

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

must take medicine at times. And our spiritual health and soundness depend rather on our souls being fed by a constant fellowship with God, and trained by an habitual obedience to his will, than by our direct attempts to cure this disordered function or that.

CARPUS.

CRITICAL SCEPTICISM.¹

CHRISTIANITY differs from all other religions in this, that it is the interpretation of a history. The Revelation is given completely, and once for all, in the facts of a Life. The Religion is the practical embodiment of man's apprehension of the facts gained little by little according to his present powers. Other religions have been historical, taking their rise, that is, from the teaching of a definite founder, or slowly shaped from point to point by successive messages accepted as Divine. But Christianity is not simply historical; it is the proclamation of facts whereby the relations of man to God, to the world, and to humanity, are placed in a new light.

This being so, Christianity stands in a definite and wholly peculiar relation toward historical inquiry. We cannot take for our guidance the principles of Christian morality, or the broad generalizations which flow directly from the Christian

¹ This paper was read by the Rev. B. F. Westcott, D.D., Canon of Peterborough and Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge, at the Church Congress, held at Brighton in October, 1874. Canon Westcott has kindly consented to its reproduction in the pages of THE EXPOSITOR, "in whole or in part"; and our readers will, I am sure, be impressed with the value of its cogent argument and fine expository suggestions.—EDITOR.

view of life, apart from the central facts of the Life of Christ. These facts supply the sanction for ideas, and the motive for a course of action which we feel to be in harmony with our nature. But without the facts the ideas are only vague aspirations, and the course of action only a beautiful theory. If, however, "*Jesus is the Lord,*" if "*God raised him from the dead,*" the faith and the effort have a solid basis.

Our Christian belief, therefore, appeals to historical criticism for the investigation of its foundations. It claims for the substance of the Gospel no immunity from the ordinary methods by which the truth of facts is ascertained, so far as the facts fall within their scope. But this qualification is essential. For when we approach the historical investigation of the Life of Christ, it is essential that we should remember that the facts of his life must be regarded under a double aspect. They are external phenomena, and they are also revelations. Under the first aspect they belong to the course of this world, and require to be examined just as any other facts. Under the second aspect they present to us, as we are able to bear them, glimpses of another world of which antecedently we can form no positive conception. Thus there are two distinct questions included in every inquiry into the Gospel history, which are almost always confounded. The first is, Have we adequate proof that the alleged facts were real? and the second, What is the interpretation which we must set upon them? Testimony, taking the word in its fullest meaning, is the appropriate instrument for dealing with the first question. The religious faculty—if I may use in passing this convenient

term — is the appropriate instrument for dealing with the second. Testimony can establish facts, or, strictly speaking, a cotemporary and consecutive belief in facts, but faith alone can acknowledge miracles. The notion of a miracle includes a particular form of interpretation of the outward phenomena, involving the acknowledgment of a personal spiritual Power, which testimony cannot give. The utmost, therefore, that testimony can do is to bring the conviction that certain external impressions were received, and that the fact, which represents the sum of them, was admitted as true, more or less immediately, widely, effectively. The interpretation of the fact thus believed comes afterward, and is wholly separate from the investigation of the reality of the fact itself. Any particular fact may be regarded, rightly or wrongly, as shewing the immediate personal action of God, as being, in other words, miraculous; but the miraculous character of the fact is not a proper subject for testimony. Testimony enables us to decide whether the alleged facts were observed and believed under such circumstances that, being what we are, we are bound to accept them as real. Then in due course we proceed to consider how we are to interpret them.

This distinction being borne in mind, my contention is, that the sceptical criticism of the groundwork of Christianity is chargeable with three grave faults. It fails to recognize the nature of the problem to be discussed. It fails to take account of the cumulative and total force of the direct evidence in favour of the facts alleged. It fails to appreciate the exact religious character of the facts themselves.

This is a wide accusation; and within the limits of a paper I can only indicate the manifold lines of argument which carry conviction to my own mind. But in such a case it is of primary importance to obtain a view of the whole field over which the inquiry is spread. Nothing is easier than to point out a weak position here, a false deduction there; and so the judgment is confused by being directed to isolated details. No battle is so won that every part of the victorious army escapes repulse and check. But these partial failures do not alter the main result.

