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THE
MYTHICAL ELEMENT
IN
CHRISTIANITY.

BY
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PRAYER.

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Sir,—An active correspondence is being carried on in the columns of one of your contemporaries relative to *The Efficacy of Prayer*, but I notice that the main issues are approached delicately and treated with reserve. Will you allow me to state as clearly as I can in a few words the sceptic's difficulty? I use the term *sceptic* simply because it is short and convenient, and sufficiently, if not perfectly, accurate.

1. The sceptic cannot rely upon the *à priori* argument for prayer, cannot argue—as one of the writers has put it, “from the existence of a loving Father in heaven to the efficacy of prayer,” for the very sufficient reason that he does not permit himself to indulge in any belief at all respecting a Father in heaven. His view is that the supernatural world is to us a “*terra incognita*,” and that the notions so abundantly entertained regarding it are the baseless products of human speculation. He is not such a “fool” as to say even in his heart “there is no God;” he declares only that we are incapable of saying whether there is a God or not. The subject is not within the range of our faculties. Fully admitting that the Theistic hypothesis may be correct, he denies that we can know it to be so; and to pray to a Deity who has placed between Himself and us an impenetrable veil, whose very existence is to us a mere possibility, is from the sceptic's standpoint as irrational an act as for persons in the dark to address communications to imaginary beings with whom their fancy may have peopled the surrounding void.

2. The sceptic cannot argue to the efficacy of prayer from its effects, for the very sufficient reason that no one is able to satisfy him that prayer has any supernatural effects at all. No phenomena are forthcoming to prove that the required relation of cause and effect exists between the act of prayer and its alleged consequences. People will not remember that *post hoc* is not equivalent to *propter hoc*. The so-called answers to prayer, which the sceptic is invited to consider, are *invariably capable of natural explanation*; and to prove answer to prayer in the ordinary acceptation of the words, to prove, that is, the intervention of the Deity, it is obvious that all explanation of the phenomena on natural grounds must be disproved, or at least practically precluded by the extraordinary nature of the circumstances. For instance, if a man were to pray that he might throw sixes, his doing so would be no evidence of answer to prayer; but if he threw sixes whenever he prayed that he might do so, no natural explanation of the phenomenon would be possible, and we should be forced to attribute it to the efficacy of prayer.

As a matter of fact, the Christian carefully avoids placing himself in a position to furnish the sceptic with satisfactory evidence of the efficacy of prayer, since he prays only for objects which might be attained, and for results which might very possibly come about in the natural course of things. He prays that a friend may recover from sickness, but he does not pray that a broken limb may knit together before the time. In a word, he never prays for a miracle. And yet, since he is asking for the intervention of the Deity, a miracle should be as readily expected as an ordinary occurrence. But, as I said before, the Christian never ventures to pray for anything which appears to be impossible, for anything the realisation of which would be inexplicable on natural grounds. So long as he retains this attitude he will find it impossible to satisfy the sceptic that the phenomena which, in order of time, have followed after his prayer are due to the influence of that prayer upon the mind of the Deity.

I am, &c.,

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THE importance attached by the teachers or defenders of Christianity to the historical character of the preternatural incidents asserted to have attended the birth of Jesus, to have illustrated his life, and to have accompanied its close, has, not unnaturally, led to a reaction, liable to be as prejudicial to a sound judgment about the origin of the Christian religion on the one side, as an uncritical reliance upon the absolute truth of all that is recorded in the New Testament has been on the other side. An unreasoning belief is in some danger of giving place to an unreasoning distrust. The inconsistencies and contradictions, of which so large a crop becomes apparent in the gospels, when surveyed by the eyes of an uncompromising critic, as the author of 'The English Life of Jesus,' forming part of this series, has demonstrated, combined with the very scanty notices of Christianity to be found in any but professedly Christian writers, during the first hundred and fifty years after the birth of Jesus, have given rise to the opinion, expressed by the writer of another tract comprised in the series, that Jesus was not really an historical person at all; "that neither the twelve Apostles nor their divine Master ever existed."^a

^a 'The Twelve Apostles,' p. 28.

