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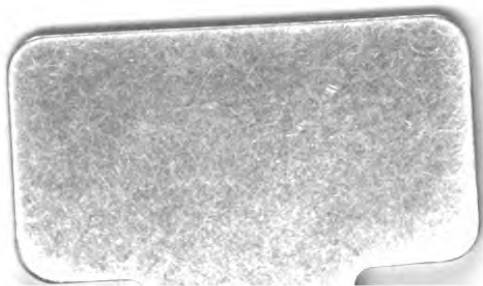
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On Certainty in Religion

Edward White.

The tone and teaching of the New Testament on certainty in ...

Edward White



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THE TONE AND TEACHING OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT
ON
CERTAINTY IN RELIGION.

BEING THE MERCHANTS' LECTURE FOR OCTOBER, 1880.

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following discourses were delivered in the present year at the King's Weigh House Chapel, Fish Street Hill, as the October noon-day course of the 208th annual series of "The *Merchants' Lecture*," an ancient foundation among the London Nonconformists. They are published at the request of some gentlemen who heard them, and who thought them likely to be serviceable in print.

They contain little beyond an enlargement of Bishop Butler's observation in the *Analogy* ; that "the establishment of the Jewish and Christian religions, which were contemporary with the miracles related to be wrought in attestation of both, or subsequent to them, are, as events, just what we should have expected, upon supposition such miracles were really wrought to attest the truth of those religions. These miracles are a satisfactory account of those events—of which no other satisfactory account can be given—*nor any account at all, but what is imaginary merely and invented.* It is to be added that the most obvious, the most easy and direct account of this history, how

our Scriptures. And no one should make a boast of his '*incredulity*' in disbelieving something that is very strange, while he is believing—as the only alternative—something incomparably *more* strange."—page 511.

I gladly embrace the present opportunity of commending to the reader's attention the work of Dr. Peter Bayne, on *The testimony of Christ to Christianity*; where, in a small space, he will find the question of Christ's intellectual and moral authority, as a witness to the reality of His own miracles, handled with rare insight, delicacy, and eloquence.

It remains only to add that although in some parts of these lectures, where it was required by the argument, I have adhered to the useful distinction, referred to in the opening sentences, between Certainty and Certitude—in the sense respectively of *truth in propositions, (considered as representing the reality of things),—and a state of the mind supposed to correspond with that reality*, in other portions I have readily fallen into the popular usage, which regards them as interchangeable expressions to denote subjectively the state of the mind only.

E. W.

December 1, 1880.

are not mere sentimentalists, but those who from moral and intellectual qualifications are precisely the best fitted to judge of the value of the evidence.

Bishop Fitzgerald, in a remarkable paper, forming the 29th number of the *Cautions for the Times*, and which Archbishop Whately—the editor—speaks of as “one of the finest compositions in our language,” retorts upon those who charge credulity upon Christian believers in the following sentences:—

“The miraculous occurrences recorded in the Bible are indeed extraordinary, and wonderful, and in themselves, improbable; but all of them put together are as nothing, in point of strangeness, compared with the only alternative,—with what must be believed by anyone who should thereupon resolve to reject those miraculous narratives. That a handful of Jewish peasants and fishermen should undertake to abolish the religions of the whole civilized world, and introduce a new one, in defiance of all the prejudices, and all the power of the world, arrayed against them; that they should think to effect this by pretending to miraculous power *which they did not, and knew that they did not, possess*; and that they should succeed in the attempt; all this is surely many times more incredible than anything and everything recorded in

THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE

ON

CERTAINTY IN RELIGION.

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are *surely believed* among us, Even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were *eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word*; It seemed good to me also, having *accurately traced down* all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest fully know the *certainly* of those things wherein thou wast instructed.”—S. Luke i. 1—4.

THIS introductory passage in St. Luke's Gospel contains in the original a little museum of Greek words, denoting the processes and results of proof in relation to Christianity, and they are substantially represented in our own version. The Evangelist distinguishes between what we now term *certitude*—or the belief of the mind—and *certainly*, or the solid reality of the facts or truths believed in;—the one an internal state, the other an external fact, fitted to be the basis of faith. He speaks of things which are “surely be-

lieved," and then of the "certainty" or safe reality of the things so believed in. He adds that with the object of causing Theophilus to know (or rather *thoroughly to know*) this certainty, he was about to write a fresh and orderly discourse founded on the testimony of eye-witnesses and ministers of the word of God, who could not be mistaken as to what they had seen or heard.

This language has a special interest in our own time. After nineteen centuries we have reached a condition of the public mind in which, as some think, there is quite as much of doubt as of confident faith in respect to Divine Revelation; and far more of doubt felt than expressed. The minds of numbers of thinking men of all ranks are not so much in a state of hostility as of confusion. They are confounded between some of the alleged discoveries of Science and some of the earlier statements of the Bible. They are confounded between the astounding claim to authority over our convictions, set up on one side by those who tell us that unless we accept the Roman Infallibility there is no logical escape from an all-devouring scepticism; and on the other by those who, whether calling themselves Christians or not, recom-

mend their own unbelief by the assurance, that unless we accept all their denials, there is no logical escape from that Roman Infallibility; and who therefore are very wrathful with those of us who find a Divine Authority and solid basis of faith in the teaching of the Apostles, under the illumining grace of the Spirit of God. They are confounded by the results of so-called biblical criticism, throwing doubt upon the genuineness and authenticity even of the gospel narratives. And they are still more confounded by the opposite systems of doctrine and church discipline, professedly extracted from the New Testament by scholars and divines of learning and ability. In this condition of affairs the luxurious selfish lives of multitudes of professed Christians, the superabundant levity of the secular, and the astonishing bitterness of some parts of the religious Press, furnish a powerful support to unbelief; and the Pharaoh-like cry of atheism rises boldly from the outlying multitudes, "*Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?*"

Now I have thought that without even seeming to touch so mighty an argument as that which is required in order to meet fully this influx of scepticism, some slight service might be rendered by offering, not a difficult and thorny discussion of the questions

raised against Christianity, but a simple statement of what we find *in the original books of the Gospel—on the subject of belief in its claims*. I feel persuaded that such a description will be readily followed by men devoting to thought an hour in the midst of business, even with minds half filled with other ideas; and further, that the consideration, however hurried and imperfect, of the marvellous language of these books respecting the certainty of their main contents, will not be without effect even on minds distracted and shaken by the doubts of the nineteenth century. Life is not long enough to allow of spending it all in uncertainty as to its meaning and its issues. If the Gospel be true, its truth can be made apparent to the busiest men who are honest. And a rationally confident belief is the secret of living nobly in the throng of affairs, and then of dying victoriously.

The object then is, without pretending to discuss, much less defend, the contents of these sacred books, to set forth what their writers say as to their own belief; as to the means by which they reached it; and as to the means by which they expect to produce similar saving belief in other minds in relation to the facts, doctrines, and hopes of Christianity.

To Portray Apostolic Certainty. 7

First of all, let attention be drawn to the remarkable phenomenon that these books—from the Gospel of Matthew onward to the Apocalypse—though differing in style, object, and feeling, are marked by one characteristic which pervades them in every page,—and that is, *the solemn tone of certainty* which runs through them, without one single break down into speculation or balancing of probabilities. At all events these writers thoroughly believed what they wrote. This characteristic distinguishes the New Testament books not only from all the Roman literature of the same age, but from all other Greek books that ever were written. In those literatures you have argument on both sides, guess, divination, doubt, mockery, despair. But here every page overflows with the feeling of certainty. The Evangelists and Apostles of the gospel absolutely exhaust all the language of certainty in giving expression to their ideas. There are no words expressive of absolute truth and trustworthiness, and intense faith founded on that trustworthiness, which these men have not employed. “This is the victory which has overcome the world” of doubters—“even their faith.” Such thorough belief and confidence were contagious. They drove mankind before them, “and shut them up” in the fold

of faith. The Roman world at large believed nothing much—but at least these men believed, “nothing doubting.” The New Testament stands up like a mighty and immovable rock of certainty in the midst of the wide unstable sea of contemporary thought—in the Jewish, Greek, and Roman world. You feel this tone of certainty in the teaching which they report from the lips of their Master—the Christ. Christ sets himself before us as The Truth. He has no long arguments, no processes indicating inquiry on His own part, or inference, or hesitation. But every word of His is struck with a definite sovereign image of truth upon it, like gold under the descending stamp of the mint. “*Verily, verily, I say unto you:*” this is the steadfast introduction to every lesson. In Him there is no “feeling after God” in the dark; no derivation of wisdom from earlier teachers; no modest citation of authorities: the only quotation is from prophecy, to point out its punctual fulfilment in Himself. Christ, in the Gospels, is represented to us as the Truth of Eternal Thought, alighting on the earth in the form of Man, and speaking absolutely, as One who “knew both what was in Man” and what was in God. His intellectual countenance is “as the sun shining in its strength.”

There are four biographers of Christ—men of as different make as any four biographers who could be found to-day,—and yet, although two of them do not claim even to write as eye-witnesses; although they write from different standpoints, and give, so to speak, pictures from four different angles,—yet nevertheless, amidst all diversities of style and treatment, the general spiritual result, as we know, is to portray one and the same majestic Divine Man—“the same Jesus” in all the four gospels—that one Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the very memory of whose sanctity has consecrated the whole land of Palestine as “holy,” chiefly because His footsteps pressed it,—and who has become the spiritual Lord of the modern world.

And in these four evangelists, so differing in the details of their books, the one feature common to all is this awe-striking impression of Certainty. They write as men each one consciously telling only a part of the truth in every case, because the whole truth was too great for any one to tell. But what was told by each was a part of the truth. They do not hamper themselves (as was recently remarked by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his Visitation Charge) with any explicit pretension to write under a verbal dictation;—as if they knew that such a profession would

be useless ; because men must first believe their history, on the ordinary grounds of credibility, before they could possibly believe in any such supernatural assistance ; and as if they knew further, that until men believed their record as that of honest historians relating the truth, there would be no room for any theory as to the mode of their writing.

And further,—in the process of writing these four histories, with their numerous reports of astounding miracle, they make no concealment of the fact that the majority of the Jewish learned men of their day who beheld the miracles were not convinced by what Christ did and said ; while they describe in artless language the early and only slowly dissolving doubts of some of their own most intimate companions, and even of the “ brothers ” of Jesus. Yet amidst this strange frankness of report as to contemporary doubt and denial on the part of persons of the utmost social authority, and amidst all minor differences of statement as to times and places and successions of events,—there prevails throughout the same calm and absolute tone of certainty as to the reality and truth of the general history, the miracles—the divine purity and glory—the death, resurrection, and ascension—of Him who

spake the "true sayings of God"—of Him on whose word the world might rest, as they did, with a confidence which purges the soul from an evil conscience, and takes away the sting of death.

And now, if we pass from the four Gospels to the Letters of the Apostles, including those of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John, what do we discover here? Precisely the same language of decisive belief based on the absolute certainty of fact and doctrine. Here again, as in our passage from St. Luke's gospel, we find heaped up on every side all possible terms expressive of certainty and certitude. We have first the perpetually occurring *Epignosis* describing that *thorough knowledge* which is the privilege of the advanced spiritual man. In Ephes. i. 17, St. Paul speaks of "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the *thorough knowledge* of Him." He says, iv. 13, "Till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and the *thorough knowledge* of the Son of God; no more children—tossed on the waves, and carried about with every breeze of doctrine." In the Epistle to the Philippians i. 9, he says, "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more in all *thorough knowledge* and all perception."

In Colossians i. 9.—“We cease not praying, that ye may be filled with the *thorough knowledge* of His will in all wisdom and spiritual intelligence.” “Putting on the new man, renewed unto thorough knowledge according to the Image of Him that created him.”

Then we have the *plerophoria*, “*riches of full assurance of understanding*, to the thorough knowledge of the mystery of God,” which is attributed to the faith of established believers—Colossians ii. 2; and again the *asphaleia*, or solid certainty of fact, on which the faith rested; and that *parrhesia*, confidence, boldness, assurance, (for the word is translated in these three forms,) which describes the posture towards God of a soul so believing in these revelations of grace and truth.

Every apostle seems to plant his foot upon a rock of recent historical fact—of which he had been eyewitness—up to the ascension of Christ; and standing there to have no doubts left as to the reality of an immortal life to come. “We also believe and therefore speak.” Their faith was of the nature of knowledge. “We *know* that if this earthly house of our tent be dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” “and we *know*,” (says St. John, at the close of his

Epistle,) "that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we *know* that the Son of God is come and hath given us intelligence that we might know the True one—and we are in the True one—and in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the True God and eternal life."

