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CHRISTIANITY:

WHAT IS IT? AND WHAT HAS IT DONE?

BY

JOHN JAMES TAYLER, B.A.

PRINCIPAL OF MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON

AND MEMBER OF THE HISTORICO-THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.

"I am more and more sensible, that most controversies have more need of *right stating* than *debating*—and that if my skill be increased in anything it is in that, in *narrowing* controversies by explication, and separating the *real* from the *verbal*, and proving to many contenders, that they differ less than they think."

Baxter's Autobiography, I. p. 134.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;

AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

EDWARD T. WHITFIELD, 178, STRAND, LONDON.

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A portion of the substance of the ensuing pages was originally read at a private conference of friends. The sketch has been since worked out and completed; and it is here offered to the public, in the hope that it may lend its aid, small as that may be, towards finding an answer to some of those questions which are now taxing the thought of earnest and serious minds. To one merit alone it lays any claim;—that of being an honest and unreserved avowal of views on a great subject, which have been held with deepening conviction by the writer through a long course of years. It is little that the most gifted can do for a complete and satisfactory solution of those vast problems of the immortal and the divine, of which all feel the grandeur, but none can fathom the depth. As the solution must come at last from a clearer revealing of God's Spirit within us, and as the Spirit is "no respecter of persons," but "bloweth where it listeth,"—it ever seemed to the writer, that the only hope of a steady growth in spiritual insight was to be sought, in abandoning at once that soulless repetition of the traditional commonplaces of a technical

theology, which, if it offends no prejudice, expresses no vital conviction, and in different minds declaring humbly and reverently, but without disguise, what they have found after years of reflection and experience to be spiritual reality. Only such free contributions from various sources can convey any adequate idea of the many-sidedness of the great subject of religion, and of the endless diversity of mental ties by which the multitude of human souls are bound to a common trust and hope. The result will of course be, much error and possibly some extravagance; but mixed with all, wherever there is sincerity and earnestness, some precious grains of imperishable truth, which continued thought will gradually wash out from the ruder ore, and store up as an immortal treasure in the deep chambers of the soul.

HAMPSTEAD, April 22nd, 1868.

CHRISTIANITY:

WHAT IS IT? AND WHAT HAS IT DONE?

I.

It may seem extraordinary to ask questions of this kind in the latter half of the nineteenth century after Christ. But Christianity is one of those spiritual influences, silently moulding the hidden man of the heart, of which the full value cannot be expressed in any given amount of accomplished results, but which demands the progressive experience of centuries to bring out its ever-unfolding significance. To this day different answers would doubtless be given to these questions by different churches and different individuals. It is not a simple matter of inference or interpretation. In the same nominal premises discordant elements are included, that must necessarily lead to divergent conclusions. Such a state of things leaves the whole problem yet unsolved, and seems to justify a renewed endeavour to penetrate, if possible, to the bottom of this inquiry—one of the gravest and most interesting that can be proposed for investigation.

I may state at the outset my strong conviction, that

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the final result will be seriously affected by the character of the religious philosophy which we assume or presuppose as the basis of our reasoning. A religious conclusion seems to me incompatible with an irreligious psychology. Pure materialism—the assumption that we have and can have no perception or cognition of anything which is not wholly made up of materials furnished in the last resort by the external senses—cannot, as I see the case, carry us logically beyond the limit of the phenomenal, can never bridge over the mysterious chasm which divides the seen from the unseen. I am aware, there have been sincerely religious men, whose philosophy was materialistic. Hartley, Bonnet, Law and Priestley, are eminent examples. But if I may express what I individually feel, with the profoundest respect for the memories of those excellent men, they were religious because they were inconsequential; they saved their faith at the expense of their philosophy. I have often thought, that no more convincing proof could be adduced of the underlying reality of those religious trusts and convictions which have been wrought into the inmost texture of the human soul, than the simple fact, that in the minds of serious and good men they should have preserved their vitality and exerted their force, in spite of an associated intellectual theory, which pushed to its legitimate consequences would, as I understand it, have logically destroyed them.

“Naturam expellas furca ; tamen usque recurret,
Et mala perrumpet furtim fastidia victrix.”*

* Hor. 1 Epist. x. 24-5.

II.

To me, then, I must confess, all tradition, all history, all literature and all art, not less than the revelations of our own self-consciousness, attest with unanswerable evidence the presence of an innate religious element in man. It is involved in our original mental organization—*aliquid datum, haud quæsitum*. It precedes reason, and is implicitly contained in its highest operations—blending itself almost unconsciously with our perception of outward things, and mingling in our deepest inward reflection on ourselves. Reason then only begins to doubt, when it renounces the premises supplied by nature, and attempts in vain to replace them by an incompetent logic of its own. The argument from design derives its validity from the intuitional assumption implied in the major premiss. The theory now gaining ground among scientific men, which the latest discoveries and experiments are said strongly to favour—that all the varied phenomena of the universe are nothing more in their ultimate resolution than convertible and correlated manifestations of a common power or force—tends evidently to confirm the view which I have suggested of the origin of the religious sense. One of the most advanced thinkers of the modern school, Mr. Herbert Spencer, has used language on this subject, which is to my mind both conclusive and consolatory, since it assigns the latent assumption of all religious belief to a permanent and immovable foundation in our nature. “There must exist,”

he argues, "some principle which, as being the basis of science, cannot be established by science. All reasoned-out conclusions whatever must rest on some postulate. We cannot go on merging derivative truths in those wider and wider truths from which they are derived, without reaching at last a widest truth which can be merged in no other, or derived from no other. And whoever contemplates the relation in which it stands to the truths of science in general, will see that this truth, transcending demonstration, is the Persistence of Force." "Deeper than demonstration—deeper even than definite cognition—deep as the very nature of mind, is the postulate at which we have arrived. Its authority transcends all others whatever ; for not only is it given in the constitution of our own consciousness, but it is impossible to imagine a consciousness so constituted as not to give it. Thought, involving simply the establishment of relations, may be readily conceived to go on while yet these relations have not been organized into the abstracts we call space and time ; and so there is a conceivable kind of consciousness which does not contain the truths commonly called *à priori*, involved in the organization of these forms of relations. But thought cannot be conceived to go on without some element between which its relations may be established ; and so there is no conceivable kind of consciousness which does not imply continued existence as its datum. Consciousness without this or that particular form is possible ; but consciousness without *contents* is impossible." "The sole truth which transcends experience by underlying it, is

thus the Persistence of Force.”*—It will be said, this is only force or power, not mind ; but observe, it is ultimate power,—power in its source and principle. And of power, considered in itself, are we able to form any conception, as Mr. Locke suggested long ago, but what is furnished by reflection on our own conscious exercise of will, as the only originating force of which we have any knowledge?† This brings us at once to mind, as the ultimate reality, by which alone we can apprehend and measure and interpret the mysterious principle that underlies and pervades all things. Feeling the necessary affinity of all mind, we rise to a very inadequate, but still to an ever-expanding, conception of the Universal Intelligence, by the transference to it of what is highest in our own mental and moral consciousness. For where there is will, there must be a law of rectitude and benevolence to guide it, or it will become *wilfulness*, and issue not in a *cosmos* but a *chaos*.‡

In the rude fetish-worship of the savage, in the wondering awe of the opening mind of a child, and in those more solemn moments of our individual experience, when we are most ourselves, and the question arises, what and where and why we are—there is borne in on the soul an unaccountable but resistless sense of something beyond and behind the phenomenal, which has a per-

* Quoted by Dr. Youmans in the Introduction to his Collection of Treatises on the “Correlation and Conservation of Forces,” p. xl. New York, 1865.

† Locke’s Essay, Book ii. Ch. xxi.

‡ This, if I mistake not, is substantially Kant’s reasoning in his celebrated argument, “The only possible Proof of the Being of God.”

ceptible though mysterious affinity with our own inward life—the consciousness of a present power and will akin to our own, though unfathomable and uncontrollable by us. This perception of some invisible reality transcending the phenomenal is the essential element of religion, rude, dim and unformed in its earliest manifestations, but—because it is an essential element of the soul's life—growing with its growth and participating in its development. It early associates with itself the awakening moral sense ; and so the primitive feeling of mere dependence ripens by degrees into the nobler sentiment of responsibility. What might have been the form which the natural growth of the religious principle would ultimately have assumed, if a priesthood had never intervened to give it an artificial direction, it is impossible now to say. It may be, that the sacerdotal period was a necessary and inevitable stage in the spiritual education of our race. One thing, however, is certain, that the priesthood could only have acquired their vast influence by using for their own purpose the indisputable facts of human nature. They seized and stereotyped in arbitrary forms and conventional usages, its strong, indwelling, invincible beliefs—its profound persuasion, that there was a connection, some correspondence and relationship, between things seen and unseen, the human and the divine : and it was by working through the claim of supernatural influence, on the most powerful emotions, to which such a persuasion gives rise—the hope of good and the fear of evil—that they elaborated their vast and complicated system of propitiations and atonements.

Divine warnings, oracles, the previsions of gifted seers, signs and omens—fraught as they were with gross superstition, and perpetuated by an established system, when the natural faith in them had died out—were still witnesses to the last of that indestructible sense of dependence on invisible powers, which cleaves to our nature through every varied phase of manifestation. What at a more advanced period was the demon of Socrates, and the accompanying conviction, that the god had commissioned him to introduce a mental and moral reform among his countrymen, but another indication in a higher form of the same deep trust? Happily, side by side with sacerdotal institutions, there ever existed in those nations of the ancient world which have most largely contributed to fashion the religious thought of later times, a body of free, independent teachers, who, whatever their mode of utterance, poets, philosophers or prophets, kept alive in the heart of humanity the sense of spiritual things, when it might else have perished under the benumbing influence of the priesthood. Foremost among these benefactors of our race we must rank the prophets of the Hebrews, whose profound insight into the moral economy of the world, and whose vivid perception of invisible realities, and intense conviction of their own personal communion with a Living God, have planted deeper in the human soul the vital trusts of religion, and left a deeper impress of religiousness on the whole ensuing course of human history, than all the other influences of the ancient world put together.

III.