I. Sceptical criticism fails, I say, to recognize the nature of the problem under discussion. This is, as we have seen, the determination of the circumstances under which the facts of the Life of Christ were believed, with a view to estimating the force of that belief in carrying conviction of their objective reality to ourselves. This question of their reality is not one which can be decided by abstract reasoning. It is not our part as historical inquirers to discuss whether miracles are possible or not. It is obviously irrational to maintain that any historical induction can be complete. No one can be justified in assuming that we have exhausted in a limited experience the potentialities of life. If, then, a critic holds that there is no God, or that, if He is, we cannot come to know Him, or that his action, as far as we are concerned, is completely measured by the generalizations which we call laws of nature, unprejudiced inquiry into the Gospel history is impossible for him. All that remains for him to determine is, how narratives which are by his hypothesis necessarily false came to be considered true. This

is a discussion on which a Christian cannot enter; and while he will carefully weigh every argument against the trustworthiness of the Gospels which may be advanced in the discussion, he will necessarily remember that their untrustworthiness is an assumption of the disputant. On this fundamental point, then, there ought to be a clear understanding. Are we, or are we not, agreed that the contents of the Gospels may be true? Many writers, however—and this is an injustice which I wish to mark as strongly as I can—profess to examine impartially the historic value of the Gospels, when really they are endeavouring, perhaps unconsciously, to justify the foregone conclusion that their contents must be explained away. And though nothing is more common than to hear contemptuous denunciations of the prejudice of believers, it is evident that the weight of this charge of prejudice lies upon their opponents. Faith is, at least, consistent with the admission of the inaccuracy of the particular records, but fatalistic scepticism is not consistent with their truth. An “orthodox” critic may be inclined to favour one conclusion, but a uniformitarian critic is pledged to the other. He has decided the problem, which he seems to discuss historically, on other than historic grounds.

II. Every fair critic will probably admit the justice of defining, in the sense which I have indicated, the position which he occupies, and I will not insist further upon a fault which, if most common, still cannot be defended. The second charge which I bring against sceptical criticism will require to be set out at greater length. (1.) Sceptical critics fail

to take account of the cumulative and total force of the direct evidence in favour of the facts alleged. (2.) They criticize special documents without regard to the general belief which the documents express. (3.) Of these documents they criticize special parts without regard to the relation in which the parts stand to the entire books. (4.) They isolate the documentary evidence from the testimony of the living body.

(1.) These four specific counts of my indictment can, I believe, be fully substantiated by proofs accessible to every student of Scripture. It is not necessary to dwell at length upon the first. It is enough to point out the important circumstance which is overlooked in popular assaults upon the reality of the facts of the Life of Christ, that the truth of the Resurrection, to keep this one event before us, is attested by a significant variety of testimony. The evidence of St. Paul, of the Synoptists, and of St. John, is at least independent. And in these we have the witness of a convert, the witness of the Apostolic Church, the witness of an apostle. Each kind of witness supplements the other. There is no possibility of supposing that Christianity ever existed apart from the belief in this crowning miracle of the Resurrection. And we could not have had more varied proof in writing of the reality and efficacy of the belief.

I shall touch afterward on the witness of the Synoptists and of St. John. I will now only insist in passing on the force and fulness of the witness of St. Paul. As literary evidence, this is the earliest and the most unquestioned which has come down to

us. No one doubts that we have in the Epistles to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Romans, the very words of the Apostle of the Gentiles, written less than thirty years after the death of Christ, and no one can doubt that the fact of the Resurrection is the centre of his Christian faith. "*If Christ be not raised,*" this is his message from first to last to his converts, "*your faith is vain.*" If we go back to the date of the conversion of St. Paul, which turned upon a belief in the reality of the Resurrection, his testimony is carried on some years earlier. We have then here the case of a man of whose intellect we can judge, who had had intimate knowledge for some time of Christ's life and belief; who, within ten years after the event took place, accepted it as a reality which changed his whole mode of life and thought; who affirmed it in a literal sense with an intensity of affirmation which cannot be exceeded. The religious revolution in this case can be measured; and the cause which we assign for it, whatever it be, must be adequate.