Now this tone of absolute assurance is present when they speak of the facts of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension; when they speak of what they call the "doctrine" founded on those facts,—the doctrine of "the end of sins" made by sacrifice; of "the abolition of death" by the resurrection of the Life-giver; of our "gratuitous justification in Christ;" of our salvation "by grace, not of works lest any man should boast;" of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit; and of the resurrection to Eternal Life. And the same tone of certainty is present in those expressions which describe their own personal assurance of forgiveness, of salvation, of enjoying the present and everlasting favour of God. Look where you will, I, for my part, cannot discover a line, a word, a syllable, of uncertain, or less certain, utterance. The trumpet always gives a "certain sound," and it is the sound which proclaims the presence in the host of the Conqueror of Death.

Apart from criticism as to its cause, this is the most wonderful phenomenon in all literature. If the New Testament is not "the judge that ends the strife, when wit and reason fail," at least it speaks in that tone of absolute and invariable certainty which we should expect to accompany a Revelation from the Living God. And as a matter of fact it is this certainty which armed the martyrs of Christ in the early centuries to confront the direst sufferings in defence of the faith; as it is also this which makes it so exceedingly difficult in our times to overthrow Christianity by a set of mere critical peradventures, which are like brittle glass spears breaking against a shield of diamond.

The New Testament is so familiar to us that we read it often without realizing this quality in the tone of its writers, in comparison with that of our contemporaries. With few exceptions the tone of all modern writing is that of inquiry, investigation, opinion. The exceptions are in mathematical works, where perfect demonstration permits absolute certitude; and in physical science, where up to certain lines (sometimes transgressed by eminent popular writers who mistake the opinions or theory of scientific men for science), there is reason for the expression of a similar degree

of confidence. But with these exceptions the modern tone of writing in matters of historical criticism, of art, of morality, of policy, is limited by the sense of fallibility.

But the writers of the New Testament, one and all, set *themselves* forth as "foundation stones" of the moral edifice, of the new humanity—the living temple. "Ye are built on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." And respecting Him they say, speaking in the name of GOD, "*Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, A ROCK, a solid rock, and he that believeth shall not be confounded.*"

The more closely this tone of certainty is studied the more soul-striking the phenomenon becomes, both in its substance and in its accessories. What led the four evangelists, and these writers of the letters on doctrine and life, to speak, one and all, in this uniform style of intense belief? Was it the blind certainty of ignorant fools?—or was it feigned all through? Was it an appearance of certainty, covering knowledge to the contrary? This implies deliberate imposture, at least in the leaders,—a conspiracy to seem convinced of empty fables, or myths dressed up into miracles.

But the one thing that a band of liars can very seldom do is to imitate all round the voice and countenance of honesty: and in all ages men have revolted from charging deliberate conspiracy and imposture on the writers of the New Testament. They at least believed what they wrote. They seem utterly regardless of calumny and misrepresentation, like men who know that they are right, and they speak with a strength of persuasion and assertion which still moves the world. They crown and finish their course by declaring that they had "not followed cunningly devised fables," but were eye-witnesses of the Divine Incarnate Majesty. 2 Peter i. 8.

Were they deceived by appearances,—and gradually led to attach a supernatural character to natural events, or to mere idle reports—as M. Renan thinks the story of Christ's Resurrection from the dead is to be accounted for by a passionate dream of Mary Magdalene—that she saw Him in a vision, alive after His death. It is just conceivable that one distempered mind might rest faith on such a dream,—but that a whole band of men, of different types of mind, should steadily rest absolute faith such as theirs in a risen Jesus on no other foundation than one woman's fancy

—is impossible—much more that they should lay down their lives in support of it. No, “that which they had seen with their own eyes, which they had heard, which they had looked upon, and their own hands had handled, of the (risen) Word of Life declared they unto us”—that we “might have fellowship with them,” and through them with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

St. John here refers, in his closing words, to the fact that the faith of Christians in the Incarnation was designed to be founded at first on the union of their minds with the minds of himself and his brother apostles—the eye-witnesses of our Lord’s history. These first spectators of “the heavenly vision” of “God manifest in the flesh,” are themselves gradually raised into transcendent certainty,—and then their testimony, and teaching, and life, transfuse that certitude into those who receive their word. That is according to the general law of life. The generations of men are related intellectually, and spiritually. There is a vital unity in humanity, what the French call a *solidarity*. What human nature once really saw, subjected to every test, and was compelled to believe, humanity still sees through the organs and

perceptions of its former members. Inheritance in all departments runs through the world. We believe all our national histories because "our fathers have told us." But this is only the first stage of belief. Honest souls can test the traditional and historical by spiritual insight—and then they say—to the all-perceiving and all-reporting humanity—"Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have seen Him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

In the lectures which follow, I shall try to set forth in a little more detail the aspects of this New Testament Confidence of tone, as to the *facts* on which the Gospel of salvation is founded; as to the *truths* or doctrines which are built on those facts, or grow out of them; and as to the *conditions* laid down for obtaining personal certitude with respect to those facts and truths—and a solid *personal assurance* of salvation.

I will now only ask you to observe the stress laid upon the possession of this confident faith by the apostolic writers.

There is nothing which is more resented and condemned in our time than an excess of certitude in

Modern Society not friendly to Faith. 19

religious belief. Society will readily forgive any measure of doubt or unbelief, but it will not forgive a measure of belief which exceeds its own. Men are angered not so much by the subject of your faith, as by its disproportionate degree. Whatever faith is stronger than their own is credulity, or bigotry, or presumption, or ignorant boldness. Whatever faith is less strong than their own is scepticism, or infidelity. There is nothing more firmly insisted on than that you ought to believe in the same things, and in about the same degree, that Society or the Church believes. And society in our time believes very little in anything above sense. Suspense of judgment, open profession of ignorance, or of indifference, in religious matters especially, these are reckoned by many the marks of knowledge and capacity. "Life can be carried on in its leading interests by sense perceptions; men's financial credit can be fixed by an easy rule of observation, or at least by an average of guesses, inquiries, and risks. And what more is needful? If you are in the dark—say so—and wait for death to end all doubts, by extinction, or admission into light beyond. Here the position that becomes us is that of the white marble effigy, in Père La Chaise,—of the man who lies on his tomb—with the shroud for his

garment, and his forefinger placed upon his lips. We nothing know, the dead do not return to teach us,—we must wait for death to solve the mystery.”

Just such was the state of thought all over the Roman world when Christianity appeared—with its dazzling and awful certainties. And its apostles “laboured night and day with tears” to transfuse their own assurance of faith into the minds of their converts. They teach that such certainty is a necessity of the Christian life, for the glory of the revealing and saving God; for the peace of the Soul; for the growth of the Christian disciple in love and gladness; and for the strength of the Church in its war against the kingdom of darkness.

(i.) They teach that Man has lost himself, by losing the knowledge of his God; and that he can recover himself, with the knowledge of his own nature and eternal destiny, only by recovering the knowledge of his Maker. But this knowledge can be recovered, not by any unaided wrestling-match of his intelligence with the unknown Eternal Being, so as to conquer from the Infinite a knowledge of its secrets. It can be gained only by a revelation of God, through the Incarnation of His Word among men. In Christ are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

In Him is the knowledge of God and of man's immortal life. But certain knowledge here is a gift not a conquest.

These men teach us that God is to be loved through being known, in His work of nature and redemption. The "Unknown God" must no longer be "ignorantly worshipped"—but "declared." And, as in natural things fuller knowledge in all departments tends not to vagueness but to definiteness—and useful art is founded on exact understanding and application of nature's forces and laws,—so in the reception of Salvation the reality of God's love is felt when men see and embrace the certainty of its revelations. But the definiteness towards which all real knowledge tends leaves an infinity of mystery still unrevealed, so that God is glorified, both by what He reveals and by what He conceals. The New Testament "mysteries" therefore are all unveiled glories of truth set forth openly before us. "The veil is rent in the midst from the top throughout." We see God manifested in His Son, and seeing, we love, adore, and worship the Living God. "God hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and understanding," in order "that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God." If we can only guess at the divine idea of the world,

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we shall offer no worthy homage. To love God “with all the understanding” implies that there is a Divine Glory which can be understood.

(ii.) In like manner they teach us that certainty is essential for the *peace of the Soul*. To assure the conscience of pardon, to vanquish the fear of extinction in death, or the fear of awful judgment beyond, to reach the depths of man’s spirit, the seat of his misery, by an effectual assurance of reconciliation, demands the direct and healing touch of a divine life-giving hand, the direct voice of the Almighty Consoler. This requires a distinctly revealed “Covenant,” not a guess, or a hope proceeding from man, but an “oath and a promise” of God; not a human peradventure, but a clear and distinct revelation of the redeeming love which apprehends us in Christ. It is this which the apostles say they bring us from heaven—“a good hope through grace” assured by many infallible proofs. They tell us that they bring glad tidings, definite enough to meet the necessity of every man, and make known a Saviour able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him; so that God can be just, yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

(iii.) The apostles teach that definite knowledge of God's work and ways is essential to *growth in Christian character*—that progressive certitude is the very pabulum of a hope full of immortality. They know nothing of an articulated creed which may be blindly assented to by young and old, gentle and simple. They insist on each individual Christian being "fully persuaded in his own mind"—even if making mistakes—striving to think for himself—here a little and there a little, but ever onwards, on the successive portions of the Revelation of God; because with the growth of certitude ("a full assurance of understanding") will come ever-increasing strength and intelligent obedience.

Lastly, the writers of the New Testament represent *the quality of the moral excellence required by the gospel* under such a character as to be of impossible attainment apart from a preliminary *parrhesia*—confidence in the possession of God's love, and life eternal. We are to "leave all to follow Christ." We are to "deny ourselves, to take the Cross,"—that is, to exchange worldly delights and ambitions for crucifixion. We are to "watch and pray without ceasing." We are to "crucify the flesh with its passions and

24 *Certainty and Christian Morality.*

lusts." We are to forgive all who injure us, to "return good for evil," and to "turn the other cheek to the smiter;" in a word, to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

But who will burn for Christ except one who intensely believes in Him? Who will think it worth while even to attempt any distinctly Christian achievement in morals, unless on a basis of certainty that such conduct is "not in vain in the Lord"? Who can forego retaliation, sensual indulgence, the pursuit of worldly aims or worldly praise, on the strength of a dim probability, or a vague dream of some just possible result in a dubious future? No—to practise the Christian morality in actual life we require to be filled with a certainty, and an overflowing gladness in the heart, which are capable of inciting to heroic deeds; to know that "these are the true sayings of God," that our faith rests on the rock of ages, and that nothing in the creation is more absolutely fixed than the connection between a life or death of martyrdom for Jesus, and an ETERNITY OF GLORY.

Neither can an accusing conscience find rest in God's pardon, nor can a motive be found strong enough to vanquish the sinful passions of nature, apart from certainty that Christ is the Son of God, that He has

“opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers,” and that He is “coming again quickly” to endow us with the life immortal.

It is this Certainty which the New Testament writers profess to communicate, as to the facts, the doctrine, and the personal application of grace; but they hold a special doctrine as to the internal forces and causes which determine belief and unbelief, and on the measures of certitude and assurance which each man can attain under those conditions. They teach that supernatural agencies have to do with the possession or destitution of certitude, and that the causes of unbelief are moral; so that “if men believe, it is by the teaching of God’s Spirit;” and if the gospel be veiled, “it is veiled to them that are perishing, whom the God of this world hath blinded, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them.” And such blinded men, being accountable for their blindness, as resisting the Holy Ghost, are to suffer everlasting destruction. Like the men of Sodom, they are first struck blind in their wickedness, and then destroyed by fire from heaven. “*The wicked shall not understand.*” (Dan. xii.)

This is most awful to think of: whether it is true

you must consider. My business will be to show that this is what all the writers of the New Testament persistently declare, founding on it the exhortation to "Repent and believe to-day," because "to-day is the day of salvation." "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure."



LECTURE II.

ON THE NEW TESTAMENT TONE OF CERTAINTY AS TO THE
MIRACULOUS FACTS OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY; AND ON THE
ORIGIN OF THE DIFFICULTY FELT RESPECTING THEM IN
MODERN THOUGHT.

“ But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you ; and killed the Author of life, whom God hath raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses.”—Acts iii. 14, 15.

WE are now to consider the New Testament tone of certainty as to the miraculous Facts of the gospel history ; and the origin of the difficulties felt respecting them in modern thought.