I venture, then, to assume an inherent religious sense in humanity as a fact, call it by what name you will. A religious philosophy must accept this assumption, or it will have no basis to stand upon. There are things which we believe, because we are formed to believe them, though they cannot be proved. It is impossible, for example, to demonstrate the existence of a world external to our minds. Yet who ever doubts it? Now this inward religiousness manifests itself in an endless variety of forms, determined by personal idiosyncrasy, by the hereditary tendencies of race, or by the external conditions of the civilization in which it has taken root. To compare with one another these diversified expressions of the religious principle, and to trace out the common idea or feeling which underlies them all, is a very interesting and instructive study, and may possibly give rise hereafter to a new department of scientific inquiry, that would not be unaptly described as Comparative Theology. With two only of these historical manifestations are we here immediately concerned, because we inherit their results, and they have exerted a direct influence on the future work of Christianity in the world—the Hebraic and the Hellenic; the former supplying the spiritual substance of the Christian belief, the latter contributing the intellectual forms in which it progressively developed itself. The essential distinction between them may be expressed in general terms by saying,—that the Greek religion conceived of deity as dwelling within

nature, that of the Hebrews as ruling above it and beyond it.* According to the one, there was a fate or destiny bound up with the physical universe to which Zeus himself was subject; † according to the other, Jehovah was the absolute Creator of heaven and earth, and would endure for ever. ‡ Both religions were anthropomorphic, and in this respect present a striking contrast to those of Egypt and India, whose symbolism was brutal and monstrous. But the Hellenic anthropomorphism was sensuous and physical; the Hebraic, moral and spiritual. When I speak of anthropomorphism, I mean no reproach to either religion. All true and living religion—all that expresses something more than the cold and powerless abstractions in which philosophy pretends to *rationalize* the popular belief—is at bottom anthropomorphic; that is, involves the consciousness of some affinity between the human and the divine, through

* In such a distinction we can of course mark only the extreme points of contrast. But the following passages appear to me to justify the statement in the text: Ps. cxv. 16, "The heaven is Jehovah's heaven;" Ps. cxiii. 5, 6, ii. 4, xxix. 10 (alluding to the waters above the firmament); and the sublime description, xviii. 9 (comp. 2 Sam. xxii. 10), "He bowed the heavens, and came down;" also 1 Kings viii. 27, 30, in Solomon's dedication prayer, where heaven is specially called "Jehovah's dwelling-place." In the later writings—for example, Ps. cxxxix. and Jeremiah xxiii. 23, 24—we begin to meet with conceptions more nearly approaching the Christian doctrine of the Divine omnipresence; but they do not amount to the idea of immanence. They rather imply a far-sighted vigilance and control, which nothing can escape, exercised from some local centre. This view is indeed almost a necessary consequence of the anthropomorphic monotheism of the Hebrews. Compare, however, the remarkable passage in Job, xxiii. 8—12, on the invisibility of God.

† οὐκ οὐκ ἂν ἰκθύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην.—Æschyl. Prom. Vinct. 518, edit. Wellauer.

‡ Ps. cii. 25—27.

which alone discourse of God becomes intelligible to man. But the character of the anthropomorphism powerfully influences the tone of the religious sentiment accompanying it. The devout Greek owned a divine presence near him and encompassing him on every side, in the striking and beautiful effects of external nature. He deified them all. In the thunder and the cloud, in fertilizing rains and freshening winds, in the gush of health-giving springs, in the general budding and blossoming and procreative energy of the vernal season, in the ripening corn and the swelling grape and the teeming olive—he recognized the power and presence of some indwelling and tutelary god, and felt his individual being dissolved and lost in the joyous and exulting nature on whose lap he lay. It was a physical inspiration which seized him. Noble gymnastics and stately processions formed a part of his worship. The mysterious beings whose invisible influence he felt and realized, sympathized with his natural instincts and animal impulses; and as an expression of his homage, he gave himself up to a wild delirium of sensuous excitement which found a vent in dance and song. Of far different character and effect was the anthropomorphism of the Hebrew religion. It saw, enthroned above all created things, a holy and awful Being, dwelling alone in inaccessible majesty, the reflex and counterpart in magnified proportions of what the worshiper found mirrored in his own purest and highest thoughts, the source and centre of a moral law, to which all men were subjected, and by which their affairs were overruled in unswerving righteousness and

truth. Reverence and awe were the only feelings with which such a Being could be approached. He was over his creatures, but not among them. He could never become the object of that light familiarity with which we find the Greek dramatists occasionally treating their gods.* The Hebrew faith, even in its most advanced forms, when the idea of a Father was coming more and more into view, still left a vast and impassable chasm between man and God. Its essence is expressed in those awful words put into the mouth of Jehovah (Exod. xxxiii. 20), "Thou canst not see my face : for there shall no man see me, and live." The same reverent feeling forbade the representation of deity under any visible form. He was a Spirit, to be seen only by the mental eye—"secretum illud," to adopt the fine language of Tacitus, "quod solâ reverentiâ videbant." Yet the religious poetry of the Hebrews is richly anthropomorphic. To familiarize the idea of God and his working to human apprehension, they freely clothe him with human attributes, and impute to him human emotions, even human passions, love, hatred, vengeance, jealousy, &c. — but always, so far as I have observed, with some idea of holiness and justice lying at the bottom of this harsh phraseology. On the other hand, it was with the outward and sensuous expression of humanity that the mind of the Greeks most readily sympathized. Their

* Scenes in the *Bacchæ* and *Alcestis* of Euripides furnish well-known examples. The poet, to use the language of a Christian Father (Justin Martyr, *Apol.* i. 4), εὐφώνως ὑβρίζει τοὺς θεοὺς, "takes liberties with his gods in melodious verse."

sense of the intermingling of the divine and human inspired the highest conceptions of physical beauty, and stamped a superhuman grace and majesty on the forms of their gods and heroes. The antithesis of the two religions is distinctly expressed in their respective forms of art,—one speaking to the bodily eye, the other to the spiritual sense. The plastic creations of Phidias and Praxiteles stand out in vivid contrast with the bold imagery and daring personifications of the magnificent poetry of the prophets and the psalms. More important consequences are involved in this distinction than may at first sight appear. The conception of deity in Greek art having been once set and fixed in definite physical forms, was incapable of expansion into anything more spiritual and elevated, though it was susceptible of degeneration, as its later history shewed, into a lower and more voluptuous type of beauty. But the aspiration after God, as a spiritual excellence, through the highest states of man's moral consciousness, which was essentially the Jewish idea, involved a capacity of self-development, expanding with the growth of the soul, and giving birth to that grand and fruitful anticipation of an ultimate and triumphant kingdom of God, which runs through all the prophetic teachings and includes the germ of Christianity itself.

IV.

To understand what Christianity is, and what it has done, we have to consider not only the nature on which it is destined to act, but also the provision that was made

for its future work in the previous history of the world. The Hebraic and Hellenic forms of faith, whose distinctive genius I have attempted briefly to characterize, are the two factors whose joint working has resulted in that type of spiritual culture of which we are the present inheritors. For myself, I could never read the history of those wonderful centuries which preceded the birth of Christ, and notice the intermingling of the streams of Oriental and Greek thought, which was one of the consequences of the conquests of Alexander—how the diffusion of the Greek language over the civilized world prepared the way for the preaching of an universal religion—how the dispersion of Jews in all parts of the Roman empire, carrying with them the Greek version of their ancient Scriptures (the first example on record of the rendering of an Oriental work into any of the dialects of the West), spread Jewish ideas and Jewish expectations through an ever-widening circle of inquisitive heathens—without a thrill of reverent emotion, and a conviction irresistibly forced on my mind, that Christianity, so clearly a result of the foregoing disposal of events, must form a principal element in the great providential plan for the spiritual education of our race. If ever human being was an agent, to a large extent an unconscious agent, in the hand of a higher Power, it was Alexander of Macedon. If there had been a prophet to mark his course and trace its inevitable issue during the three centuries which elapsed from his death to the Advent, he would certainly have applied to him the language which the later Isaiah uses of Cyrus, and called him the

anointed of the Lord.* How these two factors, the Hebraic and the Hellenic, were brought into vital contact and ultimately fused into one by the interposition of the short ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, is what I shall now endeavour to shew.

V.

Divested of the Jewish forms of thought, which brought it home to the apprehension of the generation to which it was first preached, Christianity seems to me to have consisted essentially in a renewal, a deepening and a purification of the religious sense which is inherent in humanity, and which had undergone a strongly-marked but widely divergent development in the grand types of Hebraic and Hellenic conception preceding it. It diffused through the mass of human beings, as a popular sentiment and conviction, that quickened perception of things unseen and of their momentous relation to the highest interests of the present life, which gave a new direction to human aim and hope, and announced the entrance on a new era in the spiritual history of our planet. The belief which furnished the immediate instrumentality in effecting this great change, was the expectation of an approaching kingdom of God, to be prepared and introduced by a general judgment of the human race and a dissolution of the existing state of things. This expectation had been excited and cherished by the old Hebrew prophets, developed in the later rabbinical schools and apocryphical writings, and irregularly

* Isaiah xlv. 1, ὁ χριστός τοῦ Κυρίου.

dispersed among the heathen by their frequent attendance at Jewish synagogues and ready access to the Septuagint version, and more widely still perhaps by that strange compound of Hellenic and Jewish ideas, the Sibylline verses. In its traditional form that expectation was not destined to be fulfilled; but it rested at bottom on one of those profound intuitions which cleave enduringly to the religious consciousness of mankind, and in ever-changing shapes attest an imperishable vitality from age to age—that the Present is but the womb of a more glorious Future, that the economy of Providence is based on a law of righteous and unfailing retribution, and that our individual life on earth, frail and evanescent as it is, is connected through its moral attributes with a higher and imperishable life in God, where goodness and rectitude will bear their certain fruit. It was this implicit truth, speaking to the deepest consciousness within, which invested the expectation, in spite of its delusive adjuncts, with so resistless and transforming an influence over myriads of human souls. There was a craving for moral deliverance, for some word of promise that should speak peace to the heart weighed down by a sense of guilt and trembling at the thought of impending doom.

In the result, and through the processes by which it worked, the new belief modified in no small degree the conceptions which had hitherto prevailed of the mutual relation of the human and divine. Under the influence of feelings which resulted from freer intercourse between men of a different religious training, it effected a mutual approximation. It brought down the God of the Jews

from his awful, distant throne, to dwell as a loving presence among the sons of men. With the Greek it kept deity in the world, but by assigning him also a realm beyond the world, and clothing him with holiness, it excluded the grosser elements of anthropomorphism, and checked every tendency to levity and irreverence. It recognized, therefore, at once an immanent and a transcendental deity. It infused into the general consciousness even of the lowest and servile class, the elevating persuasion that their nature had in it something immortal and divine, or was at least capable, through moral renewal and faith, of receiving it; and this was a gain for humanity which can hardly be over-estimated.