The second and third counts of the accusation are justified by the manner in which sceptical critics deal respectively with the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St. John. In dealing with the Synoptists, they disregard the relation of the record to the current belief. In dealing with St. John, they neglect the relation of a few specific details to the characteristic features of the whole narrative. I will touch upon each of these two points.

(2.) In recent popular examinations of the Synoptic Gospels it appears to be assumed that their authority is disposed of, if it can be shewn that we

cannot be certainly assured of their immediate apostolic authorship; that they present marks of close resemblance to other Gospels which obtained partial currency in portions of the early Church; that for some time the written narratives of the works of Christ were not regarded as Scripture in the same sense as the books of the Old Testament. But without entering on any one of those topics which are of the deepest interest to believers, I venture to say that if all these conclusions are admitted, the peculiar value of the simple historical evidence of the first three Gospels is quite unchanged. One or two unquestionable facts will (as I hope, justify the statement which I have made.

In the first place, then, if we set aside St. John's Gospel, which does not come into consideration here, these narratives contain almost all that we know of the history of Christ. A little reflection will shew the importance and bearing of this observation. Few things indeed can be more surprising than the barrenness of uncanonical tradition as to the Gospel. It may well move our wonder that if we look only at what may fairly be regarded as authentic, not more than three or four sayings of Christ, and one or two slight details of fact, have been preserved elsewhere which are not given substantially in the Synoptists. On the other hand, we find in the apostolic writings—the Acts and the Epistles—an outline of Christ's Life and Work corresponding, as far as it goes, with that found in the first three Gospels; and we find, also, numerous references in the earliest Fathers to words and incidents which they contain. This latter fact is

evidently of the highest moment ; for it follows that, whether we suppose that these references were made to tradition, or to our Gospels, or to other similar records, the contents of our Gospels, in any case, are coincident in substance and even in form with those accounts of Christ's Life which were current in the early Church and everywhere received as true. The general narrative of the Synoptists was accepted by Ebionites, no less than by Catholics. Let the divisions of the early Church be exaggerated by perverse and fanciful ingenuity as much as the passion for theorizing may require, and their witness still goes back to a date prior to all division.

This being so, we are necessarily led, in the next place, to a definite conclusion as to the substantial authorship of the Synoptic narrative. The narrow limitation of the contents of the Evangelic Record, and the acceptance of this limited record by all parties, can only be explained on the supposition that the brief selection of representative events was made at the very beginning of the Christian Society, and by men who had acknowledged authority. No other hypothesis will account satisfactorily for the complete suppression of the innumerable other incidents of Christ's Life, and for the general circulation of this significant abridgment. We are, then, justified in affirming that the Synoptic record is essentially far more than the testimony of one writer, or of three writers. It is the testimony of the Apostolic Church, or rather of the apostles, that Evangelical summary which St. Paul implies that he received.

And yet more than this. The few fragments of

the other early Gospels which remain enable us to compare these in some degree with the canonical Gospels as to their general character. The result is, that there can be no reasonable doubt that our Gospels preserve the common materials in the simplest and purest form. The uncanonical parallels offer in several instances legendary details and interpretative glosses, which are not found in the writings of our Evangelists. We have, then, in these not only the general testimony of the first preachers of Christianity, of the apostolic circle at Jerusalem, but we have in them that testimony in its most original shape. Now negative critics, I repeat, do not give fair weight to these certain historical conclusions. They do not recognize the positive value of a general consent as to the reality of the constituent facts of the Gospel, co-existing, it may be, with small differences in detail, of which facts our Synoptic Gospels are the faithful records.

(3.) I pass now to the Gospel of St. John. And if negative critics have failed in apprehending the real character of the testimony of the Synoptists, they have failed, if possible, still more signally in dealing with St. John. Those very features in his narrative by which it is marked as an individual testimony, bearing in every detail the impress of individual experience, and so distinguished from the general narrative of the Synoptists, have been urged as objections against its authenticity. If the Synoptic narratives had professed to be, according to the superficial popular notion, personal and independent histories, such objections might have had weight.

As it is, they are as a whole quite beside the mark ; and the only point for discussion is, whether the individualities of detail in the Fourth Gospel correspond with the position of the alleged writer. If they do, the general differences in scope, in substance, in style, between the Fourth Gospel and the other three are of no moment.