The Christian religion professes to be founded on fact. It approaches us in form of a history. This history is set forth, not as an isolated passage in the course of the ages, having no connection with what went before ; but the history of Christ is presented in the four Biographies as the consummation of a vast system of events, extending from the beginning of the world, recorded in public memorials, and having

for its end, under the Divine Providence, the eternal salvation of man, by the abolition of Sin and Death. This is the representation steadfastly made by the evangelists and apostles.

They have then absolutely nothing in common with that tendency of our time which abjures history as a spiritual basis, and seeks for the foundation of religion only in the soul of man, or in the universal reason.

They, on the contrary, while commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, announce a religion of salvation, not by law, but by grace or redemption, and found it on the facts of Christ's death and resurrection.

These historical facts are treated not as the accidents, or mere evidence of the truth; but as of the essence of Christianity. St. Paul, speaking the sense of all the rest, says "*If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins.*" "*Then they that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*" (1 Cor. xv.) Redemption to endless life is declared to be through the death and resurrection of Christ; but these were events which occurred at a definite time and place, and the apostles declare that a solid hope, and the only hope, of life eternal rests on them.

Accordingly they preached to "wise and unwise,"

Athenian and Lycaonian, "Jesus and the Resurrection," and undertook to make men certain of the reality of these facts. No resurrection of Christ, no eternal life. Therefore they spend their strength mainly in establishing this death and resurrection, but only in connection with the previous life and miraculous ministry of Him whom they call their "Teacher and Lord;" master both of the intellect and of the will.

It is foreign to our present purpose to engage in any dogmatic speculation on the worth or wisdom of this mode of teaching religion. Our business is with the phenomenon of apostolic certainty, to bring it out to view, and study its surroundings; not to defend it, since it can defend itself. Let us first of all make clear the phenomenon, and afterwards every one can form his own judgment upon it. Thus these men taught. They stoutly declare that they beheld a long series of supernatural facts, in attending on this Master and Lord, and they set forth those facts as the foundation of man's hope of salvation.

1. In studying this phenomenon the first thing that strikes us, is *the quality of the men*, the original

apostles, who either themselves wrote the gospel story, as Matthew and John, or communicated the narrative of their experiences to first-hand learners, like Mark and Luke.

Not one of them makes the slightest pretension to be a scholar or a thinker. They write of themselves (Acts iv. 13) as a company of "unlearned, unlettered men," honest, intelligent, common people—whose education had been first that of the village school, and afterwards that of the college of industry in the open air; they say that they were fishermen, tax-gatherers, custom-house officers, toll-collectors, perhaps carpenters, and nothing beyond. The impression which their writings make upon us precisely agrees with this account of themselves. There is not a single line in the Gospels, (when you have set aside their reports of the sayings and deeds of Jesus,) which indicates that the reporters themselves, whether at first or second hand, were men of any special intellectual mark. They all four keep wonderfully in the background their own personalities; but what is so astonishing in the four evangelists is, that though they have furnished the materials of thought to the finest minds for ages, never once does one of them break into his life of Jesus with an original reflection, which we

should allow to be a very striking observation. Never once does one of them say anything, *as from himself*, which would lead us to think that the writer was a man of genius, or cultured reflective power, or historical imagination, or even of what Greeks would have thought to be literary talent. There is a certain tone of solid peasant-intelligence running through the story, which gives the impression that the apostles were a company of healthy common minds, disciplined by a life of toil, who knew what they were looking at when they saw anything before their eyes, even a miracle, if it was of indisputable reality and frequent occurrence; but who were, one and all, quite below the intellectual rank of inventors, or even of happy dreamers. There was not a Bunyan among them.

They give you the impression of men who, by a course of steady observation in the company of Jesus, could say clearly what they had seen awestruck, without pretending to philosophize upon it. And what adds much to the force of this observation is, that there were twelve of them, besides "the women of their company." A dozen men are never all alike, even among the peasantry and mechanical orders; there are always differences of type and character, of temper and interest. These twelve men were, according to

their own account, ready to fall out on trifling questions of precedence; but here we have them all, as in our text, "standing up together" on and after the Pentecost, and affirming at the risk of their lives the reality of the astounding fact that the very Jesus of Nazareth whom, in bitter hatred, the rulers had crucified and killed beyond dispute, they all, over and over again, had seen re-vivified; had handled his crucified but risen body, and conversed with him in Jerusalem and in Galilee. *Of which we all are witnesses.* Surely when we see this "boldness of Peter and John," so different from their former conduct, and perceive that they were unlearned but still intelligent men, it is impossible not to allow that the utmost weight belongs to their intensely earnest affirmation, that "God had raised Jesus again from the dead."

Now when we set on one side this commonplace intellectual quality of the reporters, (as indicated by the complete absence of any single line as from themselves bearing the stamp of power, or genius, or fancy,) and then look at the representation which they have made, each one and altogether, of that Lord of theirs who lightens the earth with his glory, is there any conclusion morally or psychologically possible,

except that they were reporting *from the life*, and that wilful invention had no place in the production of this splendid image of the Christ, the earthly and the heavenly? It is not only inconceivable that there should arise four biographies, within the same thirty years, of a person who never existed; but it is inconceivable that such writers as Matthew, the publican, or such men as Simon Peter or Andrew, had anything to do with inventing the idea of Jesus of Nazareth. It would be as easy to believe that Homer's servant, or Milton's daughter, composed the poems which they repeated or transcribed.*

It is precisely this impression which these four extraordinary narratives chiefly make on ingenuous readers,—that you are reading straightforward descriptions, from the life, of a person whom his first followers loved but imperfectly understood; and in whom they believed as the Son of God with a force of conviction which it was beyond their own power to shake off or conceal. It would be sufficiently mar-

* The only question that could be raised would be in respect to the writer of the fourth Gospel; and in that case the question would resolve itself into this,—is it more likely that "John" invented a fictitious Jesus Christ, or that Christ educated a real St. John?

vellous if one narrative bore these characteristics. But that all the four should be equally stamped with them is a fact without parallel in literature.

2. Note next that it is as typical Asiatic writers that they go about to persuade the world of the truth and certainty of these narratives. Nothing can be clearer than that the four accounts of Jesus are not the result of a literary conspiracy. The narratives vary in many ways on the very surface. They are like four sets of photographs from four different angles. No two pictures are quite alike. All the four series are required thoroughly to represent the living Christ in the solid. The Gospels affect us like a quadruple stereoscope. We see Jesus behind and before; and the result is that they have presented Him "alive after his passion," if ever men drew a living likeness. These four accounts are full of variety, of one-sidedness, of limited statements, and not without a number of trivial discrepancies. There is now and then an Oriental indefiniteness as to method, chronology, topography, —or what looks like it—as those most strongly assert who have most minutely studied these writings; and yet in the midst of the vague and shimmering atmosphere of local and chronological detail, what solid

masses of concurrent testimony—what clear outstanding of the main events of the story—and above all what a dazzling moral effulgence in that central Figure, whose life stands out like a Transfiguration at the beginning of modern history !

And one may here remark that these Asiatic men, children of nature, have written, as all honest common people do, just as Nature paints her pictures upon our minds. There is a certain indistinctness in her outlines. No one ever yet saw in nature an exact mathematical diagram,—but for all that her mountains “burn into the midst of heaven,” and her carpet of flowers and herbage, with a sufficiently distinct pattern, adorns the earth, and entrances all beholders; even though no one of them but must admit that this glory shines in the centre of a somewhat indefinite atmosphere at the edges.

And utterly careless seem the evangelists of such defects in the strict numerical precision of their writings. They do not agree apparently whether Jesus cured one blind man or two, on entering, or leaving Jericho; but that He suddenly cured blindness at Jericho, in a man who cried out “Son of David, pity me!” they have no doubt whatsoever. They differ in each case as to the exact superscription on the

Cross, but they all agree that it contained the Messianic title of Jesus; just as they all agree, in the only miracle which they all four record, that Jesus fed five thousand men, counted out in companies on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, by multiplying "five barley loaves and a few small fishes." They have none of them left such an orderly table of appearances of Christ after his resurrection, as will satisfy our interesting contemporary, Mr. Rathbone Greg; much less satisfy a critic who is a spiritual adversary, like Dr. Strauss; but that Jesus really died, that they saw him crucified, dead, and buried; that He rose on the third day, and that they repeatedly saw him "alive after his passion," "by many infallible evidences," they attest with a clearness, a unanimity, a moral simplicity of tone, and an intensity of confidence and certitude, which has carried the Church along through eighteen centuries of suffering and contradiction.

3. It may be further suggested in support of the evangelists that their testimony resembles in texture that which satisfies us in modern reporters of great historical events. Nothing is more common, and more vexatious, in modern life than incomplete re-

porting of spoken discourse, or the reporting, with an *animus*, of single isolated sentences apart from their connection ; but reports of visible events are usually sufficiently honest and correct. The four memoirs of Christ betray no selective *animus* as to His speech, and on matters of observation they go straight to the mark.

The military correspondents of four great journals would not quite agree in the order, or proportion, or detail of the great occurrences which they beheld. And by comparing and tabulating their statements, an appearance of imperfection and disagreement might be easily set forth to shake the public confidence. But after a while it would be seen that each observer has had his own point of view, and his own attractions, his own information, and his own specialities of description, as to detail, colour, and tone ; and no man of common sense or honesty would think of doubting, *on such grounds*, the leading events of the war in Zulu-land or Candahar ; or would dream of giving up the main story on account of small imperfections in some details.

4. Another noteworthy and important element in these narratives which offer themselves to us with a

tone of so much certainty on the level of visible fact, is that the writers make no secret either of their own doubts on the resurrection, and only gradual satisfaction, or of the determined hostility of the bulk of the educated class who were Christ's contemporaries in Palestine.

On carefully reading the Gospel narrative, it is easy to see that none of Christ's disciples were very forward to believe in Him during His ministry, or indeed understood His aims. They tell us frankly that His own "brethren," His relatives, "*did not believe on Him.*" Some of them thought that he was out of his mind, because he was so much beyond the range of theirs. They say "these things understood not his disciples at the first." So far from entering into his plan, even in the last year of his life, Simon Barjona "took him aside and began to rebuke him" for the design of going up to Jerusalem to die. After one of his discourses "many of his disciples went away and walked no more with him." After another the complaint was of his enigmatical teaching. "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." And so steadily were their minds set on Jewish crowns and sceptres, that after He was crucified they gave up all hope as an illusion. "We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel."

When at length they relate his appearances, after his resurrection, they describe the obstinate incredulity of Thomas; who was persuaded to think that the report of the rising again was something better than a dream, only by "putting his finger into the print of the nails, and thrusting his hand into his side." And when after the resurrection He met them on the mountain of Galilee, in large numbers, they frankly confess that "some doubted," an admission which could have been afforded only by men of thorough honesty and intense belief. As for Simon Peter, one of the pillars of the Church, he so nearly lost all conscious faith in his Master, when he saw him betrayed into the hands of sinners, that with oaths and curses he declared that "he knew not the man." When, after all this battling with the evidence, and with the difficulties of the manifestation, these men settled down, against the general opinion of the learned, into a firm, united, world-defying assertion of the miraculous life, death, and ascension of their Lord; surely it was because their souls were filled with a certainty of the real death, the real resurrection, and the real ascension to heaven, of Jesus Christ; strong enough to assure all future ages that these things were so.

And now it is worth while to point out the four chief obstacles which unwisely hinder the effect on modern minds of this immense certitude and belief of the men who wrote as eye-witnesses of the Incarnation. It is indisputable that the modern world would receive the evidence of twelve co-ordinate observers of a contemporary event, even of twelve tax-collectors, or Sussex fishermen, with a far stronger feeling of confidence than that with which it now receives the declarations of the apostles of Jesus.

(i.) Of the causes of popular doubt as to the reality of the facts on which Christianity is built, the first is the *distance from them in time and place* at which we now stand. Among the very ignorant there is always a lurking but profound scepticism as to the truth of history, a vague doubt whether anything can really be known of past ages. It goes so far as to lead some of them to think there is no objective reality even in the geographical references of the Bible. The ingenious Mr. Zincke, Vicar of Wherstead, relates that, on his return from the Holy Land, he told one of his small farmers that he had been to Jerusalem, where Christ died. The farmer's answer was characteristic, "No, Parson, you don't mean to tell me you have been to Jerusalem! Why, I always thought that

that were only a Bible word ! ” The glamour of antiquity about the name of Jerusalem had abolished its reality in the farmer’s mind.

Not a very different temper of incredulity is found among some of the most learned ; who are prone to think of all ancient history as either mythical, or half unreal, especially when it is concerned with a revelation of divine truth. The notion grows up that what is related in the New Testament, if it happened at all, occurred so long ago that the facts have worn out through mere age,—have lost their edge like old coins,—that so many centuries and generations have passed since then, that no one can know certainly any of the events of that time. If we *can* know anything, it is that no one then living had any clear perception of the distinction between fact and fiction—myth and true history—so that it is impossible to build important beliefs on Christian traditions.