Such were the ideas and tendencies resulting from the contact of Hebrew and Hellenic mind, which then filled the moral atmosphere of the world, and could not but act on its social condition. Had they remained ideas and tendencies only, they might have evaporated and been absorbed by some stronger influence following them. But in the grand order of providential arrangement, they were converted into fact. God sent into the world at this particular crisis, one of those mysteriously organized natures which seem fitted for closer union with Himself, and enjoy a deeper insight into his moral relations with mankind. The new era revealed itself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Gathering to himself by a sort of elective affinity the purest elements of the intermingled influences of his age, he embodied them in a concrete form, and endued them with vitality, and transmitted them through faith and sympathy as a new principle of

moral life to coming generations. From whatever point of view we look at it, this must be admitted, I think, to be a wonderful phenomenon. If it be asked, what was the secret of the great transforming power which attended it—so far as I can trace it underneath the broad surface of historical fact, indicated to us in the primitive tradition of the New Testament—it was resolvable into two main constituents:—the original effect of spiritual sympathy, and the subsequent verification of spiritual experience.

VI.

My fundamental position is, that the religious sense has its germ in the original organization of the soul. Where this sense has either not been developed, which is sometimes the case, or has been dulled and enfeebled by wrong treatment almost to extinction,—I have observed that as a rule it is not to be restored *ab extra* by logic and scientific demonstration, which assume premises by the supposition unhappily wanting, but can only be replaced by the strong direct action of some profoundly religious mind, which rekindles through sympathy the dormant sense within, and compels the conviction that there is after all a reality, however strange and mysterious, in things unseen. Few men are wholly insensible to this religious influence, where it is powerfully exerted.* As I interpret it, it is the Spirit of God working through a human medium. It is the clearest evidence of the

* William Penn has borne a striking witness to the power of this influence, in his account of George Fox in prayer. See his "Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers," p. 108.

supernatural, or, what is the same thing, of some agency beyond the phenomenal. It is the most living revelation that God ever makes of Himself to the world. Such men as Bolingbroke and Hume were always prepared with some answer, which they would have deemed conclusive, to the acutest arguments of Clarke or Butler. But Hume's nature, we are told, would melt at times into religious tenderness at the presence of a simple and genuine piety ; and there were occasions, it is said, when Bolingbroke came away deeply impressed from the fervid appeals of Whitfield. They yielded to reality what they could not give to verbal formulas.

This spiritual influence we may assume to have been greater in Jesus Christ, than in any prophet who ever lived before or since. We measure it by its effects. It was a result of the spiritual idiosyncrasy which distinguished him from other men. It may be observed, that in the most authentic record of his teaching, contained in the three first Gospels, Christ never argues. He speaks at once, in short, pithy sayings, or in parables suggested by men's daily life, to the experience and consciousness of all. He indicates, sometimes in the broadest way, what the mind is left to work out into clear meaning and practical application, for itself. He makes his appeal to hopes and fears, to wants and aspirations, which he knew were already existing in the popular heart, though it might be in a Jewish form and with Jewish limitations. But no one could have produced the deep impression left by Christ on a human soul, who was not himself wholly possessed by the truths which he uttered, and

who did not feel that they came to him from God. This was the secret of his teaching, "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." An influence like this does not terminate with the earthly existence of its source. It has infused a new life into the world; and that life perpetuates itself and grows in the minds which it has entered. No statement ever seemed to me so meagre and so little consonant with historical fact, as that favourite position in old books on the Evidences—that the chief function of the apostles was to record the words of Christ and attest the acts and events of his public ministry. They propagated his religion, not by becoming the authors of a canonical Scripture, of which they never dreamed—but by throwing all their personal influence with an intensity of love and zeal into the living tradition which bore his Gospel irresistibly into the hearts and consciences of thousands, by preaching and working in his spirit, by seeing all things in heaven and earth with his open vision of faith, and, as their labours spread into new realms of manners and thought, ever taking wider views of the nature, range and objects of his spiritual kingdom. Scripture, which was a successive embodiment of different traditions, may be regarded as in one sense an accident of the time, though overruled by Providence in the sequel to the most important results. It is the diversified manifestation of Christ's spirit—the surest evidence of life—which constitutes the great charm and interest of the apostolic age. Instead of being disconcerted and annoyed at the discovery of conflicting views and not always consistent testimony in the New

Testament, this is precisely what I should expect from the unavoidable conditions of the case, and to me a strong, internal proof, that it conveys to us a fresh and vivid impression of the varied phenomena of that very remarkable period.

Of that period one of the most striking features is the profound conviction which pervaded it, not only that Jesus Christ had passed into another state of existence, but that he still continued to hold spiritual intercourse, from that invisible sphere, with his disciples whom he had left on earth. The Acts and the Epistles, notwithstanding their occasional disagreement on other points, concur throughout in their witness to the depth and the universality of this belief. My own views on this subject may be regarded as peculiar ; but I do not hesitate to avow them. I do not, of course, question the power of an Almighty Being to restore a human body from the grave, and give it back to touch and sensible apprehension, flesh and blood and bone and muscle, just as it had previously existed on earth. But the attestation to a *bodily* resurrection, as contained in the four Gospels, seems to me inadequate to establish the fact. Where the testimony should have been overpoweringly strong and consentaneous to prove so extraordinary an event, it is fragmentary and disjointed, and incapable of combination into a self-consistent whole—what could hardly have been accepted as satisfactory evidence in any human court of justice of some daily occurrence. The narrative, as given, is precisely what divergent streams of popular tradition might be supposed to have preserved in their

own loose and cumulative way, of some mysterious visitations and assurances vouchsafed to the minds of the earliest disciples. Moreover, I could never see any logical force in the argument so eagerly founded on these recorded appearances, that they are conclusive proofs of a continued existence, *out of this mortal body*, in a different world from the present. Nevertheless, I do not regard the early Christian belief in a resurrection of Christ, his passage from the earthly to the heavenly life, as a delusion. For to the universal belief in this general form the testimony is unanimous, and followed by corresponding effects. Paul firmly believed in a risen Christ; it is the key-note of all his writings: though evidence of the fact through outward and bodily sense was denied him. The persuasion was so strong and general among Jewish and heathen converts alike, it wrought so profound a change in their whole moral nature, it formed so completely the corner-stone of the future fabric of the Church—that, unless we are prepared to refer the holiest and most beneficent revolution in the world's history to a foundation in absolute falsehood, I must suppose that it rested ultimately on the recognition of some fact—an inward and spiritual, if not an outward, fact—which carried an implicit assurance of its own to the mind of the believer. On the whole, it seems to me the best solution of the mystery to suppose, that the spiritual vision of the soul had been so opened and enlarged by the quickening influences of that extraordinary time—and mainly through sympathy with the higher life of Christ himself—that it felt and saw, as present realities,

some things which are hidden from us in our normal condition of religious sensibility—things, of which even now perhaps we might catch a glimpse, were our faith equally pure, deep, unworldly and strong. As it is, all through history and literature there break forth here and there strange announcements of mysterious visitations from the unseen world, which I cannot explain and do not undertake to prove, but for which, however we may dispose of it, testimony distinct and positive undoubtedly exists. And why, if there be a spiritual world, which, I presume, every Christian admits, should such things be pronounced at once and without further inquiry absolutely incredible?*

* I am well aware, that by hinting at such a possibility I expose myself to the sarcasms of some, who while accepting to the very letter the hardest outward miracles of Scripture, discard with contemptuous incredibility as unworthy even of examination, any affirmation outside Scripture, however well attested, of an agency beyond the known laws of the phenomenal, which alone renders many Biblical statements credible or even possible. There is a strong disposition at the present day to regard extreme and one-sided opinions as the sign of mental strength, in anticipation perhaps of "the stern encounter," so well described by J. H. Newman (*Apol. pro Vita sua*, V. p. 192), "when two real and living principles, simple, entire and consistent, one in the Church, the other out of it, shall at length rush upon each other, contending not for names and words, or half views, but for elementary notions and distinctive moral characters." I do not, however, believe, that the entire truth is to be found in one quarter alone, or that the whole range of cosmical possibilities is as yet exhausted. In our present imperfect state of knowledge, we can only take facts as they lie before us, and put on them the most probable interpretation which they seem to yield. Possibly those who feel, that there must be some great, underlying common fact in the intuitions of religion and the discoveries of science, and who open their minds to all gleams of light from whatever side they come, may be nearer the central truth, though they seem to reach it by a sort of compromise, than strong-minded and exclusive extremes of opinion in either direction.

remains, that the clear unquestioning belief in another state of existence, and in the possibility of personal relations with it, which marked the apostolic age, was one of the most marvellous fruits of the faith which Christ brought with him into the world, and which he raised and cherished in other men's souls by the strong, sympathetic action of his own.

VII.

Profound as was the impression left by Christ on the religious consciousness of his own generation, it would not have endured, had it not been sustained by the subsequent verification of spiritual experience. The final test of spiritual truth is its persistency and capacity of growth. By which I mean, not that any particular doctrinal form is therefore to be regarded as a complete expression of the truth, because it has subsisted through many centuries, for it may be artificially upheld by the force of usage and institution, long after it has ceased to be an exponent of actual conviction;—but that the spiritual principle which has found a shelter in any such form, and has imbued it with whatever religious influence it may exert, and which may pass essentially unchanged into other forms better suited to the altered conditions of human society, bears attestation to its own truth and heavenly source, by its firm hold on the permanent elements of our moral nature, and its adaptation to wants and aspirations which are bound up with the very constitution of the soul. Tried by this standard, no religion can adduce such evidence of divine origination as the

simple religion of Christ. In spite of the corruptions and disfigurements brought into it by an artificial theology, the grand substantial truths which it has disseminated, of man's personal responsibility to deity, of the surpassing value of the human soul, and of the close, indissoluble connection of things seen and things unseen,—have struck so deep a root in the general consciousness of Christendom, that I believe they would henceforth endure through their own inherent vitality as a *κρῆμα ἐς ἀεί* for mankind, if all knowledge of their historical origin could be taken from us, and the Scriptures were expunged from the records of the past. These truths have outlived the convulsions of the Reformation and the still more destructive shock of the French Revolution. For myself, I am persuaded they will yet survive in some purer and more spiritual form, all the attacks, critical and philosophical, by which at some weak points the old foundations on which they have been hitherto too exclusively based, are now so vigorously assailed.