To say that this exact correspondence does exist between the contents of the Fourth Gospel and the circumstances of its composition, according to the Catholic belief, is simply to say, in another shape, that I have weighed again and again every word of the narrative, and allowed each phrase to receive its full meaning as part of a whole inspired by a living unity. For nothing less than an analysis of the book verse by verse, candid and patient,¹ can bring home to each student the conviction of its apostolic authorship, as it may be brought home even intellectually. But as a mere sample of the fallaciousness of criticisms which still pass current, I will take two illustrations of special knowledge in the writer in relation to two topics on which he has been accused of ignorance.

The writer of the Fourth Gospel, it is said, makes many mistakes as to the geography of Palestine : it is said also that he falls into error even in regard to the simplest facts of the Jewish institutions. I do not purpose to examine the arguments which are

¹ Such an inquiry has been made by Mr. Sanday in his singularly calm and convincing essay, "*On the Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel*," 1872. A further application of the principles of moral analysis which he lays down completely removes (as I believe) the reservations which he makes as to some of the records of the Lord's discourses.

alleged in support of these statements. I can, indeed, hardly understand how any impartial critic can still repeat them. But if it can be shewn that the author of the Fourth Gospel possesses an exact and minute acquaintance with geographical details which were obliterated by the destruction of Jerusalem ; if it can be shewn that he deals in the freedom of complete mastery with phases of Jewish thought which had passed away early in the second century : then it will be superfluous to do more. Positive knowledge of this kind is a final answer to the allegation of supposed mistakes. And, unless I am greatly in error, any one who will collect for himself from the Fourth Gospel the incidental notices which it contains of the topography of the Holy City, and of the Messianic expectations of the Jews, will feel with a certainty of assurance that the writer was a contemporary of the events which he describes, and if a contemporary, then no less surely the Apostle St. John.

The multiplicity of life which breathes through every part of the Fourth Gospel can indeed only be realized by some such personal investigation ; and few of us perhaps distinctly realize, till we have made the inquiry for ourselves, how greatly we are dependent upon it for the local and personal colouring of the Gospel history. Almost all we know of the characters which surround Christ as friends or enemies, with the exception of St. Peter, is derived from it ; and every person who is brought forward lives by the lightest touch. It is barely conceivable that the writer may have been an unknown Shakespeare, though those who are best acquainted with the second century will find the conception most difficult ;

but no creative genius can call into being a lost site. Now the writer of the Gospel evidently moves about Jerusalem as if he were at home there. Whether he mentions spots known from other sources, or named only by himself, he speaks simply and certainly. As he recalls a familiar scene he lives again in the past, and forgets the desolation which had fallen upon the place which rises before his eyes. "There is," he writes, "at Jerusalem a pool called Bethesda," much to the discomfiture of unsympathetic commentators and scribes, who are unable to go back with the Apostle to the time when the incident first became history. "Bethesda by the sheep-gate," "the pool of Siloam," "the brook Kidron," which are not named by the other Evangelists (yet see Luke xiii. 4), stand out naturally in his narrative. What imagination could have invented a Bethesda with its five porches, and exact locality? What except habitual usage would have caused the Kidron to be described as "the winter torrent"? How long must the name Siloam have been pondered over before the perfectly admissible rendering "Sent" was seen to carry with it a typical significance? The *Prætorium* and *Golgotha* are mentioned by the other Evangelists; but even here the writer of the Fourth Gospel sees the localities, if I may so speak, with the vividness of an actual spectator. The Jews crowd round the *Prætorium* which they will not enter, and Pilate goes in and out before them. *Golgotha* is "*nigh to the city,*" where people pass to and fro, and "*there was a garden there.*" And St. John, for I must use the name, alone notices the Pavement, the raised platform of judgment, with its Hebrew title, *Gabbatha*. The

places Bethesda and Gabbatha are not, in fact, mentioned anywhere except in the Fourth Gospel, and the perfect simplicity with which they are introduced in the narrative, no less than the accuracy of form in the Aramaic titles, marks the work of a Palestinian Jew who had known Jerusalem before its fall.