Now, unquestionably, the earlier part of the Bible history goes back into the dim antiquity of the earliest world. But the most important portion of it, the New Testament, belongs to the beginning of modern history, that is, to the times of the Roman Empire. It is simply a misuse of terms to speak of the age of Augustus and Tiberius, of the Rome of the

Cæsars, as belonging to a dim antiquity. Modern Europe is the recent outgrowth of the Roman Empire. Its population, languages, laws, institutions, are full of the blood of Rome.

It is only twenty long lifetimes ago, of 90 years each, since the siege of Jerusalem, and the days of the apostles. There are remains of at least a dozen buildings still standing in Europe and Asia, as old as, or older, than the New Testament. It is a most mischievous illusion which leads men to think of the facts of the Gospel history as so exceedingly ancient. They occurred in the full blaze of the Roman day, and in the centre of the Empire.

And well-authenticated facts do not wear out by the lapse of time, if the testimony to them is contemporaneous and durable. It is not a little less certain to-day than it was last week that General Roberts conquered Job the Khan at Candahar. It is not a little less certain to-day than it was last century that Julius Cæsar was slain in the Senate House. And it is not less certain to-day than 1000 years ago that Jesus Christ died on the Cross, and rose again, if we have the testimony of honest contemporary witnesses who beheld and reported what they had seen and heard.

Faith through reading the Gospels. 43

The true method of transfusing into our own minds the certitude which the apostles felt in believing these things, is to read their writings carefully. Read the Gospels as historical memorials, with a pictorial visualizing imagination, which can faithfully depict the scenes recorded, and belief, in spiritually sympathetic souls, will generally follow. Do not deliver Christianity over to the men of abstraction, of theological speculation, on either side, until first you have studied under its historians. Vividly to realize what the Evangelists relate will soon compel us to feel the certainties which they record.

While speaking on this subject, on this spot,* how can I help recalling to mind that eloquent voice which forty or fifty years ago first broke on the ear of London with a course of Scriptural instruction so pictorial, dramatic, and spiritually realistic, as to compel the belief in Scripture history in all minds, except those especially endowed with the faculty of not seeing historic truths. Mr. Binney possessed in his earlier days, in almost unexampled force, the inestimable gift of making the past seem present.

* The Weigh House Chapel.

44 *Effect of visualizing description.*

The dry bones of history, when this breath of inspired genius swept over them, stood up a great army. The story of the Bible from end to end requires only to be vividly represented in its systematic unity and variety, to enforce conviction of its reality on the general mind. A purblind tinkering criticism, ever on the watch to entangle in their talk the prophets and apostles, will have little success against this sublime narrative of facts, properly set forth by a loving and constructive spirit. The best defence of the Bible consists in a dramatic and sympathetic representation of its contents.

And when these miraculous events are set forth, they exercise a fascination, not less on the conscience than on the convictions. Let me, for one, thank God that in early life I heard the Bible so represented here, that scepticism on the ground of the mere antiquity of the history has ever since been an impossibility. Eighteen centuries have done nothing to extinguish the eternal light of the life and love of Jesus, and that is a power that will bring "distant prospects home."

(ii.) The second cause of difficulty felt in receiving the reported events of Christ's life, is *their miraculous*

character. To believe in them seems a wholly different exercise of mind from believing in ordinary history. They are seen in a glory-mist which throws a certain unreality over their outlines. Miracles, if real, must have been the greatest aids to faith at the beginning of the Gospel to those who beheld them. Now they are, under the reign of physical science, the foremost hindrances to faith to those who only hear of them. And will be—unless we reflect that any revelation of God, beyond the order of nature, must necessarily be supernatural or miraculous. The fundamental question is, whether any revelation from God, having for its abnormal object the abolition of human sin and death, is impossible or improbable. If neither, then such a revelation must be essentially a complex miracle, and the records of its manifestation must be the records of its supernatural and abnormal action. Christ's person is itself the great miracle. He is the "Wonderful." All miracles are but paler rays from that central splendour. The question then resolves itself into this, If God has bestowed pardon and eternal life on mankind, can a dozen plain men be believed as a jury of witnesses in reporting the signs that accompanied the Epiphany. Says the majestic St. John, "*We beheld His glory, the*

46 *Influence of Spiritual Character.*

glory of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

(iii.) This brings me to speak of a third difficulty in the way of perceiving the certainty of the facts of Scripture, that which arises from *their spiritual quality*. Men's reception of testimony is much affected by their party, their prepossessions, their prejudices, their moral character, and even by their company.

Wordsworth sings to us—

The man of abject soul in vain
Shall tread the Marathonian plain,
Or haunt the shadowy gloom
That overhangs the guardian pass,
Where stood sublime Leonidas,
Devoted to the tomb.

But again, there are spiritual states in which a man rises above commonplace and the incidents of daily life, through close intercourse with some holy and exalted character, and he can then believe in deeds and words which seemed incredible before. The most certain of facts can be made to seem doubtful if they

are stoutly and repeatedly denied, for not evidence, but sympathy, or inclination, or party spirit, determines the historical belief of multitudes.

But the intimate presence with us of one great spirit would alter or elevate all our canons of certitude. Suppose we could receive among us to-day Paul, with the flashing countenance, as he appeared in Rome in his latter years, when he lived at the foot of the Palatine—the man who wrote those fifteen Epistles which still shake the world—the man who stood on Mars' Hill and declared the “unknown God” to the Athenians—who harangued, in Hebrew, the raging crowds of Jewish zealots from the stairs of Antonia; do you think the great apparition of Christ on the road to Damascus, *as told by him*, would seem to us so wholly incredible? Would not the believing faculty receive a new direction under such an inspiration?

Or, if a still greater and holier thing were possible,—if we could enjoy but for one day the presence of the Jesus of the Gospels, if we could hear Him speak to the down-trodden peasantry his parables of the Good Samaritan, of the Lost Son, of the Lost Sheep, of the Lost Silver, the Sermon on the Mount, or the Discourse of the Last Supper before his death;

—if we could look upon that Face, which was like a window into a heavenly world of divinest sympathy for sinners and mourners, that Eye which melted and purified by its gaze the sinful woman,—which reclaimed the apostatizing Peter by a single glance of reproachful love—if we could hear that Voice which spoke from depths before unknown, and lifted up men's thoughts to heights undreamed before; we should soon be sensible of an influence under which it would seem easy to believe that wherever He went, the halt, the lame, the wounded, the blind, the sufferers from plague, and fever, and gangrene, the palsied, the lunatic, and the raging victims of the fiends of hell, were brought around, or flocked in dreadful multitudes, to present their woes before that Countenance, which, like the morning sun, looked all their griefs away; to be touched by that Hand which made all things perfectly whole; that “virtue went out of him,” that his presence was like a perpetual spring, that his breath, like balm, filled the air with gladness, and his eye spread new sunshine through the skies.

Every individual character is subject to God's judgment alone; and we will judge no man; but we may safely say that the spiritual state generally de-

termines the measure of men's difficulty in reaching certainty as to the facts of this history. Let a soul be in sympathy with the spiritual character of Christ, and his miracles, in most cases, will appear divinely true. Let there be a moral antagonism, or a false philosophical theory, intervening, then "neither will you be persuaded though one rose from the dead." He who is spiritually right in the present has relations with the spiritual men of the past, unknown to the crowd of sensualists, learned or unlearned. He can see through the eyes and hear through the ears of departed good men things which are hidden from the crowd. And of these the chief are the truth and certainty of the history in the Gospel page,—the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, "*even as they delivered them unto us who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.*"

(iv.) But when all this is said, and rightly said, it is necessary to add that other than moral causes, in the readers or hearers of the miraculous gospel history, have a share in the present day rejection of the apostolic narrative. The original records of Christianity are now too frequently read through the refracting and distorting medium of authoritative philosophies

and theologies, which enlist against the apostolic testimony the whole force of the higher nature of man. The New Testament was evidently written in the spirit of love, hope, and gladness. It came in the spirit of the spring after winter.

It was intended to be read in the same spirit. If it be read under the fiery glare shed over it by fanatical traditions—its miracles lose much of their power to win confidence and assent, and act only to repel, as the terrible evidences of avenging justice, or injustice. The alienation of the laity in Christendom from the testimony of the eye-witnesses of the Incarnation is, perhaps, due quite as much to the direful lights thrown over the Bible by false philosophies, and the perversions of Christian doctrine, as to the hostility of Infidels. For in truth there are around us a voluntary and an involuntary scepticism, and on the victims of the latter both God and good men must look “with compassion,” as Jesus looked on the multitudes, because they were “scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.”

Meantime, gentlemen, as a security against abandoning in despair this miraculous history, I venture to commend to you a closer study of the phenomenon

of the death-daring confidence felt by the apostles of Christ as to what they had seen of the wonder-working power of God in Jesus their Lord,—especially since nothing less for us than life—or death—eternal, depends on the truth of their testimony, and our reception or rejection of it.



LECTURE III.

ON CERTAINTY IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE APOSTLES.

“Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—Galatians i. 8—12.

“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.”—1 John iv. 6.

WE have now to set forth the tone and teaching of the New Testament as to certainty in religious doctrine.

In its five historical books the writers make no visible claim, except to be faithful reporters of what they themselves had heard or seen, or had received from those who were eye or ear witnesses. In the epistolary portions of the New Testament, written by the Apostles, there is a claim of a very different nature; a distinct claim to teach doctrine, or an explanation of the facts of the gospel, with authority, and by inspiration of God; and this authoritative

teaching is presented by them to the world as the basis, and the exclusive basis, of certainty in Christian belief. The utmost stress is laid by them on this, that the interpretation of the miraculous facts is not left to the individual, or to the universal reason, which never could have ascertained their true meaning, but has been revealed by God's Spirit to these his chosen messengers. It is not, according to them, as it is in nature, where the facts are patent, but men are left to penetrate their meaning by study and discovery. But here the facts are consigned to history, and are followed by an exposition of them which is declared to be divine and infallible. The passion and the resurrection of Christ are set forth in a light which would not have been thrown on them by natural suggestion.

This is proved by the fact that when men reject the apostolic explanation, they never incline to the course of thought which finds in Christ's person a Divine nature, or in his death a sacrificial reconciliation of the world to God, much less the sole hope of an immortal life for man. The natural, in opposition to the apostolic or supernatural, explanation of the visible facts of Christ's life, is found in old-fashioned Unitarianism, which is surely contrary, both in letter and spirit, to the doctrine of the apostles, as is proved by

the enormous labour of evisceration expended upon their writings by the Unitarian commentators.

It is useless to conceal from ourselves that the New Testament offer of certitude in religious faith is accompanied by, and founded on, the strongest and most steadfast assertion of the apostolic inspiration. The Apostles profess to teach directly by the Spirit of God, and not from their own arguments or imaginings.

Let us take as an example St. Paul himself. One may say that if anything ever written among men is clear, it is that St. Paul claimed, as one of the apostles, to teach a divine revelation with absolute certainty and authority. If a reader will take the trouble to collect all the passages in his epistles in which he asserts, or implies, that he speaks directly in the name of God and of Christ, and with a demand for "obedience of faith," he will be perhaps surprised to discover how large a space is occupied with the enforcement of this claim, from the beginning to the end of his ministry. He describes himself, building on the thrice repeated account of his miraculous conversion, as *Called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God*; as *having received apostleship for obedience of faith among all nations*, that is, over

the human race; and this is prefixed to the most doctrinal of all St. Paul's epistles, that to the Romans. He declares, at the end of the same epistle, that God had *wrought mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit*, in support of this authority. He asserts that Christ *sent him to preach the gospel*, that the faith of those who received him *stood not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*; that God had *revealed the mysteries of truth to him by the Spirit*, and that he *spoke in words which the Holy Spirit taught*. He says that he had *received of the Lord* even the account of the institution of the proper mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper; that *the things which he wrote were the commandments of the Lord*. He declares that *God had made him a minister of the New Covenant*, and sets the apostolic ministry of life accordingly above that of Moses, a ministry of death. He describes this ministry as a *manifestation of truth*, a phrase which refers to the oracle of Urim and Thummim. He says he is *an ambassador for Christ, as though God did beseech you through us*. He speaks of his *readiness to revenge all disobedience to the apostolic authority*; *boasts of the authority which the Lord had given him*, speaks of opponents as *false apostles, deceitful workers, ministers of Satan*

transformed as ministers of righteousness; calls the God and Father of Christ to witness that he lies not, distinguishes between his own opinion on one subject, and his absolute teaching, ex-cathedra, in the Lord. He says that Christ speaks in him, certifies the Galatians that he was an apostle not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father; pronounces accursed, and smites down to hell with anathema all who teach any other gospel than that which he preached; which is not another; declares most solemnly that the Gospel which he preached was not after men, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. And these are only a few of the places in which he asserts this stupendous claim to prophetic and apostolic authority over men's belief and practice, as an expositor of the facts and doctrine of Christianity. The Epistle to the Galatians and the whole of the second letter to Corinth has this for its chief topic.