When Christ's person and work were reflected on by those who propagated the Gospel after his death, his image rose up before them as a glorified humanity which had passed through death into a most intimate and everlasting communion with God. It held out to them the standard of perfection, after which they were themselves to aspire. His life, death and ascension were a condensed epitome of the destiny of every virtuous soul. It made them feel that the human, if it took the direction so clearly indicated by Christ, was intended to become at last divine. The second epistle of Peter (i. 4) speaks

of Christians partaking through faith of a divine nature (*θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*), and Clement of Alexandria says that the Gnostic, that is, in his language, the true spiritual Christian, becomes at length a god.* With the mental tendencies then so active in the world, it is not surprising that there should have been a disposition to regard Christ as from the beginning something more than human. We discern traces of this in the later epistles of Paul, Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians, written, as I suppose, during or after his imprisonment at Cæsarea, and still more distinctly in the Fourth Gospel. It should be borne in mind, that while the spiritual substance of the Christian faith was drawn from the intuitions of Hebrew prophets, the forms of its historical development were furnished by the intellectual philosophy of the Greeks. The apotheosis first of Christ himself, and then of the Holy Spirit which was the representative of his continued presence among men, can only be regarded by those who have studied the history of those times, as a product of Greek modes of thought; and the antagonism thence resulting between the strictness of the primitive monotheism, and the polytheistic tendencies with which it was brought in contact, there was a fruitless attempt to reconcile—in those strange, incomprehensible formularies of faith which were subsequently elaborated by the subtile metaphysics of the Church, and

* *Τούτῳ δυνατὸν τῷ τρόπῳ* (i. e. through perfect faith in God) *τὸν γνωστικὸν ἤδη γενέσθαι θεόν*. Strom. IV. c. xxiii. Plato has a kindred idea, ascribing to man's participation in a divine nature, his acknowledgment of deity: *ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, διὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζῶων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισε*. Protagoras, xii.

for which only the inexhaustible richness and flexibility of the Greek language could have devised a terminology. For centuries the world seemed to go down under the influence of the new religion, which had to hold on its way and sustain its life amidst ruin and dissolution. To no institution on record is the maxim more applicable than to Christianity—*corruptio optimi pessima*. First the New Platonists, and then the Scholastics, by their deviations into the wide and weary wilderness of lifeless abstractions, drew it away to the greatest possible distance from the simple intuitions of faith and love in which it had its source.

Nevertheless, if we make due allowance for the distinction on which I have insisted, between the forms of faith and the spiritual principle latent in them, it may be shewn, I think, that some of the worst errors of belief which have signalized the history of the Church, were the exaggeration and perversion of great fundamental truths, which only perhaps through this rough process could have got into the general circulation of human thought. Two of the noblest and most fruitful elements deposited by Christ in the religious consciousness of mankind were, first, the sense of an affinity between the divine and the human, and secondly, a conviction of the sanctity and inestimable value of the soul. The first of these tendencies, unchecked by reason and a healthy philosophy, led to a deification of all the higher forms of human excellence, and encouraged a secondary worship, not only of Jesus Christ, but of the Virgin and the Saints. The second, misguided by the assumption of a metaphy-

sical theory, that a saving faith involved the reception of certain dogmas by the understanding rather than a condition of the affections and the will, justified even in the apprehension of holy and righteous men—an Augustine, a Bernard and a Calvin—the incarceration, torturing and destruction of the perishable body for the sake of the eternal interest of immortal souls. Yet these fearful transgressions of reason and humanity are less revolting to the moral sense than their heathen counterparts. To worship a human being elevated by holiness and loving self-sacrifice into affinity with God, is less degrading than to sing the praises of a deity reduced by lust and ferocity below the level of a man. Calvin surveying with grim satisfaction the smouldering fires in which Servetus implored the pity of Christ, is a less odious spectacle, when we keep in mind the feelings by which he was actuated, than a Domitian or a Commodus gloating over the hideous conflicts which reddened the sand of a Roman amphitheatre with the mingled blood of men and brutes. In sterner times, many a sincere and earnest Christian regarded the blasphemy supposed to be involved in any denial of the fundamental truths of God's Word, as the greatest of all offences against the Divine Majesty, which could only be expiated by the death of the perpetrator. When modern Protestants, in their excess of reforming zeal, deny the Christian name and the Christian hope to their Roman Catholic brethren, and plead the fires of Smithfield in defence of their want of charity, they forget that Protestants have done no better, and that they are themselves only exemplifying in a milder shape the very

same principle which once extorted even from good men a regretful approval of the extermination of the Donatists and the Albigenses. Till the axiom be admitted without any limitation whatever, that no creed, not any form of doctrinal belief, but only a pure heart and an upright will, furnish the true grounds of acceptance with God,—the mode of persecution may vary and be mitigated by the humaner spirit of the age, but the principle itself remains unchanged. As it is, the worst crimes ever charged upon the Church, the profligate sale of indulgences and the dark, unbelieving tyranny of the Inquisition, attach in no way to Christianity, but to the sacerdotal principle, which is entirely alien to its spirit and was repudiated by its founders. Such crimes proceeded, not from the spirit of Christ, but from that principle of evil, that Satanic agency embodying the worst passions of human nature, which throughout the ages has been his constant and implacable opponent. Good Catholics have been the first to acknowledge this.*

Take from the strongest tendencies of the Medieval Church—its exaggerated reverence for saints, and its stern enforcement of the claims of the immortal soul—the superstitious adjuncts which have covered them with a leprous incrustation, and admit to perfect freedom of action the underlying principle which alone gave them a delusive value in the eyes of good men,—and it will be difficult to conceive a more effectual motive to the cultivation of the highest virtue, than the belief, that it

* “Si je n'étais pas diable,” says Asmodeus, “je voudrais être inquisiteur.” Le Sage, *Diable Boiteux*.

assimilates its possessor with the divine, and brings him into direct communion with a God of holiness and love, or how a more beneficent direction could be given to philanthropy, than the transference of its efforts from the bodies to the souls of men—the substitution for almsgiving, private or legal, with all its associated pauperism, of a noble and comprehensive education for all ranks, which should put every man in full possession of his native gifts, and make him the creator of his own worth and happiness. With all the errors and infirmities unavoidably cleaving to a finite humanity, such in all ages and under all forms of belief, have been substantially the aims and endeavours of the Christian Saint. They have been marked by a self-surrender to God, a forgetfulness of personal interests and claims in the promotion of others' good, and an overwhelming sense of the grandeur and sanctity of human destinies, which mere philosophy seems incapable of inspiring, and which stamp on that type of character a beauty and a venerableness peculiarly its own. The secret of its spiritual strength seems to have lain, not in any dogmas or usages, which determined the form of its intellectual and outward life, and supplied the instrumentality through which it immediately worked—but in something far deeper,—the power of throwing itself back into that fresh and living faith, that direct intuition of spiritual realities, that immediate and habitual communion with God, which in all its fulness made Christ what he was—a constant recurrence to that fountain of perennial life, which Christ's spirit has opened in the depths of the human soul, and which never ceases to flow for those who approach it in faith and love.

VIII.

Thus far I have attempted to bring out in its ultimate simplicity, what seems to me the essential element of the spiritual change wrought in human nature by Christianity. I find it, as I have stated, in a quickened sense of things unseen and eternal, enkindled by sympathy with the profound religiousness of Christ himself, and issuing in a profounder conviction of personal responsibility to a holy and loving God, the Father of the human soul. Such a change is inward and central. Once really experienced, it must re-animate and renew the whole mental and moral being. It has been sometimes objected, that the morality of the Gospel is one-sided and defective. The objection derives its plausibility from an assumption, which is wholly unfounded, that the Gospel professes to teach a system of ethics. No ethical system that made any pretension to completeness or precision, could possibly be conveyed in the occasional form which marks all the writings of the New Testament, whether historical or epistolary or apocalyptic. The one object of Christianity, as I have attempted to shew, has been to quicken the spiritual side of our nature into new activity and sensitiveness. It does not create moral distinctions which exist independently of it, but it invests them with a new tenderness and sanctity through the warm light of faith and love which it throws on them, especially on such as are closely connected with the affections and religious feeling. It leaves morality to expand and define itself under the guidance of reflective thought

constantly exercised on the ever-multiplying relations of human society, but supplies—what science of itself can never generate—that strong motive force to the will, without which the most perfect ethical system would subsist as a powerless machinery in the dead hand of the intellect. Only through an intenser spiritual life are distinctions, however clearly discerned by the understanding, transformed into moral principles. The Christian life is implicitly contained in the Christian spirit. Conscience, or the intuitive sense of moral distinctions, enters at once and from its very nature into the closest alliance with an awakened faith. The consciousness of an omnipresent and omniscient Holiness and Rectitude fills the mind with the deepest humility and an abhorrence of all impurity and unrighteousness. The clearer our view of the high destiny to which we are called, and the stronger our feeling of the capacities and opportunities with which we have been endowed—the more agonizing is the remembrance of our wilful shortcomings, and the profounder our disgust at the thought, how carnal, worldly and selfish our lower nature still continues to be. So overwhelming at times would this reflection become, that we should almost sink into despair, and believe ourselves for ever cast off from God, did not the same faith which brings home to our inmost conviction his awful holiness, assure us also of his exhaustless and fatherly love, and yield us the consoling trust, that He will never disown or abandon us, so long as there is the constant aspiration after a higher moral standard, and an earnest though often an ineffectual struggle with

infirmity and sin. That any external influence should have interposed to propitiate the merciful regards of the Infinite Love, is an idea which in some stages of mental development may have helped the feebleness of human conception and brought its modicum of rest and comfort to the troubled soul ; but to any one who has let Christ's doctrine of the Father work out its legitimate results, and has risen to the full comprehension of all that it involves, it can appear in no other light than as a restriction arbitrarily imposed by the limitation of a finite understanding on the free exercise of a Goodness that is infinite. The obvious practical inference from a complete recognition of the grand Christian truth of the fatherly goodness of God, is not only that we should keep ourselves holy, since He is holy, but that in the outgoing of our benevolent affections and in the range of our benevolent efforts, we should know no limit, but strive to be perfect as He is perfect.