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It may appear, probably, a sufficient reply to such a conclusion, to observe that it is not shared by any of the great critics whose labours in the investigation of the New Testament have led to that change in men's judgments as to its historical character, which seems to be now growing up into the recognised critical opinion. Strauss, Bauer, Renan, the author of 'The English Life of Jesus,' for instance, one and all write with the obvious conviction that, in dealing with the life of Jesus, they are dealing with the life not only of a real man, but a man of a most remarkable character.^b But, in the interest of historical truth, it is desirable to examine thoroughly the grounds for any judgment on an important question, put forth, with apparent conviction, by any writer who possesses sufficient knowledge of the subject discussed to entitle his judgment to respect, however much that judgment may run counter to received opinion. This is desirable, *first*, because the progress of critical inquiry in historical matters has involved a continuous destruction of received opinions, and the substitution for them of others which, when first announced, were considered absurd; *secondly*, because history, not admitting of verification by immediate observation, is peculiarly exposed to that paralysis of doubt which hangs over the intellect, hampering instead of stimulating its energies, and substituting the sickly feebleness of sceptical questionings in place of the vigorous health of scientific research.^c

^b See 'English Life of Jesus,' p. 344, for a summary of the conclusions to which this able and fearless critic comes about him.

^c Thus, in Mr Lumisden Strange's 'Is the Bible the Word of God?' the hypothesis of the mythical origin of Christianity *peeps in*, as a theory which he neither accepts nor rejects, but which serves to aid the conclusions to which he comes about Christianity, by the mysterious uncertainty thrown over its origin. See pp. 351, 352, 374—381.

I propose, therefore, to subject to a critical examination the reasons adduced in support of the hypothesis that Jesus Christ is a mythical personage, who never had any existence, except in the imaginations of his disciples.

The way in which this mythical belief arose is supposed to have been somewhat as follows: ^d "The siege of Jerusalem kindled into a flame the enthusiastic spirit of trust in Divine aid inherent in the Jewish race. There were, says Josephus, a great number of prophets who denounced to the people that they should wait for deliverance from Heaven. ^e True, the Pharisaic historian can see in these men only persons suborned by the leaders of the Zealots—'the Tyrants,' as he calls them—John and Simon; but we may read the tale of that age better by the light of the ages preceding it. As from the depths of the captivity at Babylon there came forth the glowing hopes of triumphant deliverance which inspire the last twenty-seven chapters of our Book of Isaiah; as the sufferings and struggles under Antiochus Epiphanes produced the conception of the 'Son of Man' revealed in the clouds, to whom was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him, an everlasting dominion, which should not pass away, and 'a kingdom which should not be destroyed; ^f so the fall of Jerusalem produced a reaction of hope and trust, which gave a new and unexpectedly fruitful development to the idea of the Messiah. To some deep prophetic spirit, meditating on the mysterious

^d See 'The Twelve Apostles,' p. 16. I have taken the liberty of filling up the very scanty delineation of the supposed growth of the myth, given in that tract, with some details which seem to me to throw over it an air of plausibility, but for which the author of the above-named publication is not responsible.

^e 'Jewish War,' vi. 5.

^f Dan. vii. 14.

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questions, why Jehovah had given over his ancient people to be trodden down of the Gentiles? why no deliverer had appeared from Heaven to save them in their sore need? light came with the notion—it is for our sins; because the Messiah *has* come, and we, that is, our rulers, have not recognised him: he has come, as the great prophet of the captivity foretold, as ‘one despised and rejected of men,’ ‘a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,’ one ‘taken from prison and from judgment,’ and ‘cut off out of the land of the living;’ because ‘for the transgressions of his people was he stricken;’^g but yet one whom God has exalted to his throne in heaven to sit on his right hand till the time should arrive when his people, ‘purified as by a refiner’s fire,’ ‘purged as gold and silver,’ should ‘offer to Jehovah an offering of righteousness,’^h and who, then, shall ‘suddenly be revealed’ to take vengeance on his enemies, and establish that unending kingdom which the ancient prophets have foretold.”

“But *when* had this unrecognised Messiah appeared? An answer was supplied by the same prophetic voice. Had not Malachi foretold that Jehovah would send Elijah the prophet before ‘that great and dreadful day, which should burn up all that do wickedly,’ to ‘turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers?’ and was it not the fact that, about forty years before the taking of Jerusalem, one had appeared ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah,’ preaching repentance as the preparation for a greater who should come after him? Was there not also a tradition that, not long after the death of John the Baptist, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had put to death a native of Galilee, one accused by the High priest and rulers

^g Is. liii. 3—8.