It is needless to make further citations in order to prove that the other Apostles equally assert the divine authority of their instructions, and they all agree that absolute certainty of truth, as far as they go, made known to them by inspiration, is to be found in their

words. *Our* certitude, they say, is to be gained by receiving the gift of certainty in their instructions. In modern times men hold many different opinions on religion, most of them loosely and doubtfully, and they exert comparatively little influence on life. The Apostles, John, Peter, and Paul, very seldom express opinions of their own; but when they do, they carefully distinguish these from the absolute certainties which they set forth in the name of God, and which God had *revealed by His Spirit*. They set forth, not as a speculation but as certain truth, that Jesus was the predicted Christ—the Son of God; that his body was a temple of the Divine “Logos,” or Word; that his death was a “sacrifice” through which “God reconciles the world to Himself;” that our eternal life is a free gift in Christ; that our justification is gratuitous; that God’s Spirit is given to renew man’s nature in eternal life and holiness—and that such second birth is a pledge of everlasting salvation.

And the same temper of confident assurance, of pardon, of acceptance with God, is inculcated on those who believe in Christ—the *assurance* of forgiveness, “*boldness to enter into the holiest*,” certainty of Resurrection to immortal life; so that we are to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*.

Now this claim to absolute knowledge of truth by revelation, accompanied by corresponding assurance of personal salvation, reaches us in books written more than eighteen hundred years ago, under very remarkable circumstances. It reaches us while listening, on one side, to the claim made by the Roman Church and its Popedom to be the sole depositary of certainty on religious truth; and on the other, while listening to the confident declaration of modern philosophers, that amidst such boundless diversities of opinion it is impossible for any man to be rationally assured of anything except the wisdom of indifference towards the religions of antiquity. Under these circumstances let us consider the profession made by the apostles to give us certainty in religious doctrine.

1. The first impression made on the ordinary reader of the New Testament in studying this phenomenon is, that the notion never once crossed the minds of the apostles that they were writing so as to be generally misunderstood by people in earnest, or possessed of average spiritual faculties. St. Paul and St. John plainly write as if they thought that honest readers could not fail to take their general doctrinal meaning correctly. Strange indeed had it been otherwise.

Other writers in the world possess the ability to communicate their ideas without an intervening apparatus of interpretation or traditional comment. Was the speech of the Apostles of Christ alone so obscure that it became dangerous for their readers, whether earlier or later, to trust it apart from a commentary? Is it conceivable that when the things to be set down were the most important in the universe, it so happened that the authoritative teachers, knowing their own obscurity, and the risk of mistake, omitted from their writings all reference to the one principal security for a right understanding of the truth—the selection, namely, of St. Peter, and the Roman bishops as his successors, to be the channels of infallible interpretation—and restricted themselves, in writing, nearly altogether to arguments of secondary importance? No man can be so reasonably assured of the divine authority of the Roman claims as he may be of this, that most plainly the apostles believed that they were teaching in their writings the essentials of Christianity, and teaching them in a form so clear as to need no Popedom to interpret them.

Why is it that the writers of the New Testament alone should be unintelligible apart from an external

and traditional version of their meaning? How is it that no one offers us a system of tradition to explain the meaning of the writers of the second, or the third, or the fourth centuries, but only of the first? All seem to agree that those great authorities of the fourth century, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine, are intelligible by us as expositors of the faith. It is only when St. John, St. Paul, and St. Peter write for us that we are liable to be deceived, if we take their teaching in its obvious sense, and limit our beliefs by their instructions. Are these advocates of the Roman tradition afraid of the New Testament, as if, when left to itself, it might teach men that subsequent ages had corrupted the gospel into a "mystery of iniquity," having its central seat, like the ten-horned beast of the Apocalypse, on the "seven hills"? (Rev. xvii.)

2. I observe not only that St. John, St. Paul, and St. Peter wrote as if they were very confident that they could be correctly understood, and as if they were setting down the *essentials* of the Christian revelation,—but that they all alike earnestly warn their readers to hold fast apostolic teaching against an approaching corruption of Christianity, to be brought in *firstly*, through the interested perverseness of false

teachers; *secondly*, through the persistent rebellion of the people, "turning away their ears from the truth;" *thirdly*, through the influence of philosophy, falsely so called; *fourthly*, through debasing superstition; and *fifthly*, through the growing force of anti-Christian tradition.

So far from suggesting the idea that it is an exceptional felicity for an honest man to comprehend them,—on the contrary, they take for granted their being intelligible, and smite with the curse of God those who refuse to submit themselves.

When the Jewish prophets wrote predictions which neither they themselves nor their contemporaries could understand, *they* were taught that they ministered truths designed for the knowledge of future ages,—and they were ordered "to seal up the prophecy." (Dan. xii. 9; 1 Pet. i. 12.) But there is not a single trace in the apostolic epistles—which clearly profess to contain authoritative doctrine on redemption—of any suspicion that what the apostles wrote was beyond the correct comprehension of spiritual readers. Every line speaks of truth "openly set forth," and insusceptible of perversion except by "ignorance and instability," or by deliberate intention to "handle the word of God deceitfully." There were indeed personal

and spiritual conditions of understanding and receiving their doctrine, and reaching certainty, on which we shall have to speak in the last lecture,—conditions on which the apostles everywhere strenuously insist: “*If any man shall wish to do His will he shall know of the doctrine.*” But that their writings, as such, were unintelligible to the Church as a whole, or could be rightly explained only by an oral tradition in the mouths of the clergy of future ages, is an idea which receives no sort of countenance from their epistles. It is of a piece with the Jewish figment of the oral law or tradition, set up by the Rabbins to support those departures from the law of Moses and the prophets which Christ denounced in the Gospels.

How could the man who hurls the flaming thunderbolt of the redoubled “Anathema” (Gal. i.) against those who “preached any other gospel than that which he preached” have imagined that his “own gospel,” whether spoken or written, was unintelligible? Clearly he taught that there *could be* no quite innocent mistake in preaching the law instead of the gospel, or in teaching that men gain eternal life by their own merits, and not through Christ only, or could gain it at all without being “created anew.” The apostles do not hesitate to attribute the worst motives to corrupters

of the truth. They speak of "wilful ignorance," of men "taking pleasure in unrighteousness," of some being "sons of the devil, perverting the right ways of the Lord," "being enemies of all righteousness," of "doing despite to the Spirit of Grace," of "teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake"; just as Christ spoke of the scribes "setting aside the command of God that they might keep their own tradition," because they "loved the praise of men."

This very formidable language of the apostles in denouncing much which, in the dialect of our time, would be called lawful religious opinion, stands or falls with two conditions; first, the reality of their inspiration as authoritative teachers; and secondly, their ability to teach so as to be understood. And they assume both with a positiveness unexampled in history.

3. This leads me to point out another noticeable phenomenon in the New Testament—that both Christ and his Apostles lay down, for the protection and guidance specially of their humbler disciples, a most uncompromising doctrine on *the worthless quality of much able and learned instruction in "religion."* This was evidently necessary if they were to become the teachers and spiritual rulers of the world.

64 *Christ's Warfare with the Scribes.*

There is no stronger tendency among unlearned people than that which leads them naturally to reverence the Scholar and the Thinker. It is the outcome of an originally noble impulse. But when a great number of erring scholars and thinkers are gradually banded together in one powerful organization, literary or ecclesiastical, commanding the keys of knowledge, and speaking with the authority of ancient tradition, the influence which they exert on the multitude is well nigh omnipotent. It becomes next to impossible for common people to think or act in a sense contrary to their decrees. This was the force which was encountered single-handed by Jesus Christ in Palestine. He found there the learned and able class, the upholders of religious and moral error, dominated by tradition and ceremony, apostate from God, and misleading the people. He engaged in a brief but terrible death-grapple with this tremendous power. He plucked away their mask of pretended sanctity. He exposed their corruption, their conceit, their ostentation in prayer, in fasting, in almsgiving; he tore in shreds their pitiful perversions of the law and the prophets; he derided their "sad countenances," their long prayers, their long robes, their long purses, filled with the widows' and the orphans' gold. Once

No man the wiser for his learning. 65

for all he rained upon this theological Sodom and Gomorrah a fiery storm of anathemas, and showed the common people what "blindness" and "folly," what moral stupidity and barbarism, are sometimes hidden beneath intellectual and rabbinical culture.

This is one of the great moral lessons of the gospel, that, in Selden's words, *no man is the wiser for his learning*. Accordingly one of the first lessons in the apostolic writings is, not to attach any weight to learning or ability in a religious teacher, apart from some assurance of his honesty and spiritual insight. Christ has hung up, as a warning example for all future ages, the dead and rotten Scribes and Pharisees of Judah, as the bodies of Saul and his sons were hung up on the temple-walls of Bethshan. Nearly the whole learned class—the authors, men of genius, *literati* of Palestine, who ought to have been foremost in accepting the Messiah—mistook the Son of God when he appeared for a lunatic or a magician, and insisted on his criminal execution by the Roman governor, as an impostor. From these men Christ distinctly declared that God had "hidden his mysteries," while "revealing them unto babes."

This a lesson for all ages. Organizations of scholars and thinkers—and of that large class of formal and insensate minds who are scholars, and half-scholars, but not thinkers, yet very open to temptations of profit and power,—are constantly forming in every civilized age and nation; and such are not seldom, under the name of the Church, or the Priesthood of letters, the leading corrupters of the world. Accumulating authority and wealth from age to age, they inspire the people with awe for their determinations, until independence and honest inquiry can be attained only at the price of physical or social martyrdom. One such vast and ancient organization still dominates southern Europe, and is scarlet with the blood of slaughtered souls. This is the influence which it was foretold would chiefly stand between revealed Certainty and the minds of men. A pretence to an authoritative and even an infallible interpretation on the part of a disobedient clergy has become the chief hindrance to men's access to the original authority of the Apostles of Christ.

That which is true of organized hierarchies is equally true of isolated or erratic scholars. In matters of religion literary ability becomes valuable only when informed by spiritual insight. The place of

Dangers of the Literary Class. 67

learned men, as teachers of truth, is where the unlearned Mary sat, "at the feet of Jesus," the King of Glory, and that is the last place where the majority of them will consent to sit down.

Apart from the illumination common to all spiritual men, the educated and literary class, handling religious questions, becomes according to Christ the most defiant, the most obdurate, the most perverse in rebellion of all. There is no reason to suppose that the rabbins, the statesmen, the mathematicians, the philosophers, the poets, the artists, of the New Testament times, who rejected Jesus as the Son of God, were a worse race of men than any of their successors. In every generation disciplined intellect, untaught by God, because not seeking to be taught by Him, so far from being an instrument for discovering divine truth on redemption, becomes rather a loom for weaving elaborate veils to conceal it. In how many of the organized hierarchies of Christendom does every student begin his career by subscribing to antiquated and often apostate forms of thought. If a chemist or astronomer commenced his course by subscribing to the details of some antiquated theory of his subject, his mind would be shut off from truth in Nature at the outset of his studies. If there is any real value

in Christianity, the same thing is true in relation to Christ and his apostles. They profess to bring us certainties as to redemption ; but if we may study them only under interpretations imposed by subsequently formed traditions, both certainty and apostolic authority are supplanted by tradition. The Church, or something which is not the Church, takes the place of the Lord.

Now it is a matter for candid consideration whether we can admit that there are any strictly rational alternatives in dealing with the enormous pretensions of Christ's apostles, except *to submit to them altogether* on their merits, *or to reject them altogether*. To talk of receiving St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter as the Apostles of God, *the teachers of the nations in faith and verity*, and yet to vaunt, as so many do, of a freedom remaining to men of "culture," not only to supplement but to reject their instructions, or to find in them a mass of errors, myths, and superstitions, seems to be trifling with evidence on a matter of infinite moment. The question after all is whether the apostles really taught, as they so stoutly declare, by DIVINE AUTHORITY. If they did not, we are of course free to insist on our own speculations on the

facts of Christianity. If they did, then it is plainly to defy Heaven to reject their teaching, and to cut ourselves off from the fountain of certainty in God.