Nor are the results of this faith confined to the present earthly life alone. Discerning through a primary intuition the reality of things invisible, and beholding in the risen and glorified Christ that highest type of human excellence, towards which it urges its possessors to aspire, it perceives, by its own inward light, with an assurance clearer and stronger than mere reasoning could ever produce, that what we call death is only a step in the higher life, not an extinction, but a transition. For what is the conclusion which it leaves towards the end of life even in those minds which have in the main given themselves up to its inspiration, and striven amidst much frailty and

imperfection to fulfil its suggestions? That the highest end of being, so clearly indicated to us, has been accomplished? Not at all. Rather, that after much painful experience, and a protracted struggle with passion and appetite and selfishness, some small approach has been made towards a solution of the great "secret of the Lord," and the affections and habits have at length reached that state, in which, placed under favouring conditions, they might blossom into wisdom and true holiness. That all this preparatory discipline should be in vain, that the scaffolding should be taken down, and no fabric remain, Christian faith pronounces a spiritual impossibility.—Looking at the world at large, what does it see? A great idea announced, but not realized; a grand retributory system commenced, but not completed; successful wickedness admired and promoted, simple fidelity to truth and unswerving uprightness of action depressed and discouraged; great principles slowly making their way, and the noblest individuals sacrificed in the assertion of them. Were there no God, were all mere unintelligent force and law, we should simply submit to the fact of indisputable imperfection, and bow our heads, like the victims of Juggernaut, beneath the crushing wheels of a remorseless destiny. But once admit, that a Parental Intelligence is at work behind all material forces and laws, and that where there is intelligence, there must be moral law; once admit, that even in what comes within our present ken, the moral is ever in the long run superior to the physical;—and then the very same phenomena which viewed by themselves might

have bred despair, are the occasions and stimulants to a higher faith, and point to a futurity that will solve the mystery after death. Such appear to me the natural workings and results of the Christian faith : and wherever the Christian life has existed, under whatever form of outward manifestation, they will be found, I think, either implicitly or drawn out more or less into distinct consciousness, to have been its guiding and animating principle.

For centuries preceding the Reformation, this inner life of faith had been overlaid and well-nigh stifled by a cumbrous mass of external observances, which lulled the conscience, and took from religion its spirituality, from morals all earnestness and depth. A shallow Pelagianism had superseded the stern rigour of the old Augustinian creed. Luther's great doctrine of justification by faith brought back the Church's deepest thought to the centre of all true life, and made the grounds of human trust once more inward and spiritual. His position towards the Catholic priesthood was precisely that of Paul towards the sacerdotal and rabbinical Judaism, and was doubtless the secret of his passionate sympathy with the great Apostle of the Gentiles. It was unfortunate that the further movement of Protestantism did not continue in this direction. Concentrating its interest on the interior realities of the soul itself, it would gradually have broken through the narrowness of all ecclesiastical bonds, and emerged into wider and grander truth. But the necessities of controversy in the next and ensuing generations compelled a recourse to Scripture as a present

and positive authority to countervail the hereditary pretensions of the Church: and hence the glaring inconsistencies and perpetual strife in which the Protestant churches were soon involved. They provoked opposition by the very means which they took to silence it. They confounded history with religion, and turned biography into a code.* They substituted the outward robe of Christianity for its inward life, and, tearing it into shreds, claimed for each dissevered fragment the same divine character which they affirmed of the whole. They made a fruitless attempt to reconcile the exercise of free inquiry with the retention of an authoritative book, and put forth their private interpretations as the infallible Word of God. A clearer perception of these inconsistencies has diverted the attention of the more advanced theology of the present day from the old Protestant bibliolatry to a thorough and dispassionate examination of the question, What the Scriptures really are, and how they must be used. For it is evident, that till the premises on which our controversies professedly rest, are more precisely defined and fixed, the conclusions drawn from them will continue to differ, and a common result be unattainable. This one consideration will suffice to shew the immense import-

* Impartial bystanders like Montaigne, whose intellectual discernment was not dimmed by religious sympathy, perceived this weakness of the Protestant Church in the first age of the Reformation. "Ceux là se moquent qui pensent appetisser nos debats et les arrester en nous rappelant à l'expresse parole de la Bible; d'autant que nostre esprit ne trouve pas le champ moins spacieux à controsler le sens d'aultruy qu' à représenter le sien, et comme s'il y avoit moins d'animosité et d'aspreté à gloser qu' à inventer." *Essais*, III. xiii. p. 413.

ance even in a practical view attaching to the critical studies now so keenly pursued.

The essence of Christ's religion consisted, we have seen, in the profounder sense of spiritual realities which it inspired—in its bringing men to a profounder conviction of their individual responsibility to a God of holiness and truth. Such was the effect of Christ's personal influence—of that wonderful religious sympathy which he awakened, wherever the heart was not closed against him by prejudice, selfishness or pride. This quickening power went forth from his life, from the silent action of his spirit, even more than from his words, weighty and searching as they were. For the great truths which dwelt in him, as a voice from God, as a revelation from the Father of lights, when they found utterance in any definite form of exhortation or warning or promise, rose to the surface of that Jewish age, and impressed themselves on its popular consciousness through the medium of pre-existing beliefs, and took their colour from the mental atmosphere of the time. This was inevitable. In no other way could intercourse have become intelligible between the mind of Christ and the mind of his contemporaries. The convictions that were to regenerate the world, were in their earliest apprehension necessarily cast in a Jewish mould. Such was the appointed vehicle of their transmission into a wider sphere of influence. When they struck root in other minds and were propagated into distant regions, they were again modified by the temperament, capacity and previous education of the individual who preached them, or by the social condition

of the community to which they were conveyed. But the life-giving spirit was one and the same, whatever the instrumentality through which it worked, and whatever the intellectual form which it assumed. These endless diversities of external manifestation were indeed the surest witness of the depth and fulness of the inward spiritual life. Hence the multifarious richness of our New Testament Scriptures, which transmit through various media the direct and the reflected light of the mind of Christ. Hence the marked differences in conception and feeling of James and Paul, of Matthew and John, of the epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation. Regarded as an authoritative code, this combination of irreconcilable elements would constitute a serious objection to Scripture, and wholly disqualify it for its professed object; but treated as simple narrative or the unstudied language of epistolary intercourse, this same circumstance invests it with an unspeakable charm, marking it with all the characters of unconscious freshness and reality—a genuine expression of the vigorous spiritual life, which gushed forth in every phrase of utterance from the popular heart. For ourselves at this day it is a profitable exercise to make the distinction, which every intelligent reader of Scripture must make, between the transitory forms of religious truth and its permanent substance. It keeps us from remaining indolent and passive in our spiritual education, taking what is given without thought or conviction. The very effort to enucleate the precious kernel from the historical husk, reacts on our mental state, and opens our spiritual vision,

and makes the result more fruitful through the quickening process of self-appropriation. We are beginning at length to recognize this obvious and pregnant fact in its true significance ; although in all the consequences of its application to the interpretation of the New Testament, to theological controversy, and to the retention of biblical language in our public formularies of devotion, we have yet much both to learn and to unlearn.

IX.

Different phases may be noticed in the theory of Scriptural interpretation. When the Church was supposed to possess the power of determining what was doctrinal truth, Scripture was studied to confirm and authenticate its decrees, and still occupied its ancient subordinate position to ecclesiastical tradition. Roman Catholicism is alone self-consistent in upholding this view. Yet Protestant Churches have more or less acted on it. Starting from the assumption, that their own doctrinal system was and could be the only possible and true, and that it was contained in the infallible Word of God, they at once concluded, that it had only to be sought for and it would be found. They were of course unerringly guided to it under the delusive light of what they called the *analogy of faith*, often to the grievous wrong of grammar, criticism and history—handling the Bible as no other ancient book ever was handled. Men less swayed by sectarian bias, more learned and more candid, soon discerned the inherent vice of this system of interpretation ; and in their determination to avoid it became thorough

and uncompromising Scripturalists. Their sole aim was to ascertain what Scripture really said ; and some would fain have taken the name of Bible Christians : as if the production of one clear, unambiguous biblical affirmation on a given point, settled at once and for ever all doctrinal controversy and furnished a permanent canon of doctrinal belief. In the generation that has past, sects professing very rationalistic views of theology, were almost as much under the influence of this blind letter-worship as the most rigidly orthodox. They thought they had effectually parried all attacks on their system, by saying, "Whatever the Bible clearly teaches, we accept." It was a legitimate application of the old Protestant principle of the Sufficiency of Scripture—a natural fruit of that earnest but somewhat narrow Puritanism, which has left so deep a trace behind it in all the sections of English Nonconformity. I remember in early life, when I was first beginning to turn my mind to this subject, an excellent and learned Unitarian minister once saying to me, "Whatever I find distinctly expressed in any part of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, I am prepared to receive as a Word of God."—Many of these men were scholars and critics. Their mode of procedure up to a certain point was strictly scientific. They understood the value of a sound text. They fully appreciated the importance of collating the oldest Manuscripts and Versions ; and when criticism had done its work, and they had got the best text attainable, they honestly endeavoured to bring out its original meaning by a diligent application of the grammar and lexicography of Helle-

nistic Greek, and by a comprehensive estimate of the modifying influences of contemporary opinions and events. But here, on the ground traditionally assumed by them, their real difficulties began. To say nothing of the wide discordance in doctrinal views between the different writers of the New Testament, which no critical eye could fail to discern—how, it may be asked, in the face of our modern science and actual civilization (even supposing Scripture to be ever so much in harmony with itself), would it be possible to reproduce in its original form the primitive faith of the Church, as a present principle of religious life, and still more to replace our existing relations of social intercourse by the world-aborring and ascetic usages of a small communistic body, that lived in the conscious presence of an opened heaven and in the solemn awe of an impending judgment-day? Yet this was the conclusion to which a thorough-going Scripturalism would legitimately lead, and was perhaps involved in the popular conception of a divine revelation.