^h Mal. iii. 3; iv. 5, 6.

of that day of blasphemy and sedition, whom Pilate had crucified along with others, 'malefactors,' in whom it might well be that the prophecy of the innocent sufferer, who 'should make his grave with the wicked' had found its accomplishment? Thus, on the slenderest possible foundation of actual fact, may it have become possible for the Jewish imagination to launch the Messianic idea under a novel aspect, postponing to an indefinite, though not very remote future, its expectant glories, and supplementing them by the conception of an earthly life suited to one who, for our sakes, had borne our sins and tasted of our sorrows? ⁱ Opposed from the first to the formal spirit of the Pharisaical party, the Scribes and Lawyers of the New Testament, which had become dominant again when the ardent hopes of supernatural victory, that led to the obstinate resistance of Jerusalem, had been crushed by its fall; drawing its inspirations from the free air of ancient prophecy, rather than from the more modern 'Book of the Law,' from Isaiah and Jeremiah rather than from Ezra; the new faith, while it attracted within its influence many of the noblest and purest spirits produced in that age by the Jewish people, still met with a cold reception from the mass of the nation. But it rapidly spread among the Gentile proselytes; and soon shaking itself free from the fetter of circumcision, was able to recruit its ranks from all the varied populations comprised in the Roman em-

ⁱ The author of 'The Twelve Apostles' (p. 16) calls this notion an "inversion" of the popular belief, and alleges that other cases of similar "inversions" may be produced, though he does not cite any instance. But to make the Christian conception of the Messiah into an inversion of the Jewish, it would be necessary to show that the Jews believed in a Messiah who should suffer after having triumphed, a notion which might have been inverted into that of a Messiah who should triumph after having suffered; while, in fact, the notion of a suffering Messiah appears to have been quite foreign to Jewish expectations till it was introduced by the Christian teaching.

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pire, and thus swell its numbers to a large body; while yet it retained, from the fervour of its original members, in the general spirit of its doctrines, and the character of the supernatural details with which the imagination of the disciples gradually clothed the supposed life of their master, the flavour of Jewish thought and the traces of Jewish beliefs. Thus grew up the myth of Jesus Christ embodied in those four gospels, themselves only a part of a far more extensive evangelic literature once widely diffused in the Christian Church, to which the subsequent course of ecclesiastical history has given such a wide and lasting influence over Europe and the countries conquered or colonised by European energy."

If we regard this hypothesis only in itself, without troubling ourselves as to its power of accounting for the positive statements relating to the rise of Christianity which have survived the waste of time, I think it must be admitted that the mythical theory of its origin presented above is not encumbered by any inherent impossibility; that stranger things have undoubtedly happened in the religious history of mankind than the growth of such a belief, deriving its nourishment, like some orchidaceous plants, only from the atmosphere in which its seeds germinated, and supporting itself on the accidental props of surrounding circumstances, without requiring to strike its roots into the solid ground of facts. And, if we are disposed to found our judgments as to the origin of Christianity *only* on arguments of internal probability, and test them *only* by the historical evidence for the *details* of the narratives relating to it, we may be ready to acquiesce in the canon proposed by the author whose hypothesis we are examining, that, "if a hero be known chiefly as the performer of supernatural exploits, both hero

and exploit are mythical." ^j But to those who value attested facts more highly than their own imaginations of possibilities, general canons of this nature are unsatisfactory. Let us see, then, if we cannot find some other test of more scientific precision than imaginary possibility to which to subject this hypothesis. It is not difficult to find one. The hypothesis of the mythical origin of Christianity above stated is founded on the revolution in the expectations as to the coming of the Messiah, supposed to have been produced in the minds of some pious enthusiastic Jews by the destruction of Jerusalem. If by good historical evidence we can trace the conceptions which associate the Messianic character with Jesus, called the Christ, to a time anterior to the siege of Jerusalem, this mythical theory must fall of itself; and for that purpose the use of the name Christian is sufficient. For Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah; "the anointed one;" the "Son whose throne is for ever, and the sceptre of whose kingdom is the sceptre of righteousness; who had loved righteousness and hated iniquity, wherefore God had anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows," ^k King and High Priest for ever; ^l and the sense of the termination *anus*, in *Christianus*, is "belonging to Christ." So that, even if we could not find any direct proof of the title Christ having been applied to Jesus of Nazareth prior to the siege of Jerusalem, but have proofs of the use of the name Christian before that date, this would suffice to show that Christianity did not arise out of such a myth as has been above stated; unless it could be demonstrated that the name was then applied to persons who held tenets quite distinct from those subsequently associated with it.

Before entering upon this investigation, however,

^j 'Twelve Apostles,' 32. ^k Ps. xlv. 6, 7. ^l Heb. i. 8, 9; ii. 5.