4. In prosecuting our main purpose of describing the phenomenon of New Testament certainty in Religion, we must now add that the Apostles do not appear, from their writings, to have felt any practical difficulty as to establishing the closest direct communication between their own minds and the minds of future generations of believers, so as to make us partakers of their absolute knowledge of divine truth. "That which *we* have seen and heard *declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.*" (1 John i. 3.)

Theoretically the road for such transmission of certitude is strewn with difficulties. Unless the conjecture of the first century had been confirmed, so that at least one of the heaven-taught disciples "should not die," how, even mechanically, shall the words of the Messengers of God be preserved in freedom from corruption to future ages? Their own autographs, or authentic gospels and epistles, would rapidly decay. What security against involuntary or voluntary changes in the copies that succeed the originals? Many various readings were certain to

creep into their text and its copies. Again, what security in the translation of the Greek originals into the later languages of mankind, civilized and barbarous? And how, amidst the confusions and corruptions of ages, shall the evidence of Apostolic authority itself be preserved so as to reach the popular understanding?

It is much in the same manner that a seemingly strong speculative case against trusting to one's eyesight might be made out by Mr. Liebreich, Mr. Critchet, or Mr. Bowman, if they were so disposed, for the confutation, or confusion, of the rustic who believes in it. "Think you, poor fellow, how many things must go right ere you can be said truly to see a haystack or a tree? Here is the *cornea* which is often untrue in its convexity, the *crystalline lens* which is often opaque with cataract, the various humours which are frequently thickened by a dim suffusion, and the *retina* which is afflicted by every nervous disease that enters the brain. How can *you*, or rustics such as you, absolutely trust your individual sight, when the machinery is so complex, and there are so many possible causes of error attending the passage of the sunbeam through the chambers of the eye?" Yet the clown, when he opens his eyes, is

compelled by instinct to forget all this intricate machinery, with the argument built upon it, and to acknowledge that he sees the haystack, even if a whole college of oculists should command him to doubt his vision.

It is the same with the eye of the understanding in the common people in matters of salvation. They forget the possible defects of the machinery which has brought home to them the image of the Son of God, or carried to their intellectual ear the voice of the Good Shepherd; and they say to the Church, "Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have seen Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." There is an inward witness, a spiritual experience, and a glorious image on the mental retina, which tells to the unlearned that, by whatever external methods, they have indeed come to know God in Christ. "Whereas I was blind, now I see." There is no doubt a proper work for learned believers and for the true Church to do in the task of the transmission and translation of the Bible; but this once being done, under some abatements of defective execution, "the wayfaring man, though a fool," whose heart the Spirit of God has touched, knows that he has seen the God of his salvation.

For there is this difference between the communication of mathematical and spiritual truth, that in the former case a minute error at the beginning becomes multiplied at every stage, and at last is fatal to the calculation ; but in a spiritual and moral revelation, when the same truth is repeated in many forms, where history embodies facts, and argument and exhortation and entreaty are piled up, like a range of lofty mountains that reach the sky, it is not so easy—it is next to impossible—to conceal the truth, even by a large amount of careless copying, or defective translation, much less by a defective Canon. When one text is corrupted, five thousand others remain to redress the balance, and to ensure the average of a steady transmission of the ancient standards of truth.

But the progress of science and art in editing from ancient manuscripts and in translating them, instead of rendering the text and the interpretation more doubtful as time rolls on, educes more certainty at every stage of the process, so as to render the text and translation of the New Testament more absolutely authentic to-day than it has ever been since the time of the apostles.

Those original evangelists evidently anticipated no greater difficulty in transmitting the records of their

teaching to posterity after their decease than Moses and the prophets, or Cicero or Virgil, had in transmitting theirs, or anyone else who can write. And if the inheritance of a large estate depended upon such evidence for the title as that which we possess of the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament writings, is there a scholar in Europe, or a priest of Rome, who would not maintain that it was a thousand times over sufficient to establish their claim to the property? Is it not only when there is a lively fear of the entrance of Authority, demanding the submission of rebellious thinkers and apostate Churches, that we are instructed so carefully in the defects of literary transmission? Is it not that Christ is cast out of his kingdom by sham criticism and dishonest handling of the word of life? "*Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.*" "*We will not have this man to reign over us.*"

5. Last of all occurs the oft-repeated difficulty that if we allow the absolute authority of the apostles in doctrine on the person and work of Christ, or admit that certainty is there, *we shall be compelled to claim infallibility for the interpreter*, and thus lay the foundation for every kind of sectarian and contradictory intolerance.

Some aspects of this question we shall reserve to the closing lecture. But as to the possibility of the mind of man being brought into practical working relations with external certainty, even at some distance in time and place, without claiming infallibility for the interpreter, we may refer to familiar facts, on a much lower plane, for a decisive illustration.

At Greenwich Observatory there is an exact and absolutely certain knowledge of the true time of day. This certain knowledge of the time of day is made the basis of the safety and direction of the whole internal traffic of England, and of the direction of our whole navy, and vast commercial marine, on every sea. In the one case the time is transmitted from the infallible clock at Greenwich by telegraph in the twinkling of an eye to the extremities of the country, and all the railways sufficiently well set their time by that standard.

In the other, the Nautical Almanac, a book-revelation, notwithstanding all the risks of printing, carries the results of the infallible science of Greenwich to sea in every craft that leaves our shores. There may be occasional and infinitesimal defects in the transmission of the time to London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. There may be occasional errors in the

printing of the Nautical Almanac, and occasionally much ignorance and carelessness on the part of captains and lieutenants in taking observations of the sun and moon; whence errors in the working of the longitude and latitude, and awful catastrophes at sea.

But surely no one would hence argue that the endeavour to enforce the infallible rule of Greenwich time upon railways and ship-masters was an interference with the liberties of modern intelligence; or in fact an endeavour which must needs practically fail, through the fallibility, or bad eyesight or arithmetic, of station-masters and captains. No one would think of telling each such functionary that, on the whole, since the use of an infallible authority would involve a claim to personal infallibility in the observer, it was best for every one to make of the facts of nature what he could, and to guess the hour, each man according to his several ability. And if any of these people set up for adversaries of the message from Greenwich, or said that it required a commentary to make it a safe guide, they would be reckoned somewhat too intelligent for their situations.

Now in this parable the Greenwich Observatory corresponds with the Apostolic Certainty in doctrinal teaching. There may be some risks in the trans-

mission of its message. There may be some errors in the attempt to interpret a book-revelation. But on the whole it is true that the apostolic certainty is effectually present, close at hand amongst us, and may be most correctly apprehended, no doubt in different degrees, by those who most simply and intelligently desire to receive its directions. The difficulties resemble those which hinder the attainment of scientific certainty in nature. There are some risks in both cases. There are personal equations, as the astronomers say of each observer's eye, to be eliminated; and the abstract difficulty might be made to appear enormous. But the parallel is complete between the laws of sound interpretation of nature, and those of the sound interpretation of recorded revelation. In neither case is it wise or safe to throw overboard the standard of certainty, or to set up for free and independent investigators, *simply because of minor risks* attending the effort to receive the divine communications. The misfortune is, perhaps, that in religion there are so many more persons whose worldly interests, or intellectual twist, incline them not to see what the apostles wrote, than there are of station-masters and captains who do not desire to know the Greenwich time.

It is quite impossible to describe in few words the impression of reality and certainty which comes to us in reading the New Testament with a serious purpose. It can be fully felt only through earnest, patient, and repeated study. This is a sphere of effort in which it is emphatically true, that "to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." I have heard from converted priests at Rome, nurtured amid all the supposed safeguards and interpretations of the "infallible Church," the admission that their souls often sank in an abyss of scepticism, even when ministering in the Mass before the altars. Such scepticism is understood to be one of the commonest topics in sacerdotal confessions. But one has never heard from any devout student of the apostolic epistles aught but an ever-deepening persuasion that the rock of certainty is here—that here the Spirit of God communicates directly and effectually with willing souls—as when it was said to Moses of Divine Communion, over the Mercy-seat, "*I will meet with thee there.*" But these are rays of light which depict their images only on the sensitive surfaces of minds prepared to receive them.

6. Finally I observe that the apostles themselves seem to have realized the stupendous quality of the claim which they made to be the God-sent teachers of mankind. It is indeed a fearful thing for a man to assert *truly* that the Infinite God speaks the mind of heaven through him;—still more fearful if the claim be *false*. “*Woe unto them that say HE SAITH, when the Lord hath not spoken.*” No man better comprehended the gravity of this claim than St. Paul, whose travels had made him conversant with the sublimer aspects of nature in the earth and the starry heaven—the visible symbols of the Invisible Majesty on high. Yet he repeats the assertion of his direct Divine Commission, even with his dying breath. His writings show that his soul often sank under the awful weight of his responsibility; “*Who is sufficient for these things?*” But still he lays it down as a first principle of truth, that God spake by the Apostles of Christ, and that their words were the message of the Almighty to men, designed to “*bring every thought into obedience.*” (2 Cor. x. 5.)

If a contemporary had objected to St. Paul or St. John that this was to make too much of the mere *words* of a mortal, to impose them as a yoke of

authority upon the thinking of all future ages, they would doubtless have replied that at least the objector, who desired to cast aside *their* words, attached a greater importance to his own—and thought *them* worthy to become the canon of the world's belief, or rather unbelief. If the words of an infidel are to become so authoritative as to displace those of the apostles, why be offended at the authority of the apostles' writing? This is simply a question between rival authorities;—the one pleading reason alone; the other reason, evidence, and divine inspiration.

Still less weight would have been attached to the objection that the destinies of men could scarcely depend on the treatment given to a "Book-revelation." 'The world is half filled to-day with "book-revelations," written for the purpose of overthrowing the Bible, and establishing on the basis of nature a wholly new view of humanity and its eternal future. A Book-revelation having for its end to make known Eternal Life may well support itself against fifty others, having no higher aim than to abolish faith in God, and to cut off the entail of immortality. Surely we see in these objections the acme of literary inconsistency, and perverseness almost equal to that of the Scribes and Pharisees in the gospel.

If now, lastly, the objection be that men will ever count it, in Bacon's remarkable words, a "bondage to fix a belief" in conformity with any authoritative revelation of certainty;—that the progress of thought leads to ever-increasing revolt against doctrines imposed by law—whether human or divine;—that deeper reflection on man's relation with the Infinite must convince all thoughtful spirits that definiteness is no attribute of wholesome faith;—that mystery and vagueness are of the essence of moral and religious influence of an elevating kind;—and that the assertors of Apostolic authority in dogma can end only in a restoration of Puritan and Huguenot tyranny, and the reshackling of modern intelligence in the old harness of the Ironsides; it may be rejoined that the apostles must not be held responsible for the corrupt Catholic or Protestant despotisms of Christendom;—that their own teaching was at once definite and vague, carrying a central lustre and a dimmer enfolding radiance, shading away into the Infinite;—that Christ distinctly imposes a "yoke" on men's souls, but renders it an "easy" one through the development of intellectual and spiritual freedom, "the glorious liberty of the sons of God;" and that although all modern science tends towards definiteness,

true science and true theology alike avoid a definiteness which confounds mortal knowledge with omniscience, and provokes doubt by its overweening pretensions to completeness.

The most decisive method of testing the apostles' claim to be the teachers of Certainty is for the individual to subject the mind candidly to the influence of their writings. Let each man who has made the life-long experiment declare the result. For myself, I can only confess that I have found there a spirit which assures me that it is the merest trifling with moral evidence to confound these men with the vulgar pretenders of Heathenism or of Islam. They were manifestly intelligent, serious, and therefore sufficient witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; men who cannot be set aside as dreamers or fanatics. I find in their writings a spirit which corresponds with the transcendent claim which they make to inspiration of God. It awes me like the sound of many waters. As none works so none speaks like the Lord of all. In the Old Testament I hear the dread sound of the storm and the earthquake. But Jehovah is not in the tempest. These are but the heralds of that "still small voice" of Infinite Love in which onward

comes the Lord. There is in the New Testament an authority, an earnestness, a sincerity, a simplicity, a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, a depth and a loftiness of thought, which breathe on the soul with an immortal energy. I could as soon think of questioning the Divine Hand in the sunrise as the Divine Source of the writings of St. Paul and St. John. They reach something deeper than the intellect. They commend themselves *to every man's conscience* in the sight of God. And when I hear these holy pages read they compel me to listen, as if a quire of angels filled the firmament with their songs. Their theme is Peace on Earth—Goodwill to Men. It is the voice of the Eternal Love, reaching me through its human messengers. I recognize the tone of the Eternal Mercy, and I rest in the faith of the resurrection of the dead, and the hope of the life to come.