And so we are brought by the irresistible current of ideas face to face with the grand critical question of the present day: What are the Scriptures? and how must we use them? When we have discharged the function of an honest exegesis, and it has yielded its final result in the form of some positive precept, some definite doctrine, some decided expectation—our task as the expounders of religious truth is only half accomplished. We have still to ask ourselves: What great spiritual principle, what permanent trust, what universal conviction, is here involved? How should we translate the

same divine truth into modern language? What would be its religious equivalent for us? Were Jesus or Paul, with the same great purpose of bringing men to God strong and operative within them—plunged in the midst of our nineteenth-century life, in the heart, for example, of some great Babel of selfishness and sin, like Paris or London—how would they now speak? how would they now act? In the presence of a totally new order of outward facts, amidst the multifarious results of a science and an art that have revolutionized men's ideas and transformed all our social relations,—in what form would they have clothed their solemn message, to bring it home with equal cogency to the awakened consciences of men? —We must have recourse here to the great distinction on which I have so constantly insisted, between dogmatic forms and a principle. Such questions seem at first view overwhelming and altogether beyond our power to answer. But their weight is lessened by the reflection, that they relate not to the superficial aspects but to the permanent foundations of our being; that right and wrong are everlastingly separated; that spiritual realities are unchanging and eternal. To conceive aright what Christ would now be and do, we must throw ourselves back into his own living faith. We must go with him direct to the Fountain of all Life and Light, and put our minds in the same attitude of devotedness and self-surrender to God. Through this communion “the eyes of the heart,” in the beautiful language of the epistle to the Ephesians, “will be enlightened;”*

* *πεφωτισμένοι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας.* i. 18.

with sharpened vision through the outer crust of Jewish belief and opinion, we shall draw out of it the deeper spiritual principles enclosed, and be capable of applying them intelligently, with that strong sense of practical reality which only historical embodiment can convey, to the altered conditions of our present human lot. We shall have learned from this analytic study, that these principles had once at least a vivid realization in actual life. The spirit of Christ is the best, and in the last resort the only satisfactory, interpreter of the recorded words of Christ.

It is instructive to notice, how providentially the mischief of a formal and outward copying even of what we justly consider most divine, seems to be guarded against by the very composition of our sacred books. The whole record is broken, fragmentary and occasional—an accumulation of scattered reminiscences, a noting down of impressions as they occurred, or a reflection of the light in which they were subsequently viewed. If we wished to fix in our minds a distinct image of Christ's outward man, as a definite rule for our personal conduct, the materials for it do not exist. The author of the well-known work "De Imitatione Christi" has filled up the wanting details from the creative fulness of a kindred spirit. Christ's presence is revealed to us amidst the events of his earthly ministry, not in clear and full-orbed brightness, but in a few rich and wonderfully suggestive gleams, like moonlight glimpses between shifting clouds,*

* — qualem primo qui surgere mense

Aut videt, aut vidisse putat per nubila Lunam.

Virg. *Æn.* vi. 453, 454.

which lay hold with a mysterious charm on our spiritual sympathies and call them into fervid, kindling action. This sympathy gushing up from the very depths of our moral being, makes us feel, that it is no dreamy vision we are gazing on, but some great reality standing in the closest relation to what is best and highest in our own souls. All the riches of this great reality we feel sure cannot be disclosed to us in those brief notices of the evangelists; there must be something richer still behind: but yielding to the spiritual impulse which it sends into our minds, we strive to follow it out into all the amplitude of conceivable perfection, not merely as it could alone exist on earth within the limits of a Jewish humanity, but as it has expanded since into the glorified proportions of a heavenly life, a divine man. The hint is given, the direction imparted to thought, by the few pregnant touches which tradition has left on the scanty page of history; but the detail is worked out and realized to our own conception by our own continuous reflection on what must have been, and must still be. Our idea of Christ dilates and completes itself with the growth of our own moral nature. No familiarity with a minutely delineated type constrains and deadens the freedom of spontaneous sympathy. All pure and devout souls, however diversified, find something in what is deepest in them, akin to the spirit of Christ. Yet Christ is not a mere idea. He becomes the ideal of a religious humanity, not independently, but in virtue, of an historical embodiment which makes it a fact, and gives it a permanent footing in reality. Had all records of the life

of Christ perished, we might feel certain, from the character of the social movement which we observe spreading through all classes towards the close of the first century of our era, that some great personality, though unknown to us, must have been at the centre of it. The mere words of a silent book, unless enforced by a living influence, could never have been followed by such deep and lasting effects.

X.

One of the most unfortunate results of the superstitious Scripturalism into which Protestantism was forced in its struggle for a final authority with the older Church, was the tendency to lay the stress of theology rather on the forms of Jewish thought than on the spiritual substance of the divine message of which they were merely the earliest historical vehicle. As a necessary consequence, controversy has been interminable and fruitless, with little other effect than to draw away men's attention and interest from vital religion. The spirit of Christ himself shines indeed clearly enough through all these forms for every mind that is open to receive it, and must be applied steadily and constantly, as I have already stated, to bring into view the deeper truth which is hidden in them. That wonderful awakening of the religious consciousness of humanity by which Christianity has re-moulded the moral condition of the world, was effected in the first instance through the medium of conceptions which belonged to Christ's own age, and with it, in their primitive form, have passed away and lost

their immediate significance. No one who reads without a bias the books of the New Testament and the writings of the early Christians, can doubt that the impelling motive to conversion and newness of life in that first age, was the expectation of a last day and an approaching judgment. If there be anything which can be truly described as the impregnating idea of the primeval Church, it is this. It has left the deepest traces on the faith of ensuing centuries, and found a sublime expression in that grand strain of medieval poetry, admired alike by Goethe and Scott—

“Dies iræ, dies illa
Solvat sæclum in favillâ”—

familiar, it is said, to thousands who have no knowledge of the general hymnology of the Latin Church. Luther's magnificent hymn is another instance of the profound impression left on the Christian mind by this awful anticipation. The belief still so closely adhering to all the popular forms of Christianity, that at the last day there will be a final and everlasting separation between the accepted and the condemned, is plainly deducible from the Jewish conception which has left no obscure impress on words put into the mouth of Jesus himself.* Yet this expectation, as originally entertained, was not realized. To this day we have subsisting evidence of the perplexity which the disappointment occasioned; and we can still follow in old writers the gradual change of opinion, which reinstated the present life in its ancient

* Matt. xxv. 46, *εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον—εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.*

rights, and carried forward the retributions by which it would be followed, into a remote and indefinite future. But was the expectation itself a delusion, because the form in which it was primarily clothed, had to be exchanged for another? I think not. It kept its hold on the human soul, through the force of the intuitive conviction which it involved—that man is responsible to God, and must render an account hereafter of his discharge of the trust committed to him.

There is another belief of that first age which seems to me to have left a visible mark, less indeed on the words of Christ himself (though even from these it is not entirely absent*) than on those of his great apostle Paul:—I mean, the association of some expiatory efficacy with the death on the cross. I have never yet been able to persuade myself, that this idea could by any unforced interpretation be fairly eliminated from the proper meaning of several passages in the Epistles.† Nor does its occurrence there surprise me. The whole conception of human intercourse with deity, pervading the Levitical as strongly as the heathen priesthoods, and through them determining and shaping the popular sentiment of the ancient world, involved the two great elements of pro-

* *λύτρον ἀντι πολλῶν*, Matt. xx. 28; Mark x. 45. See also the words of the eucharistic institution, Matt. xxvi. 28, and Mark xiv. 24, who omits *εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*.

† See Rom. iii. 25, v. 8, 9; 1 Cor. x. 16; Coloss. i. 20; Ephes. i. 7, ii. 13. Compare with these passages, as indications of early Christian belief, the following: Apocal. i. 5, v. 9; 1 John i. 7, ii. 2, iv. 10; also the peculiar and significant expression common to Hebrews xii. 24 and 1 Peter i. 2, *ῥαντισμὸς αἵματος*, and the *a fortiori* reasoning in Hebrews ix. 13, 14.

pitiation and atonement. Though prophets and poets continually strove to qualify its primitive anthropomorphic harshness, and asserted the worthlessness of mere sacrifice in and for itself, it still maintained its ascendancy, and influenced almost unconsciously even those who in their higher moods endeavoured to throw it off. In such a mental atmosphere it was perhaps impossible, without the constant presence of a counteracting miracle, for the martyr-death of Christ to acquire any spiritual influence and significance without drawing to itself some of the popular beliefs with which the whole of that atmosphere was so deeply impregnated. Yet the principle implied in such beliefs, if pushed logically into all its consequences, as by a later theology it was—was plainly at war with the full development of the greatest truth brought by Christ into the world—that God's mercy is gratuitous and free, that he is essentially Love, the Father of the whole human race. We escape the perplexity which this apparent contradiction occasions, by recurring to the distinction so often referred to, between the spiritual substance of a great universal truth, and the unavoidable limitation of the historical forms in which it must submit for a time to be clothed. The age of Christ was a period of transition, when the older and the newer thought came into inevitable collision, and could not at once disentangle and separate themselves. But facts have a language which is intelligible to all time, however various and conflicting the interpretations which they may have suggested. We can never look on the cross of Christ, "towering," as it does, "over all the

wrecks of time," without a profound conviction, not only that self-sacrifice for others' good is the highest form of human virtue, but that the moral order of this world is so constituted, that its wickedness and misery are only to be stayed, and its gradual elevation to a purer and happier condition effected, by the toil, the suffering, sometimes even the death, of the holiest and the best; an appointment which would seem partial and unjust, if man's whole being were limited to this brief terrestrial life, but which at once assumes the form of a wise and benignant provision, when it is looked on as a discipline for purifying and perfecting human character, and fitting it for the exercise of the nobler functions which await it in another state of existence.