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it will be well to consider another form of mythical hypothesis about the origin of Christianity, not admitting of being subjected to this chronological test, namely, the theory which traces the name Christian to a confusion between *Christus* and *Chrēstos*, the Greek word for "good," and supposes that "Christians" may have originally meant only "the good men," the followers of one who was imagined to have been supremely "good;" an appellation afterwards exchanged for "Christus," or "the anointed one," when this body had come, by some process not distinctly explained, to identify their supposed founder with the Messiah. This idea is suggested by the Rev. Robert Taylor in his 'Diegesis; or, Discovery of the Origin and Early History of Christianity,' who, in support of it, makes the following statement:^m "Justin Martyr, in his account of the name (Christian), which he gives in his apology to Antoninus Pius, thus takes away *all possible* reference to the name of Christ as the founder of a sect. *Christianoi einai kategoroumetha, To de chrēston miseisthai ou dikaion—chrēstotatoi huparchomen.*"ⁿ Theophilus of Antioch,^o after a long string of puns upon *christus* and *chrēstus*, thinks that *christus*, not *chrēstus*, should be the word, because of the sublime significance of *christus*, which signifies the sweet, the agreeable, the most useful, and never-to-be-laughed-at article, *pomatium*. "What use of a ship," he argues, "unless it be smeared? What tower or palace would be good or useful unless it were greased? What man comes into life or enters into a conflict without being anointed? What piece of work would be considered finished unless it were oiled? The air itself, and

^m Pp. 399-400.

ⁿ We are accused of being Christians, but it is not just to hate that which is good. We are very good.

^o A.D. 171.

every creature under heaven, is, as it were, anointed with light and spirit. Undoubtedly we are called Christians for this reason and no other, because we are anointed with the oil of God." ^p

"Tertullian,^q Clemens Alexandrinus,^r and St Jerome^s abound in the same strain. *Everywhere* we meet with puns and conundrums on the name; *nowhere with the vestige* of the real existence of a person, to whom the name was distinctively appropriated."

Mr Taylor appears to have entertained very peculiar notions as to the meaning of verbs of number. The "abounding" of which he speaks consists in the existence in the writers from whom he quotes of the passages cited, and *no others*, so far as I can discover, containing any allusion to the possible derivation of Christian from Chrēstus: while his "absence of any vestige of the real existence of a person to whom the name (Christus) was distinctively appropriated" concerns writers, from quotations in whose works the story in the Gospels might be almost, if not entirely, reconstructed, if the Gospels were lost. But, besides this, the passages cited, when examined, do not support the position that the writers of them had any doubt as to the true origin of the name Christian. It is very questionable whether Justin Martyr, in the passage quoted by Mr Taylor, refers at all to an identification of *Christus* with *Chrēstus*, though Mr Taylor, by *inverting* the order

^p *Toigaroun gar toutou eneken kaloumetha christianoi, hoti chriometha elaiou Theou.*

^q Cum perperam Chrestianus pronuntiatur (puta christianus), de suavitate, vel benignitate compositum nomen est.—*Apology.*

^r *Strommata. Autika de eis Christon pepisteukotes chrēstōi te eisi kai legontai.*

^s In Gal. v. 22: Quum apud Græcos chrēstētes utrumque sonat, virtus est lenis, blanda tranquilla, et omnium bonorum censors.

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of Justin's sentences, and *leaving out* the connecting passages, gives his words this appearance. Justin's argument, which is too long to quote fully, is, that we (Christians) are very good men (*chrēstotatoi*); therefore, we ought not to be condemned simply on account of our name, because we are called Christians, for it is not just to hate that which is good. He does not say, as Mr. Taylor insinuates, our *name shows* that we are good men; he directly asserts the fact of this goodness. And that he did not himself derive the name Christian from *chrēstos* is placed beyond a doubt by two other passages in his *Apology*, the first of which says, "Our Master, the Son of God, the Father and Ruler of all things, is Jesus Christ, *from whom also we come to be named Christians*;"^t while the second states that the true Son of God is called Christ, because God had anointed and set in order all things by Him.^u Theophilus, in the passage referred to by Mr Taylor, is arguing that his correspondent Autolycus "did not know what he was saying, in laughing at him for calling himself a Christian."^v A proposition which he proceeds to prove, by dwelling on the common practice and admitted usefulness of the act of anointing, to show the excellent qualities implied in the Christian name; an argument in which we, who are not accustomed to anoint ourselves or our houses, &c., may see as little force as those who never wash themselves might see in the praise of water as a source of cleanliness; but which is very far from showing any doubt in the mind of Theophilus about the derivation of the name Christian from the verb *chrīō*, to anoint. The quotation from Tertullian,

^t 1 Apol. 12.

^u *Christos men kata to kechristhai, kai kosmēsai ta panta di hautou tou Theou legetai.*—2 Apol. 6.

