is the sacred history, that of the Old Testament, which in all its lines converges upon this fact, and that of the New, which wholly flows from it. . . It is not more possible for the miracle of the resurrection, if it was a reality, to have been an isolated fact, than it is for the part which that miracle plays in the divine history to which it belongs, to have been a *secondary* part. By the fact of the absence of any human agent as its instrument, it takes its place on a level with the most prodigious of miracles, that of the creation. This analogy holds good even to the very fundamental nature of the two facts: to summon into life and to recall to life. Are not these two acts of the same nature? Creation is the victory of Omnipotence over nothingness; the resurrection is the victory of this same power over death, which is the likeliest thing to nothingness known to us. As the creation is the primordial fact in the history of the universe, the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be its central fact. It is that or nothing."

Blot the resurrection out of the story of the Christ, and you may as well blot out the Christ Himself. Blot out the Christ, and you may as well blot out God. For all our true conceptions of Him, and all our true affections towards Him, grow out of the filial relation to Him to which

Christ lovingly restores us. And "God added to, or deducted from, the sum of existence," makes existence an altogether different thing from what it would otherwise be. Save us, by any means, from the conclusion of the sceptic, who could only see an "empty heaven looking down upon a soul-less earth."