The allusions to the Temple shew no less certainly the familiarity of the writer with the localities in which he represents Christ as teaching. The first scene, the cleansing of the Temple, is in several details more lifelike than the corresponding passages in the Synoptists. It is described just as it would appear to an eye-witness in its separate parts, and not as the similar incident is summed up briefly in the other narratives. Each group engaged stands out distinctly,—the sellers of oxen and sheep, the money-changers sitting at their work, the sellers of doves; and each group is dealt with individually. Then follows, in the course of the dialogue which ensues, the singularly exact chronological note, "*Forty and six years was this Temple in building.*"

The incidents of the Feast of Tabernacles (which are given in Chapters vii. and viii.) cannot be understood without an accurate acquaintance with the Temple ritual. The two symbolic ceremonies—commemorating the typical miracles of the wilderness—the outpouring of water on the altar of sacrifice, and the kindling the golden lamps at night, furnish the great topics of discourse. The Evangelist is familiar with the facts, but he does not pause to dwell upon them. Only in one short sentence does he appear to call attention to the significance of the events.

"*These things,*" he says, "*Jesus spake in the Treasury, as he taught in the Temple.*" The mention of the exact spot carried with it to minds familiar with the Herodian Temple a clear revelation of what was in the Apostle's mind. For the Treasury was in the court of the women, where the great candelabra were placed, looking to which, Christ said, "*I am the light*"—not of one people, or of one city, but—"of the world." And there is still another thought suggested by the mention of the place. The meeting-hall of the Sanhedrin was in a chamber adjacent to it. We can understand, therefore, the hasty attempts of the chief priests and Pharisees to seize Christ, and the force of the words which are added, that even there, under the very eyes of the popular leaders, "*no man laid hands on him.*"

The next visit to Jerusalem, at the Feast of Dedication, brings a new place before us. "*It was winter,*" we read, "*and Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch,*" a part of the great eastern cloister, suiting in every way the scene with which it is connected.

Once again, as I believe, we have a significant allusion to the decoration of the Temple. On the eve of the Passion, at the close of the discourses in the upper chamber, the Lord said, "*Arise, let us go hence.*" Some time after we read that when He had finished his high-priestly prayer, He went forth with his disciples "over the brook Cedron." It seems impossible to regard this notice as the fulfilment of the former command. The house, therefore, must have been left before, as is clearly implied in the narrative, and the walk to the Mount of

Olives might well include a visit to the Temple; and on the gates of the Temple was spread the great vine of gold, which was reckoned among its noblest ornaments. Is it, then, a mere fancy to suppose that the image of the vine and its branches was suggested by the sight of this symbolic tracery, lighted by the Paschal moon, and that the high-priestly prayer was offered under the shadow of the Temple walls?

However this may be, it is inconceivable that any one, still more a Greek or a Hellenist, writing when the Temple was razed to the ground, could have spoken of it with the unaffected certainty which appears in the Fourth Gospel. It is monstrous to transfer to the second century the accuracy of archæological research which is one of the latest acquirements of modern art. St. John, it may be safely said, speaks of what he had seen.

The topography of Jerusalem in the Fourth Gospel is the topography of that city before the Roman siege: and the representation of the Messianic doctrine current at the time of our Lord's ministry cannot be made to suit any later date. A religious revolution separated the middle of the first century from the close of it; and a careful student of St. John must be struck by the contrast between the personal teaching of the Evangelist in the Prologue and in parts of the third Chapter, and those types of opinion which he records as existing in Palestine during the period of his history. The doctrine which he holds himself is definite and uniform; the doctrine which he has occasion to represent is fluent, conflicting, fragmentary, now reconcilable with the

truth and now irreconcilable: but in each case earlier than the fatal conflict which finally determined the relation of Christianity to post-Christian Judaism.

In a few clearly-marked scenes—ten or twelve—the religious crisis of the people is set before us. The conflicting thoughts of Jew and Samaritan, of the people of Galilee and Jerusalem, of Pharisee and Sadducee, of believer and unbeliever, are vividly portrayed in their essential features.