In this same category of a historical form embodying a spiritual principle, I should without hesitation have placed the doctrine of the Incarnation of a personal Word—but for the exclusive importance attached to it by some highly cultivated and religious minds, as the central truth and cardinal fact of Christianity. It ought not, therefore, to be disposed of in a mere general reference, without a more particular consideration. I would remark, in the first place, in regard to the pre-eminent claim which is set up for it—that it certainly cannot be classed with the primary religious intuitions of the soul, like the sense of a Living God, a personal responsibility, a moral government, and a future retribution. It is at most but a form in which the consciousness of these spiritual relations has realized itself. Again, we can distinctly trace the dogma of the Incarnation to its his-

torical origin in the speculations of a certain philosophical school, which had their root in the effort of an incipient reflection, to solve the problem, how matter and spirit could act and re-act on each other. If I rightly apprehend the views of the advocates of this doctrine, they think it brings man into closer relationship with God, by exhibiting humanity as a sort of extrusion of deity (*ὁ λόγος προφορικός*) into conscious thought and personality—individuals and nations being only the smaller and larger members of a great archetypal man, who binds them altogether in one grand organic whole. Great stress is laid on the moral influence of this system, in consequence of the nearer hold which it is supposed to give us on deity, by the admission of a divine presence still essentially human, with which we are every moment in spiritual contact. But I would ask, Is there anything morally elevating in this view, which is not equally attained by regarding Christ as a man peculiarly organized and endowed by God for a great spiritual work; the medium, through which God's Spirit operated with a regenerating power on humanity; a personality, which during a short space disclosed glimpses of a life truly divine on earth, and then, leaving an imperishable record behind, passed on to a glorified life in heaven—there to be looked up to and aspired after as the religious ideal of humanity, with vision ever clearer, as his spirit with the onward flow of time more thoroughly leavens our nature and approximates it to the divine? We know no more of the internal economy of deity or of the secrets of the invisible world, on one theory than on the other. We can still

only press upward to a less inadequate conception of God, through our highest aspirations and most exalted moral ideas. Christ gives the key-note to our spiritual sympathies just as much on one view as on the other. It is only by realizing our spiritual kindred with him, and yielding to the spiritual impulse which he communicates, that we are able in any degree to transcend the limits of the visible and invisible, and dimly image to ourselves the distant heights to which our humanity may hereafter rise. It was the belief of the first Christians, that the risen Christ had become the head of a new spiritual creation; that his spirit, appropriated by faith, circulated like a new life-blood among his followers, and wrought them into a living organism, and constituted his body, the earthly realization of his presence—the Church.* Whatever may have been originally the precise force of these phrases, they are as readily translated into the present idiom of religion on our theory as on that of the Incarnation. We can only realize Christ now through his spirit. It is the spirit which makes us one with him, and through him with the Father. The interposition of a second deity between God and the human soul, seems to me only to put back to a greater distance the One Supreme, whom Christ taught us to believe in as ever present, and pray to at once as our Father in heaven—the Being to whom we must all ultimately come, and who will at length be all in all. On our view, we begin with the humanity of Christ, as it is revealed to us in the Gospels, and ascend through it

* Colossians, i. 17—20, with the parallel passages in Ephesians.

to a conception of deity in its intimate relations with our nature, which will become clearer and deeper, the more we imbibe Christ's spirit and live Christ's life. Change Christ from a man into an incarnate god, and it appears to me that we at once incur this difficulty. If we practically bring home to us his humanity, we lose the divine in that exalted, absolute form which is specially claimed for the doctrine of the Incarnation. If, on the other hand, we expand our conception of him into deity, we miss the peculiar benefit of all the tenderness and human love and accommodation to our human weakness, which gives the assumed value to his manifestation in the flesh. Poised, as it were, between two natures, the conception, according to my feeling, lacks on each side the impress of reality.

I know how difficult it is for those who think differently on doctrinal questions, fully to enter into each other's views, and do them adequate justice. If there are those who can best realize their personal relation to deity through the theory of an incarnation, that is no doubt the true Christianity for them. But a living sense and conviction of that personal relation is assuredly the main thing. The mode of access to it is a subordinate question, which it is impossible for one mind to settle for another, and where each must be left to judge for itself. In this neutral position I should gladly have left the matter, but for the pretension which seems by implication to be occasionally put forth—that the doctrine of the Incarnation is a *sine qua non*, involving the vital issue of belief or no belief in Christianity. This I

cannot concede. While perfectly willing to admit the possibility of its relative value as an intellectual view, adapted to the wants of a certain order of minds, I must contend, that neither intuitional origination, nor independence of history, nor any moral and spiritual influence exceptionally attaching to it, justify its transference from a place among the forms to the essentials of Christianity.

XI.

If the distinction which I have endeavoured to establish be sound, it will materially affect the future character of theological controversy, by shewing that much of it has turned rather on the historical forms than on the spiritual substance of divine truth, and was therefore not worth the expenditure of zeal and uncharitableness which it has cost. Theology must henceforth take the more profitable direction of endeavouring to trace philologically the origin of these historical forms and developing the elements of popular conception which they involve, and still more of drawing out into clear view, by a reference to the permanent demands and aspirations of the soul, the deeper religious principle which is hidden under them. By such a change of aim, theology will become more peaceable in its demeanour and more abundant in its spiritual fruits. Many questions which have bred incurable disputes, will be seen to belong entirely to history, and to have no claim to be classed among the eternal verities of religion. There is, however, a point of no unimportant practical bearing yet remaining behind;

which the present tendencies of criticism, if we are to deal consistently with their results, will compel us to take into serious consideration. As theologians, we may be content to regard many of the subjects of former controversy as relating to mere forms of Jewish or Hellenistic thought. But there is a rich and exceedingly beautiful religious diction, founded on the popular beliefs and conceptions of the primitive age, which has entered largely into our accepted formularies of devotion, and imprinted itself in uneffaceable characters on the hymnology of the universal Church. In this language Christian poets have always sung; and in the ideas which it has circulated, the piety of Christendom has ever lived and moved and had its being. Regarded as the literal expression of theological truth, many of the epithets and phrases which abound in our prayers and hymns can no longer be accepted in the sense in which there is no doubt they were originally employed by the writers of the New Testament. We are obliged, therefore, to ask ourselves, whether that is a reason why they should be discarded altogether? why some of the sublimest utterances of the Common Prayer and in the devotional compositions of Jeremy Taylor, some of the finest breathings in verse of Luther, Paul Gerhard, George Herbert, Watts, Doddridge and the Wesleys, should drop out of the consecrated use which they have so long enjoyed in our churches and homes? I will explain more distinctly what I mean. Many of the epithets applied to Christ in all devotional compositions, such as Lord, King, Saviour, Redeemer, Judge—many of the descriptions of his Messianic work

as an Atonement (*καταλλαγή*), as a Purchase, Redemption and Salvation of the Elect (*ἐκλεκτοί*)—even the most comprehensive view of his ministry as a founding of the kingdom of God and the preparation of men by repentance and regeneration for an approaching judgment-day, with that grand distinction of the present and the future life, of heaven and hell—all this language had reference to, and took its earliest signification from, the one idea which pervades the New Testament from beginning to end, and is the basis both of its warnings and of its promises,—viz., that Messiah's kingdom would be speedily introduced by the dissolution of the existing state of things, the actual *κόσμος*, and by the holding of that grand and solemn assize by Christ in the name of God, at which those who had embraced the offers made them would be saved, and those who had rejected them would perish. Shades of difference in the conception of these impending solemnities, with a language more or less sensuous or spiritual corresponding to them, may doubtless be traced in the several books of the New Testament; but that this is the impregnating idea of their collective thought and tendency, and lies at the bottom of all their phraseology, however diversified, no one who reads them with unbiassed mind will venture, I think, to dispute; and as little, that, taken in its original and proper sense, the language founded on that expectation, which has found its way into the hymns and prayers of the universal Church, not only never had a historical justification, but is rarely if ever literally applied and realized by any reflecting Christian at the present day. Are we, then, I

again ask, compelled to relinquish all this wealth of devotional expression, this exhaustless fund of religious imagery and illustration, in which the holiest souls have found solace and strength, and into which the noblest thought, the sweetest affection and the most fervent piety, have been breathed in every Christian tongue—because we cannot reconcile it with historical fact, or bring it into exact accordance with the rigid inferences of a critical theology? Must we let the fresh, spontaneous poetry of the soul, clothing itself in the rich and variegated tints of popular conception, fade away into the pale and colourless abstractions, which may leave the logical intellect unoffended, but carry no deep meaning to the conscience and the heart? I cannot but think that we should lose far more than we gained by any such theological scrupulousness. Words that have come down to us through a long course of moral and spiritual transmission, have acquired by their very contact with a succession of minds, a depth and fulness and many-sidedness of meaning, which it is important to preserve, though it may often lie obscure and dim, and which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to replace by all the brightness and sharpness of a new verbal coinage. One of the most intellectual of our living writers, in an admirable chapter of his *Logic*, has remarked, “that in attempting to rectify the use of a vague term by giving it a fixed connotation, we must take care not to discard (unless advisedly, and on the ground of a deeper knowledge of the subject) any portion of the connotation which the word, in however indistinct a manner, previ-

ously carried with it. For otherwise language loses one of its inherent and most valuable properties, that of being the conservator of ancient experience; the keeper-alive of those thoughts and observations of former ages, which may be alien to the tendencies of the passing time."*

In the spirit of this profoundly wise and philosophical observation, I would earnestly plead for the general retention, on grounds to be presently stated, of that rich legacy of religious diction which we inherit from the birth and infancy of Christianity, as the vehicle at least of a living piety, if not an adequate exponent of scientific theology. What recommends the language of the primitive Church, as a nutriment of devotional sentiment, above any that could be now substituted for it, is the broad and obvious distinction—that the former is the product of an age of religious inspiration, the fresh and popular outpouring of intuitive belief; while the other, unless it could become a new utterance of the primeval faith, must to a large extent be the cold and calculated product of the reflective intellect. Criticism, by rendering more clear the difference between the forms of religious conception and the substance of religious truth, is helping to effect the separation between religion and theology, and to bring within the domain of religious poetry a wide range of the most beautiful and expressive phraseology, which the scrupulousness of the old rationalistic theology hesitated to accept. I shall never forget the sense of relief which came over my mind, when I

* System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: by John Stuart Mill. Book iv. Ch. iv. 6.