LECTURE IV.

ON THE APOSTOLIC TONE OF ASSURANCE AS TO PERSONAL SALVATION; AND ON THE RELATION BETWEEN CERTAINTY AND CERTITUDE, ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and *in much assurance*.”—1 Thessalonians i. 5.

“The times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; *whereof He hath given assurance unto all men*, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.”—Acts xvii. 30—31.

“If any man shall *wish to do* His will, *he shall know* of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”—John vii. 17.

OUR description of the phenomenon of apostolic Certainty as to fact and doctrine will be incomplete, unless we take note that the same tone of confidence runs through the New Testament on the question of personal salvation.

In every troubled age, when ancient foundations are broken up, in thought, in worship, in government, and in social life, men, sinking in unknown depths of

doubt, yearn after certainty with what St. Paul calls "groanings which cannot be uttered." The soul, an atom of intelligence in the centre of an infinite darkness, agitated by conscience, and feeling after God in its miseries, shudders at its own ignorance, and cries aloud for a ray of light from heaven to enable it to live in hope, or die in peace. Such an age was that in which Christ appeared at the rise of the Roman Empire. Such an age too surely is our own. The earthquake rocks the most solid foundations. Black gulfs of doubt open on every side; and in their desperation multitudes are flying blindly for refuge to a Positivism which takes no account of half the facts of nature and human life, or to a tyrannous papistical Infallibility, ruling timid spirits through the Confessional by threatenings of endless misery in hell fire.

It is amidst these wrecks and false refuges that Christ's Apostles still offer to men solid certainty in miraculous fact, and in a doctrine of Immortal Life through the Incarnation of the Word.

But now it remains to add that they commend this certainty to men's intelligence with a corresponding degree of assurance as to personal salvation. We find in their writings the spiritual enjoyment of

certainty, as well as certainty itself. They declare that this certainty was given by God for the purpose of establishing in us an unshaken basis of certitude and assurance as to our own condition and destiny.

On external matters, in all cases of mere calculation, which form but a small part of our deeper life, probability is, as Butler says, our sufficient guide. "But," as a far-seeing critic in the *Spectator* recently observed, "you cannot rear a worship upon it." In the higher sacrifices and higher duties, confidence is the basis of all power and nobleness. Even an illusion thoroughly believed produces a nobler character than a mere balancing of probabilities. To produce the highest life in God there must be a faith which knows, and loves because it knows. Faith, in the Bible, is never opposed to Reason, but always to Sight. The faith which saves is reason in its most exalted exercise, in which heart and brain, conviction and confidence, are one. Assurance in God, in his truth, in his justice, in his eternal love, is the backbone of Christian character. It is by the infiltration of this solid element that the floating gelatinous soul rises in the scale of being, and, so to speak, becomes a powerful vertebrated organism, fit for the work of the Lord.

Now the apostles teach that the design of the gospel is to put an end to doubt on the most important problems of human life; to fix the soul on immovable foundations of truth; to lock it fast in the arms of Almighty love; to give it a directing pole-star amidst the billows of temptation, "so that we be no more children tossed on the waves, and driven about by every wind of doctrine;"—and to enable it at last to confront death itself with a shout of victory. (1 Cor. xv.)

It is a characteristic of much modern religion that it is at best a vacillating argument against despair. How few who dare to say to themselves that they have found the truth,—have "the witness of the Spirit,"—and know their own glorious destiny in God. Religious faith is too generally either obedience to Church authorities, which, having conscience in their keeping, degrade it into a tool, and rob it of its vital energy by the dispensing power; or, it is the balance of mere probabilities in evidence, leading to little force of character, under the guidance of a dissolving Protestantism.

But in the New Testament we find that the faith of the writers and their converts corresponds in force and clearness with the certainty on which it rests,

and hope corresponds in its steadfastness with such a basis. They speak of "knowing that they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" of "knowing God," who had taught them to call Him Father, by His own Spirit,—they even boldly say that they "rejoice in tribulation" in "hope of the glory of God." They do not even wait to consider the modern notion that it is morally disreputable to look for any recompense of reward, but they press on straight ahead for "the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God."

Who, in reading these writings, does not wish to possess an anchor of the soul like theirs, "entering into that within the veil?" Even if the gospel be an illusion, it would be better to pass this troubled momentary life in such an ennobling dream. But oh, if it be *true*, who would not desire to replace this half-believing faith of ours, with its feeble hold on truth, and imperfect self-sacrifice, by an assurance of pardon, of the indwelling presence of God, of Omnipotent protection, of unfailing guidance in life and death, such as theirs, "the Spirit itself bearing witness that we are the sons of God."

It is the profound conviction that the only method of restoring to modern minds the exalted joy and

inspired character of the apostolic age, is to bring them into fresh and closer contact with the apostolic certainty in fact and doctrine, that has led us to set forth in prominence this phenomenon itself.

But the last, and perhaps the most important question remains—that of the relation, and the law of the relation, between certainty and personal certitude and assurance; and this also I shall in like manner content myself with answering from the pages of the New Testament. For we find there a whole philosophy of religious certitude, in its conditions, its methods, and its results—not only a grammar, but a syntax, of assent, and an account of the radical causes of scepticism.

It will now no doubt be asked of us, “If the Apostles have left us certainty in their writings, *how do you account for the state of Christendom?* Here are, from age to age, a dozen parties, holding widely different faiths as to Christianity itself, and all alike confident of their dogmas. They cannot all be right. Yet all profess to have learned from the Apostles. What then becomes of the alleged apostolic certainties? At all events these have not reached the majority of minds in Christendom.”

This raises, in its most urgent form, the question of the relation between external certainty and internal certitude. We will not encounter this question by any formal defence of one party against others, much less by setting up conclusions of our own against other faiths. But I shall try to set forth what the Apostles themselves teach respecting the conditions of spiritual knowledge and the general methods of attaining it.

You cannot open the New Testament without seeing plainly on every page that both Christ and his messengers affirm on the one hand the revelation of certainty, and on the other fixed conditions of certitude in the learner; so that a man must *be* something, must place himself in a certain posture, before he can stand in effective *rapport* with the revealed certainty. And failure in these conditions will nullify for him that certainty in the proportion of his failure.

Let no one impatiently exclaim, "Then, after all, the apostolic certainties are as good as non-existent, if our enjoyment of them depends on conditions in ourselves." The case in reply may be made clear by an observation derived from modern methods of coming to the knowledge of Nature.

Nature is external to the mind, and is not generally

denied in our time to be a revelation of eternal Thought and Power in material forms. Beneath the forms the eternal forces energize, acting under fixed restraints of law. Scientific certitude has its objective there. When the mind knows Nature, it knows truth, and touches certainty in the sphere of material things.

But under what stringent conditions does Nature reveal her certainties to man? If he read her pages in imperfect knowledge of her language, if he look upon her wonders with an impure eye or prejudiced fancy, if he study her phenomena through the medium of a false theory, or in an unteachable temper, then neither does he see half the facts, nor rightly apprehend any of her laws.

This familiar principle enables us to understand how it is that Certainty may exist in the Divine Revelation, while nevertheless men may fail of personal relations with it through failure in the conditions.

This audience cannot be wholly unfamiliar with the general principles of Lord Bacon's philosophy of certitude in natural science. Science is the Latin word for knowledge, and this represents objective reality in nature, becoming the basis of solid certitude in man. Lord Bacon in his *Novum Organum*, or

“New Instrument for the study of Nature,” has expounded once for all the fallacies, or general classes of errors, into which the human mind is prone to fall, and which hinder the perfect union between nature and man’s intelligence. Every reader has heard of the *Idola*, false notions of things, or erroneous ways of looking at nature, which arrested the advance of true science in former ages, and postponed for ages the understanding of the Kosmos.

I.—The Idols of the Tribe—*fallacies incident to the race in general*—the proneness to suppose in nature greater order and regularity than there really is; the tendency to support preconceived opinion by affirmative instances, throwing out of account all opposed cases; *the tendency to generalize from few observations*, to give reality to mere abstractions or figments of the mind;—errors arising from the excessive influence of the will or passions; from the restless desire of the mind to penetrate into the ultimate principles of things; and from the belief that man is the measure of the universe; whereas in truth the world is received by us in a distorted image, and we see through a glass darkly. II.—Then there are the *Idols of the Den*, errors incident to the peculiar mental or

bodily constitution of each individual; for according to the state of the individual is his view of things. Such errors as a special passion for antiquity, or for novelty, a tendency to note exclusively resemblances or differences, or a fondness for some leading idea, taken up without any careful examination. III.—Next there are *Idols of the Market-place*—errors arising from the influence over the mind of mere words;—words which are really mere names for non-existent things, which are yet supposed to exist simply because they have received a name; or names hastily and unskilfully abstracted from a few objects, and applied recklessly to all that has the faintest analogy with these objects,—thus causing the utmost confusion;—or words whose natural and proper meaning has been lost by a persistent misuse of them in a sense imposed by false habits of thinking and expression. IV.—Lastly, there are *the Idols of the Theatre, that is, fallacious modes of thinking, resulting from received systems of philosophy and from erroneous modes of demonstration*.*

Such is a brief but exact account of the intel-

* See, for a fuller statement, the article on *Bacon*, in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

lectual hindrances to a correct knowledge of nature. And by strict observation of the principles and warnings of this philosophy men have reached absolutely solid knowledge, or certitude, or science, respecting a multitude of facts in the visible creation. They have, (to employ a most useful verb, which ought to be restricted to its etymological sense) *ascertained* them, *i.e.*, got at their certainty. The whole development of modern life, its arts formed on its sciences, furnishes a comment on the blessing that attends the pursuit of truth by the right methods.

These observations will prepare us to understand the conditions of personal certitude and assurance in the spiritual realms. They prove to us beyond dispute that external certainty in religion also may exist, yet that men may fail of reaching it through a disorderly method, flying for refuge to a one-sided Positivism, or to a dream of traditional Infallibility.

What then are the conditions prescribed by the New Testament writers for the enjoyment of certitude and personal assurance, based on revealed certainty? By attending to these we shall at the same time perceive the causes of scepticism.

First, these writers unanimously announce that

Christianity does not undertake to convince all men. As a primary condition of direct contact with truth, they insist on moral, rather than intellectual, qualifications. Every degree of mind above idiocy, they affirm, can be made to understand and enjoy something of the holy gospel and its certainties of truth and grace, if there be but an honest intention. It is a moral, much rather than an intellectual, revelation. The wisest "see through a glass darkly, and know but in part." But it is addressed to all mankind. Hence the apostles speak of being "debtors to the unwise." The honest truth-seeking eye is the organ on which the divine light loves to fall. Even the feeblest spirit is dear to God. Christ came to "seek and to save the lost." The humblest intellectual capacity is concerned in this revelation of love, for the central force in man resides in his moral nature, not in his speculative power. Hence the first demand is that simplicity of purpose, which Christ calls a "child-like" temper, truth-seeking, teachable, and honest. And is not this the truly scientific temper? The mind which delights chiefly in smartness, in exhibiting its own ingenuity, in setting up merely verbal objections to such a person as Jesus Christ, must not complain if it is "taken in its own devices,"

and abandoned by that Holy Spirit which can teach every man except a pragmatical dissembler.

The Apostles affirm—whether rightly or wrongly—that there is nothing so dangerous as approaching this revelation in the tone of a mere disputant or partizan. Now is not this precisely what Lord Bacon would say of the mind which wrongly approaches Nature? In Christianity God is declared to be present, dealing with man's condition in sin and death, with a view to pardon, new creation, and eternal life. The mere report of such a Presence, and of such a purpose, ought to ensure seriousness and sincerity in the examiner of the claims. If it be a mistake, it is at least a melancholy and sublime mistake—that the apostles have made in propounding a Divine Remedy. If it be a truth, no words can describe the vileness of the temper which affronts the Eternal Mercy by the response of a scoffing criticism. Scoffing and carping leave men to sink in deeper doubt. Profanity of temper closes against itself the gates of heaven. As a rule, also, earnestness of character, the unconscious expression of the virgin countenance, which is yearning after a rest that it cannot find, is rewarded by the great discovery.