The dialogue in the fourth Chapter is a signal illustration of this natural historical portraiture of opinions. In this the difference between the Messianic views of the Jews and of the Samaritans is not definitely brought forward by the Evangelist, but is only to be gathered from the course of the narrative. The Jews, looking for a temporal deliverer, held a false opinion: the Samaritans, looking for a prophet, held an imperfect opinion. In the one case, to accept the familiar title would be to confirm an error: in the other, to develop a germ of truth. The whole Gospel is, in one aspect, a gradual unfolding of the divergence between the popular Jewish conception of Messiah and the true spiritual conception of the Saviour. To the last, when the Jews say, "*If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly,*" they get no direct answer. To the Samaritan woman, on the other hand, who looked for Messiah to solve all her doubts, Christ says at once, "*I that speak unto thee am he.*" Now any one who will consider how this contrast is presented, will, I believe, allow that the Evangelist must be recording facts which he had known, and not imagining a

conflict foreign to the experiences of the second century.

The picture of the concurrent varieties of Jewish opinion is no less certainly drawn by an eye-witness. Nothing can be further from the truth than to represent the teachings of the Gospel as antagonistic to the Jewish revelation. It is indeed antagonistic to "the Jews," the narrow party who wished to make the revelation an exclusive possession of their own nation, as it did in fact spring from among them. But the doctrine of Messiah's Work and Person is in every particular placed in a living connection with the old Dispensation. The starting-point lies in the principle that "*the Salvation is of the Jews;*" and as the truth is unfolded gradually, *To the Jew first* is written, as in the Epistles of St. Paul, over a message which is declared to be essentially universal. In the first Chapter, for example, the Baptist proclaims that he was sent in order that the Christ should "*be made manifest to Israel.*" Philip recognizes in Jesus of Nazareth Him "*of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write.*" Nathaniel addresses Him as "*the Son of God, the King of Israel.*" So, elsewhere, the life of Abraham and the lessons of the Exodus are set forth as fulfilled in Christ. "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day.*" The manna, and the water from the rock, and the pillar of fire, receive a new interpretation. The relation of the past to the present is as shadow to substance, but it is assumed throughout that without the substance there can be no shadow.

In all this it is to be noticed that Christ is de-

scribed under titles and aspects which, though they were perfectly appropriate and natural under the actual circumstances of his appearance, assumed a new meaning at a later period of Jewish and Christian history. No one whose ideas of Christ were formed after the fall of Jerusalem, no one who wished to construct an ideal person as the embodiment of the Alexandrine conception of the Logos, could have so presented the Messiah in his essential relations to true and false Judaism—not to one only, but to both—as the author of the Fourth Gospel has done.

For the acknowledgment of the one Hope of Israel furnishes the common ground for faith and unbelief in the record of St. John. The interpretation of the Hope brought doubt and division. Some, like the apostles, attached themselves at once to the person of Christ, and rested absolutely in Him, as He made Himself known in ways which they did not anticipate. Others hastily seized on what they imagined to be the fulfilment of their own dream, and would have "*taken him by force to make him a king,*" and then fiercely resented the failure of their hopes, seeking at the last even to alter the title on the cross.

These are the extremes, and the wide interval between them is filled up with natural fluctuations of popular feeling. There is the reverence for Christ's works, checked by a superstitious ritualism. There are the low anxious questionings of half belief; divided opinions among the multitude and even among the Pharisees; conflicting notions as to Messiah's appearance; balancings of Christ's claims with

his actual position. On the other hand, there is the uncompromising hostility of the rulers. And even here there is one life-like trait which is apt to escape notice. In the last crisis the Pharisees give place to the Sadducees. The cold stern resolve of the selfish fanatics overpowers the helpless vacillations of the men who, with half convictions, took the place of religious leaders.

The whole history of the fulfilment of the Messianic idea in its progressive development is, in a word, a transcript from life. Scene follows scene without repetition and without anticipation. Thoughts are revealed, met, defined from point to point. In this process we not only see individualized characters, but we see the characters change before our eyes under intelligible influences. And this is done within the narrowest limits, and in a writing of transparent simplicity, if also of infinite depth. Art can shew no parallel. No one, I repeat, who had not lived through the vicissitudes of opinion which are reflected often only in the most subtle phrases, could have realized by imagination transient and complicated modes of thought which found no existence in the second century.

There are some difficulties undoubtedly remaining in exactly determining the relations of the Fourth Gospel to the Synoptists; but these are trifling when taken in connection with the continuous signs of immediate personal observation which mark the whole narrative: so that our conclusion must be that the Fourth Gospel is the work of an Apostle, and that the testimony which it gives to the Resurrection is the testimony of an eye-witness.