first realized to myself all that was involved in the full recognition of this distinction. I rejoiced in the feeling, that I could throw myself back with a hearty sympathy into much of the old poetry and devotion, which the cramping influence of a dogmatic theology had once held me back from adopting, but of which I could now discern the rich symbolical significance, even while admitting that much of its original historical meaning had passed away. It should never be forgotten, that the Jewish beliefs and expectations which have left so deep an impress on the doctrinal language of Christendom, were the popular utterance in that historical form of grand and permanent religious intuitions; and that while the form has unavoidably lost with time its original and immediate application, the intuitions which it clothed remain unchanged. The retributions which await the present life are carried, we have found, into the distant future beyond the veil of death; and the solemnities of the final judgment, we may no longer believe, will be conducted with the forms of an oriental tribunal, as described in Matthew. But every Christian still believes that there will be a retributory future, when he will be judged by a heart-searching God according to those principles of justice and mercy which are set forth in the Gospel. The kingdom of God, we now know, will not come and be established in the way expected by the ancient Chiliasts and so gorgeously described in the Apocalypse. But we still believe that there is a kingdom of God, foreseen and announced with such wonderful glimpses into futurity by ancient prophets; and that it

is slowly making its way over the earth in opposition to all tyranny and wickedness and ungodliness, furnishing a trial and discipline for men in their passage through this life, but destined to work out all its results and attain its full dimensions in the unseen world to come. We still believe in a spiritual rule over men's hearts and lives, of which Christ, by the spirit he brought with him into the world and embodied in his person and history, is the recognized Head, and which, through some agency unknown to us, he may be still upholding and enforcing in that more glorious state of action and influence which he now occupies. We may no longer hold that there will be that absolutely sharp and final separation of good and bad men at the last day, which the popular language of some passages in the New Testament seems to imply ; nor that simple escape from such a judgment embraces the whole of that salvation which Christ is declared to have effected for sinful men by his expiatory death on the cross. But this we do still believe : that sin cuts off men from filial communion with God and that eternal life which is only to be found in Him ; that sin persisted in precipitates the soul into hell ; that repentance and earnest striving after goodness open the gate of heaven ; that no influence has yet been found so effectual to raise men out of animalism and selfishness to a higher life, as the spirit of Christ stirring their consciences and touching their hearts—above all, the devout contemplation of his cross, as an enduring symbol in the eye of all time, of the beauty of self-sacrifice, of the grandeur of martyrdom in the cause of truth and human weal, of the infi-

nity greater value of the world that is entered, than of the world that is left behind, in death. Considering, then, the very close and vital connection between those Jewish conceptions and the imperishable truths enshrined in them; considering further, that to those who first uttered them, the form and the truth were so completely blended into one, had so thoroughly interpenetrated each other, that the form itself acquired from this conjunction a force and expressiveness which no subsequent phraseology, though more philosophically correct, could possibly replace—I feel no difficulty, I confess, in the language of prayer and religious poetry, in freely applying to Christ such epithets as Lord, Saviour, Redeemer, Judge and King, or in speaking of a kingdom of God and a last judgment, of heaven and hell, and of our deliverance from sin and its consequences by the faith which attaches to the Cross of Christ:—although I admit, that these modes of expression, like all utterances of deep spiritual meaning, have associated themselves with different conceptions at different periods, as they may still perhaps do in different minds, and being mere forms of belief cannot be subjected to rigid scientific definition, or properly be made a subject of theological dispute. When we read the invocation of that fine hymn in Martineau's Collection for the Christian Church and Home—

“Great Chief of faithful souls! arise;”

or what immediately follows it—

“O King of earth! the Cross ascend;
O'er climes and ages, 'tis thy throne;”

we at once apprehend and adopt the profound spiritual significance of this exalted language, and never dream of limiting it by a cold, critical reference to the narrower Jewish associations which may possibly have clung to its original Scripture equivalents.

Of course, a wise and faithful application of the distinction on which I have been insisting, demands on the part of the public teachers of religion redoubled earnestness in two very important respects : first, in explaining clearly and unreservedly to their flocks, what the Scriptures are, and how, in using them, it is necessary to separate the eternal substance of truth, to which the Spirit of God bears a direct and perpetual witness in every awakened soul, from the outward forms, imaginative or intellectual, which, from the very necessity of its historical transmission, it has successively assumed ; and secondly, in cultivating, by prayer and habitual communion with God, that same spirit of living faith out of which these forms at first spontaneously sprung, and which, by infusing into their continued use an element of their original vitality, must prevent their lapsing into mere professional conventionalisms, the worn-out diction of an age that has passed away. To accomplish these ends, the Christian education of our youth must be far more complete and thorough-going, and form a far more important element in the discipline of our schools and colleges, than is at present the case ; so that the mind may be imbued from the beginning of its course with an intelligent love and reverence for the sacred literature of the Bible, far transcending in its influence over the

habitual tone of thought and feeling, the purely æsthetic admiration which a classical scholar imbibes from the studies of early life for the old poets and sages of Greece and Rome. If hard-minded, so-called practical men somewhat impatiently ask, Why cannot we have all this instruction in a definite, positive form at once?—we can only reply, that the actual process is an inevitable condition of the possession of a religion historically transmitted—of the great revelation of God in history; and that perhaps not one of the least advantages of the spiritual discipline thus provided for us is, that it cannot be enjoyed to the full without large general culture, and that we reap its benefits indirectly and by successive efforts of self-appropriation.

One obvious limitation to the continued use of old scriptural phraseology will at once suggest itself:—where the form is so deeply imbued with the narrow and dark ideas of the age which gave it birth, that it overpowers and for us spiritually deadens the force of the truth buried under it or more remotely connected with it. We have constantly to bear this in mind, in making use, in our public or private devotions, of those wonderful compositions, the Psalms—the deepest utterances from the inmost heart of humanity that ever reached the ear of the outer world. Two examples occur to me at this moment from the New Testament, where the ultimate fate of the wicked and unbelieving is set forth with a terrific intensity of vengeful feeling, which no Christian, who has once imbibed the spirit of his Great Master, can possibly adopt. I refer to the description of the Last Judgment in 2 Thes-

salonians i. 6—9, and that fearful picture of the "great wine-press of the wrath of God," which is to be found in the Apocalypse, xiv. 19, 20.

XII

The natural result of carrying out into their legitimate consequences, the principles which I have here attempted to establish, as furnishing the true explanation of the phenomena of Christianity,—would be the introduction, not indeed of one outward form of ecclesiastical association, which even if possible would be hardly compatible with the freest exercise and manifestation of the religious life—but of an union of many churches, separated by no impassable dogmatic barriers, freely exchanging their sympathies and services, nourished at the same fountains of learning and science, recognized as equal by an impartial government, and exhibiting only diversified expressions of a common national life. It is constantly objected to such proposals as these, that they are visionary and impracticable. But why are they so? Not because there is anything absurd or impossible in the theory itself; but because different parties are too closely wedded to their ancient usages and their doctrinal predilections, to open their minds to the true nature of Christianity, and admit all the consequences that would flow from the acceptance of its essential principle. It is only by the ceaseless assertion of this principle, however unseasonable and premature it may be thought, and clearly indicating the obvious issue of its adoption, that we can hope gradually to produce such a change in public opi-

nion, as must lead to the final extinction of the present sectarian constitution of society. If the religious mind were as ready as the scientific to accept facts, and reason them logically into their results, there would ensue, not indeed the dull stagnation of unquestioning uniformity—for there would still remain many differences of opinion and much matter for earnest discussion—but controversy would at least turn on subjects capable of clear statement and intelligible explanation, and promising some spiritual fruit. In the religious as in the scientific world, there would be a steady growth and development of thought. Unfortunately, the premises which are defined or definable in science, in the case of religion are either left entirely vague, or arbitrarily limited and fixed by purely gratuitous assumptions. There has been a vain attempt to convert theology into a science, without first clearly separating the permanent and mutable elements that are involved in its subject matter. How this may be done, I have attempted in the foregoing sections to shew. To the hindrance of all advance in true spiritual insight, the attention of religious inquirers has been diverted from the thoughtful study of the manifold workings of God's Spirit in the human soul, to the one-sided and technical construction of an ancient document which simply attests some of the more wonderful and striking manifestations of them. In every section of Christendom the assumption has more or less prevailed, that the whole of Christianity is to be found in some one definite doctrinal statement, which each claims as its own, and then tries to substantiate by a copious induction of

texts from every part of what it regards vaguely, without any distinct apprehension of the meaning of the term—as the authoritative Word of God.

What interminable strife has been the consequence, the past history of Protestantism only too clearly shews. From a misconception of the very nature and only possible conditions of a historical revelation, theologians have pitched for the special subjects of their controversy precisely on those points that were unessential, as attaching to the mere form of transmission, and have neglected almost with contempt the great and imperishable intuitions, on which all faith must ultimately rest, as belonging to what they called natural religion. When to this vague and arbitrary apprehension of the premises, was added the vain attempt to apply scientific methods in the development of their doctrinal results, we can well understand the unsatisfactory condition in which theological learning still remains. The comparatively modern subject of the Evidences which aims at proving scientifically the truth of Christianity, dates from the time when the cultivation of the inductive sciences began to tell on the higher thought of Europe, and the faith was shaken in those appeals to an interior tribunal and the witness of the Spirit, which had satisfied the more thoughtful of the mediæval divines, and are still recognized as conclusive in the oldest confessions of Protestantism. After the time of Bacon, it was felt, that Christianity should be placed on the same scientific footing as the other branches of human knowledge and inquiry. If I am not mistaken, we hardly meet with

regular treatises on the Evidences, as that subject is now understood, till the seventeenth century—the age of Grotius and Chillingworth, Huet and Locke.* At the present day men's minds are gradually reverting once more to spiritual sources for the ultimate elements of religious faith; and even the physical sciences are assuming a form and direction in which the questions of a first philosophy must again be entertained, and the great controversy will have to be settled between the Theist and the Atheist, whether the universal and eternal Force which is admitted to underlie all phenomena, can receive any satisfactory explanation, apart from the acknowledgment of a Supreme and Infinite Intelligence. Grant this, which is the truth of truths, and religion has a basis in reality, on which its whole superstructure of trust and hope may by the continued agency of prophetic insight be solidly built up.†

Meanwhile, in the acceptance, as their bond of union and ground of sympathy, of that holy and benignant

* Perhaps the nearest approach at an earlier period to a modern treatise on the Evidences, marking clearly the distinction between Natural and Revealed Religion, is to be found in the once celebrated book of the Spaniard, Raymund of Sabunde, "Theologia Naturalis sive Liber Creaturarum," published at Thoulouse in 1436, which Montaigne at the dying request of his father rendered into French, to counteract the disturbing effect of the new doctrines of Luther, and which was objected to by adherents of the old school, for venturing to uphold the authority of the Christian faith by human reasons. See *Essais de Montaigne*, Livre II. Ch. xii.

† "In all phenomena, the more closely they are investigated, the more are we convinced that, humanly speaking, neither matter nor force can be created or annihilated, and that an essential cause is unattainable. *Causation is the will, Creation the act, of God.*"—Grove on the Correlation of Physical Forces : Concluding Remarks.

Theism, of which the Bible is the richest record, and Christianity the purest and most vigorous expression, religious men of all parties will find a source of light and strength more favourable to the development and diffusion of a spiritual life in the world, than in the maintenance of that state of armed neutrality with its fallacious show of an outward freedom, by which law and public opinion uphold at present a precarious peace between a multitude of hostile sects.

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