There is nothing on which Christ lays more stress

than "seeking." Seek, and ye shall find. Seeking is the law of philosophy, and it is the law of life. Knowledge is granted by nature to the seeker. Food is granted to a world of hungry animals that "seek their meat from God." Among men, ignorance and starvation are the doom of sloth and indifference. Here also the conditions of certitude and enjoyment are common to both worlds. There is perhaps no more indisputable cause of prevalent doubt than the neglect of the study of the Bible *as a whole*. Neglect ruins more men than positive crimes. Men read some bold and slashing article against Christianity in the magazines, and then fancy they see through its pretensions. According to each man's opportunity and ability time and labour must be devoted to the careful study of the sacred record. St. Luke remarks of the Bereans that they were "more noble than the Jews of Thessalonica, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so. *Therefore many of them believed.*" Truly some whole sets of people are nobler or ignobler than others; and if you belong to a set where a habit of sneering passes for serious thinking, you must not be astonished if you live in doubt, and die in darkness. All this is but an English version of

the ancient words, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*—let him attend to evidence, and study fact; just exactly what the professors of Physical Science say to their students at *Jermyn Street* and the *Royal Institution*. Professor Huxley has finely observed that “they who adhere most closely to facts will be the masters of the future.” But then it must be *all* the facts.

If a man’s studies are obstinately one-sided, the further he goes the deeper he sinks in the mire and darkness; and such a result is inevitable in religion unless his thinking is quite honest, and refined because honest. Now that man is not quite honest who starts with the contemptuous notion that there is nothing in Supernatural Religion. There *is something* in our consciousness of sin, and in our pitiable shortness of life, which needs just such a remedy as Christianity,—and if this be not the true remedy for sin and death, it ought to cause mourning throughout all nations—for there is no other. And further, that man is not quite refined who can carefully read the report of Christ’s discourse at the Last Supper, in the gospel of John, and *start* in his critical inquiries with the suspicion that this writer was a second-century forger of false documents, or an inventor of false stories in the first. A man

who, after reading those three heart-moving and sublime chapters, can so think, is capable of believing almost anything. It is conceivable that reason may at last compel us to abandon all our hopes; but the *presumption* raised by sections of the New Testament such as this is all the other way, so that the man who does not feel the divine tenderness of the history of that Night before the Cross, writes himself down as one unqualified for criticism on these subjects.

Let us enforce what has been now said by three weighty identical affirmations of the New Testament. The first is from the lips of John the Baptist: *He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.* The second is from the lips of Christ himself: *If any man shall wish to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* The last is from St. Paul: *The natural, or animal, man comprehendeth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* In a word, God hides himself from the dishonest, the arrogant, and the brutish man. "If our gospel be veiled, it is veiled to them that are perishing, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of

the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

According to the apostles, scepticism has its roots in sin much more frequently than in honest speculation. A man leads an impure, dishonest, God-defying life; a woman leads a wasteful, voluptuous, and frivolous life, or worse; and then of course these people have their own reasons for trying to put out the awful eyes of Christianity with the red-hot iron of their philosophy. But that is no reason why the rest of mankind should abandon the certainties of judgment to come, of the salvation of God, or of the life everlasting.

2. The next condition of reaching certainty, in strict analogy with the Baconian laws for getting at the certainties of Nature, consists in *conformity to the eternal laws of interpretation*. These require, first, that we shall not begin by setting up an extra-biblical theory of inspiration, to be applied indiscriminately to all the books of the New Testament alike. It is quite sufficient to believe what each of these books in succession says of itself; and this will be found, in certain cases, to differ from the statements made by some uninspired men on their behalf.

Next, the Scripture is not to be “wrested”—it is not to be “broken”—not to be twisted out of its plain and obvious meaning by the imposition of non-natural senses, set up in order to counterwork its authority, or to excuse traditionary growths of sentiment or practice. We are not to read out of their proper natural sense whole streams of language, in deference to one or two imaginary opposing texts. This would be to imitate the pre-scientific observers of Nature. We are not to turn rhetoric into logic, nor logic into rhetoric, nor offer violence to that common sense which distinguishes the two. We are to remember that if God was pleased to employ human language as the medium of a spiritual revelation, the first condition of understanding this revelation is strictly to adhere to the supreme canon of interpretation—the rule of taking the most obvious and popular sense of the terms employed,—and to abide by the known idioms of the tongues of the prophets and apostles. No new and unknown sense will be put on common nouns, adjectives, and verbs by a Divine Spirit seeking to communicate with men who know only the ancient and common sense of words. There will be no sacred dialect known only to the clergy. Above all, since the laws of the interpretation of the certainties of Nature

and of Revelation are radically identical, we must not take with us a ready-formed theory on the very subjects respecting which Revelation comes to instruct us. If we persist in the plan of looking at the Sun through smoked glasses, we shall lose half its brightness and all its beauty. If we fix in the mind an imagination of our own, under the name of a *natural* philosophy, or theology, or psychology, and then insist on reading the divine Revelation under the interpreting force of such a pre-occupation, it is inevitable that we shall handle the word of God with violence, and probably with deceit.

So long as men looked upon nature under the fixed conviction that the earth was six thousand years old, and that a universal flood of waters, four thousand years ago, produced all the phenomena of the fossil world, it was simply impossible for Nature to teach men geological truth. As soon as that unscientific, and unbiblical, notion was dispelled by hard fighting, the whole science of geology flashed on the human intelligence in the lifetime of one generation—but not before. And so long as men read the writings of the apostles with fixed preconceptions as to the chief questions on which the apostles had a divine commission to teach the world, it is simply impossible to

reach certainty. This is equally true whether the preconceptions come from church-tradition, or from rationalism. The Apostles steadfastly proclaim that ungodliness and unteachableness are the two grand hindrances to certain knowledge among those to whom the word of God is sent.

And that which is true of the whole is true of the parts. Divine Revelation is credible and defensible when accepted as one vast and far-reaching whole. Take away any of its principal truths, or add some conspicuous and far-reaching error, and the whole system becomes strained, if not incredible. We may go further. Divine Revelation, according to the Apostles, includes Physical Nature, the Record of Scripture, and the Experience of human life. Taken all together these three form a coherent system of fact, and of principle, of which each part adds resistless strength to the other. If the Old Testament histories are read alone, by one who is ignorant of God in nature, they may leave doubts as to their original. If they are read in the light of some knowledge of the great system of life and death which forms the history of this planet—this Old Testament history, with its long catalogue of prophetic types and destructive judgments, is found to

be but the echo of the record of nature, and of the formidable constitution of the world under the dominion of the all-creating and destroying God.

And equally, if you approach nature with a mind sincere and teachable, but holding some one erroneous thought which you persist in forcing in amidst her facts and phenomena, you will thereby render it impossible to receive some other great truths in nature which are inconsistent with your theory. Thus also in interpreting apostolic certainty. If we carry to the school of Christ some pre-formed opinion respecting humanity, or the Deity, on some question respecting which the Apostles *have been sent to instruct us*, we shall not only fail in reaching certainty on that subject, but we shall receive their instruction on other topics under perverting conditions which will hold our faith constantly tottering on the verge of scepticism.

Some doctrine of predestination, for example, is clearly taught by the Apostles. But you may approach the New Testament with fixed ideas on the nature of man or of God, which compel you to hold fast the doctrine of predestination under conditions which expose your faith to ever-imminent subversion, the more you think of it. If, above all, we carry to

the record some fixed notion that God can deal with men in no other way than in strict justice, and that "justification" signifies reckoning a *just man* for what he is, or converting a bad man, by fear of judgment to come, into a good one,—this is a preconception which will arrest for ever our reception of the New Testament distinction between *the law* and *the gospel*,—will prevent us from seeing the truth of the *faithful saying*, "that Jesus Christ came into the world *to save sinners, even the chief*,"—will shut us out from perceiving that while a legal religion fills men with fear, and drives them from God, a religion of glad hope and a "*justification of the ungodly*" wins us back to the Holy One;—the one supplying no motive, and affording no peace; the other leading to *joy unspeakable*, and love that conquers the world. "The end of the commandment," says St. Paul, "is love,"—an end which the pardoning love of God alone can produce. "The law makes nothing perfect." To reach this certainty we must sit as learners at the Apostles' feet.

3. Thirdly, if certainty is to lead to progressive certitude and personal assurance of salvation, the Apostles teach us that we must, for dear life, break loose, at whatever cost, from every social dominion

over faith, and establish the right and duty of individual thought in the things of God. "*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*" "*Whatsoever is not of conviction is sin.*" The whole of Scripture is an example of, and a plea for, gradual *individual* enlightenment by honest search,—progress towards solid knowledge through mistakes, through the rending of successive veils, through the aid of successive teachers. We find there nothing like the modern plan of summarily forcing three Creeds, or 'Thirty-nine Articles, much less the Creed of Pope Pius IV., or the Scottish *Confession of Faith*, down the throat of spiritual infancy. That is one of the cruel mercies of dominant Ecclesiasticism, and the result is seen in universal spiritual indigestion and a fast extending disbelief.

All sensitive souls, it is true, have sympathetic relations—the strong helping the weak, and the weak the strong. No single mind is sufficient for the study of a truth and grace which are infinite. All souls together are required for action here in order "to comprehend *with all saints* the love of Christ." There is no hard or narrow individualism in the kingdom of God. But the main hope of restoring certitude, on the basis of revealed certainty, is to excite a general

insurrection against the authoritative teaching of organised hierarchies, and to bring back individual minds, each one according to its ability, to the study of the Apostolic Revelation, that is to say, to practise, as well as to preach, the Protestant principle of personal contact with the original Messengers of God; and to do this under a resolute reassertion by scholars of the Baconian laws of scientific interpretation. Time and experience, which have tested the success of this method as to the interpretation of Nature, would no less attest its success in relation to the Revelation of God. Apart from such an intellectual revolution there is no escape from Niagara—a world-wide violent resolve to be rid of perverted Christianity. But it will be the professional upholders of these perversions who will be guilty of that catastrophe.

4. Further, I venture to point out that the apostles represent certainty in their instructions as *the common heritage of the Church*; but certitude as the *privilege of the individual mind*, in secret communion with God;—unjudged by man—unregulated by ecclesiastical or civil law—incommunicable by human argument or authority—and differing in its measure and degree with the measure and degree of each man's

conformity to the laws of spiritual insight and rational interpretation. “*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his Covenant.*” “*He that is spiritual discerneth all things, but he himself is judged of no man.*” “*Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*” “*To him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*”

But small measures of knowledge, small degrees of intellectual certitude, are sufficient for salvation. Faith, as a grain of mustard-seed, moves mountains. The humblest attainments in assurance enable the soul to reach the ultimate object of spiritual cognition, the reconciling justice and love of God, just as even an infant's eye takes in some impression of its mother's love. Thus the true doctrine of certitude leads neither to an iron dogmatism, nor to the fashionable worship of agnosticism.

Certitude, in its successive degrees, is the ascension of the soul, on those golden steps which Jacob saw in Bethel, up to the gates of heaven. The personal persuasion of forgiveness, and of the love of God, whether in the higher or lower degrees, is the gift of God's Spirit, and those who do despite to that

“Spirit of grace” may argue until doomsday, but they will never behold the inner glory of Christianity.

With one more observation I will complete this argument. The teaching of the apostles on Certainty must be taken as a living whole. It is a phenomenon as complex and as wonderful as the radiant vision of the chariot of the Cherubim, on which Ezekiel, at the downfall of the Hebrew monarchy, beheld the Eternal descending in grace and in judgment on Jerusalem. It can be fairly accounted for by no natural causes in the spirit of the times, or in the history of Jewish, Greek, or Roman thought. A religion based on a history of the criminal execution, and subsequent resurrection, of its Founder, was not a natural product of either human strength or human weakness, of abstract thought or vulgar deception. The invincible steadiness of the witnesses of this event, their unanimous and steadfast confidence in preaching a revelation of God’s truth and mercy to mankind by Christ’s cross and passion; their own inextinguishable faith and hope, triumphing over a lifetime of hostility, and a death of violence; their success in kindling a like spirit of belief in men of every country under heaven by their inspiring message; and, above all, the never-

dying power of their word, after eighteen centuries, to kindle the like faith and hope in life and death in the hearts of men of every kindred and every tongue; all point to one conclusion, that here we have what is professed—solid certainty, and the assurance of immortal life in God.

To describe this phenomenon is to defend it; or rather to commend it to inquiring spirits, as the solution of their doubts, the answer to their yearnings, the antidote to their fears. The apostolic tone of certainty has been caught from a mightier Voice, the voice of the Father of our spirits. For He who made man to be capable of doubt so agonizing knows best how to reach the depths of our sorrow, and to command in the midst of the storm the great calm that comes with rest in the Lord. The truth which is to be believed is concerning love which is to be trusted in, nothing doubting; and that love will never leave us “till it has done that which it has spoken to us of.” (Gen. xxviii.) For these are its words, “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my lovingkindness will I not take from thee, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.”

By the same Author.

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