(4.) This direct testimony of the apostolic body and of the last of the apostles to the facts of Christ's life, and in particular to the Resurrection, is supplemented by the testimony of the living Society. The Christian Church is the one final and abiding witness to the realities of Christian life. The belief in these as literal facts was the foundation of the Church, and penetrated every part of its faith and worship. The earliest Christians observed the first day of the week as that on which Christ rose. Baptism was regarded as a dying and rising with Christ. "The celebration of the holy Eucharist is unintelligible without faith in a risen Saviour. . . . The fact of the Resurrection was not an article of the creed; it was the life of it."

Now this testimony of a continuous life—the testimony of the Christian Church—is either entirely overlooked or strangely perverted by sceptical critics, and that both in regard to the facts which it establishes and in regard to the record of the facts.

The Church at the end of the second century is supposed to have been the result, not of a slow and orderly growth, but of a fundamental revolution in the Faith, accomplished apparently over the whole world about the same time without the knowledge of the victors. This extravagant hypothesis is tenable only so long as the fragmentary literary remains of the century after the fall of Jerusalem are interpreted without any regard to the vital condition of Christianity as it is clearly revealed for the first time at the close of that period. The Fathers, who speak then with a fuller knowledge than we can

have of the opinions and writings of their predecessors, have no doubt as to their own agreement with a continuous apostolic tradition and an uninterrupted Christian life. Different elements of the truth were, as it is admitted, brought into fuller prominence in one part of the Church than in another. Experience, according to the Divine law, was necessary for the full realization of each constituent of the final sum, and for the co-ordination of all. But this process was a vital process of unbroken continuity. The collection of apostolic writings which we have in the New Testament is a sufficient explanation of the history of the second century; and, conversely, the consolidation of the Catholic Church, which was a great reality at the close of the age, can only be satisfactorily explained by supposing that the various aspects of the Faith which these writings present had been energetic side by side from the first preaching of the gospel. But plain as they are, these great facts of a victorious life are wholly neglected by a school of writers who start with a preconceived notion of what Christianity must have been at first, and then cut down all testimony to suit their hypothesis, while the testimony is scanty enough to be dealt with by force, and afterward invent a silent revolution to account for a general consent adverse to their hypothesis, which is too strong to be suppressed.

III. This fatal inability to enter into the life of the Christian Society marks the last principal charge which I prefer against sceptical critics. They make no effort to apprehend the Christian conception of the facts of Christianity. And yet, in order to deal

intelligently with such a fact as the Resurrection, it is necessary to know what it claims to be. According to the Christian creed, the Resurrection belongs to two worlds. It was a revelation as well as an incident in life. It was absolutely novel and unique : it is inexhaustibly significant. Both these points are overlooked by sceptical critics, and consequently they are unable to estimate fairly the historical relation of this fact, which they misapprehend, to the life of humanity, and so to feel, what I may call, its divine naturalness.

The fact of the Resurrection was, I say, absolutely novel and unique. The other raisings from the dead, so far from offering parallels to the Resurrection of Christ, as is commonly assumed, or preparing the way for the acceptance of the belief in it, have, so far as they go, a contrary tendency. They present examples of restoration to natural mortal life under its ordinary conditions : Christ's Resurrection, on the other hand, is set before us as an elevation to an immortal life, in which the conditions of man's present life may be either assumed or set aside. No conceivable tests could have established the two complementary truths, that Christ lived again in his human nature, and that his human nature was glorified, more completely than the incidents recorded naturally and without effort in the Gospels. The nature of the case admitted of nothing more than the juxtaposition of details which severally suggested the two ideas. Physical investigations would not have given assurance of the second truth ; and so far as they proved the first, they would actually have excluded it.

The fact was novel, and it was at once apprehended as unique. It was looked upon as a revelation, a new thing in the earth, and incapable of repetition. In virtue of the Resurrection, Christ was seen immediately and for ever to occupy a fresh relation to believers and to mankind. Deductions were drawn from it, hopes were confirmed by it, a faith was built upon it, which had not been called into existence in any degree by earlier miracles. For the effect produced by the belief in the Resurrection of Christ was commensurate with the uniqueness of its character. It has been argued, undoubtedly with some exaggeration, that the Jews in the time of the Lord were so familiar with the conception of the occurrence of miracles that it cost them no effort to admit a new one. But exactly in proportion as the impression produced by supposed miracles was transitory in other cases, the exceptional influence undoubtedly exercised by the belief in the Resurrection becomes inexplicable on ordinary grounds. It was contrary to the general tone of mind to attach overwhelming importance to an admitted wonder. There must, then, have been something in this one wonder by which it was distinguished from all others.

What this was becomes evident if we look a little more closely at the religious significance of the Resurrection, though eighteen centuries have not yet enabled us to grasp its full relations to nature and to man. The Resurrection of Christ, followed by his new life, offered in a historical, and therefore in an abiding form, that assurance of a union between the seen and unseen which is necessary for the full

satisfaction of our human being. It shewed death as conquered, and sin with death. It gave to the world the idea of the transfiguration of manhood, which has never since been lost. It reconciled the conceptions of permanence and change in the individual life. It altered the whole aspect of sorrow and suffering. It inspired the sense of divine fellowship with victorious power. It suggested thoughts of a life vaster than that of a man, breaking down the barriers of caste and class and sex and race, so far as they dismember humanity.

This, then, is the issue to which we are brought by a legitimate historical inquiry. We find that a fact—still to speak only of the one central fact—not explicable by what we see in the ordinary course of nature, was proclaimed to have happened, and that on the scene of the occurrence, and publicly : that it was of a nature wholly unparalleled, and yet answering in unexpected ways to the wants of men : that it became the effective foundation of teaching before unheard : that it gave rise to new types of individual and social life universally recognized as good and true and beautiful though they had been hitherto unrealized : that it was embodied in different ways in the constitution of a definite society : that we possess the records of it which were drawn up by an immediate witness, which contain the sum of contemporary preaching, which express the convictions of a great convert. No alleged fact, I will say without reserve, can shew a better claim to be considered as a true element in the whole experience of the life of the world. This, I repeat, is the result to which testimony brings us. And some explanation of the

result must be given. The explanation must be clear and definite. It is necessary to fix in an intelligible way the process by which vast conquests were rapidly achieved. The novelty and uniqueness of the fact of the Resurrection are essential elements of the historical problem which it presents. From what source, except actual experience, can we suppose that ideas were derived which wrought a revolution in the world, and which still, if fairly regarded, meet the wants of our latest age? The alternative explanations indeed are simple. We must suppose either that men fitted by no previous training, assisted by no similar conceptions, suddenly in a crisis of bitter disappointment and desolation, created an ideal fact, of which they could not at the time have foreseen the full import, and then fashioned their own lives under its influence, and moved others to accept their faith; and that all later experience has found the answer to the questionings of successive generations in this creation of (at best) passionate love: or that God, the Creator, did, in the fulness of time, bring that about to which the life of the race tended in the guidance of his Providence, and from which it has drawn strength not yet completely appropriated.

With these alternatives before him, I cannot see how any one who has watched the orderly progress of humanity, not to speak now of nature, from stage to stage toward some goal, who knows that the determination of the mode of being, or of the succession of being, is no explanation of the fact of being, who holds that the existence of a God with whom man can have fellowship is a final fact

of consciousness no less than the existence of self and the existence of the world, can hesitate in his choice.

With a full recognition of the inherent limitations and imperfections of historical evidence, with a frank admission of the power of credulity and enthusiasm, I do not hesitate to accept the issue which has been proposed, and to affirm that it is more difficult, immeasurably more difficult, to believe that the Resurrection—standing as it does supremely solitary, and unapproached in its conception and in its effects—was a delusion—no one, I imagine, would now suggest that it was an imposture—than to believe that it was a divine fact. The difficulties in the one case are such as to make all life an unsubstantial dream, or a terrible enigma; the difficulties in the other case are those which are inseparable from the coexistence of finite and infinite Being.

ST. PAUL ON MARRIAGE.

I CORINTHIANS vii.

THERE are two preliminary considerations which throw some light on this much-contested passage. First, Paul had to speak about marriage as he found it, as it existed among those to whom he wished to be of service. Hence he makes no allusion to that which among ourselves is the main argument for, or at least the common motive to, marriage, viz., love. Marriage is treated here from a lower point of view than it would have been had this letter been