^v *Peri de sou katagelan me, kalounta me Christianon, ouk oidas ho legeis.*—Ad. Aut. i. 1.

made by Mr Taylor, is garbled. The complete passage reads thus: "The interpretation of Christianus is rarely derived [by you] from anointing. For since it is very badly pronounced by you *Chrestianus*, for you have no accurate knowledge even of the name, it is compounded from suavity, or benignity." ^w So that Tertullian, instead of intimating any doubt in his own mind of the origin of the name, as Mr Taylor suggests, adduces the use of the name *Chrestianus* in proof of the *gross ignorance* of his contemporaries about the true origin of *Christianus*; but says, if you will make this mistaken substitution of *e* for *i*, then you must derive the name from goodness. The passage quoted from Jerome has nothing at all to do with the origin of the name Christian; but is simply an explanation of the meaning of *chrēstotēs* in the passage in Galatians, which, he says, is the Greek equivalent of either suavity or benignity.^x Lastly, the passage cited from Clemens Alexandrinus^y is part of a metaphysical argument, based upon a statement of Plato, "that the knowledge of a true king is a kingly knowledge, and he who has acquired it, whether he is a king or a private person, would always, according to the true method, be rightly addressed as a king;" whence, continues Clemens, "those who have believed in Christ are, and are to be addressed as good, since they are cared for as kings by the true king. For as the wise are wise by wisdom, and the legal legal by law, so those who belong to Christ the king

^w Apol. c. 3. Christianus raro quantum interpretatio est de unctione deducta. Nam et cum perperam Chrestianus pronuntiat, a vobis, nam nec nominis certa est notitia vobis, de suavitate vel benignitate compositum est.

^x Benignitas autem sive suavitas, quum apud Græcos *chrēstotes* utrumque sonat, virtus est lenis, &c. Mr Taylor's scholarship appears to have stopped short of teaching him that *utrumque sonat* means has either *sense*, and has no reference to the *sound* of *chrēstotes*.

^y Strom. ii. c. 418.

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are kings, and those who are of Christ are Christians " Whatever we may think of the argument, its conclusion both shows that, in the idea of Clemens, it rested on the office of Christ as " anointed " king, and supplies in itself a clear " vestige of a person to whom the name Christ was distinctively appropriated," which Mr Taylor finds so difficult of discovery in the writers cited by him.

The hypothesis that Christian may have grown up by the transformation of *chrēstos*, is thus left destitute of any support from ancient authority. But, besides this, it is exposed to a grave objection of a linguistic character. *Anos* is a termination very little used by Greek writers, and when it is employed, this is in the sense of the possessor of a quality, which the primitive expresses; as *peukedanos* from *peukē*, having bitterness; *rigedanos* from *rigos*, having cold.² But there is no Greek primitive expressing goodness, from which *Chrēstianos* could be derived. The primitive is *chrēstotēs*, and the name, therefore, if formed from this source, would have been not *Chrēstianos*, but *Chrēstotētanos*. On the other hand, *anus* is a very common Latin termination, in the sense of belonging to a distinct place or person, as Montanus, Fontanus, Romanus, Albanus, Spartanus, Tullianus, Catonianus, Sullanus;^a the sense in which Christianus is commonly employed. Whence F. C. Bauer has expressed the opinion that the name probably arose at Rome, notwithstanding the statement in the Acts,^b " that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." And, at all events, if it was first used in Antioch, this was most likely done by Italians, or in order to make the name intelligible to Roman ears.

² Matthiæ Greek Gram I. Adjectives III.

^a Zumpt. Lat. Gram. 181, sec. lix.

^b xi. 26. Kirchengeschichte der drei erster Jahrhunderte, i. 432.

Now *Chrēstos* or *Chrestus* is by no means uncommon as an ancient name among Greeks and Romans. Appian mentions a Socrates *Chrēstos*, whom Mithridates made King of Pontus; Aurelius Victor speaks of a *Chrestus* as engaged in a conspiracy to kill Hannibal; Martial has two epigrams on a "*Chrestus*," and one on a *Chrestillus*.^c *Chrēstē* occurs in an ancient epitaph; Fulgentius mentions a *Manlius Chrestus*, who wrote a book on Hymns to the Gods; and Ausonius has an epigram^d on two brothers, *Chrēstos* and *Akindunos*, of whom he says that, if *Akindunos* would make a present of the *a* in his name to *Chrēstos*, the names would answer better to their characters; for *Chrēstos* would become *Achrēstos*—*i.e.*, useless, and *Akindunos* *Kindunos*—*i.e.*, dangerous.^e And Mr Fynes Clinton, in his '*Fasti Romani*,' mentions three other persons named *Chrestus*, one contemporary with the sophist Adrian, A.D. 171; another put to death by Ulpian, A.D. 228; and a third, a grammarian, living A.D. 359. It cannot therefore be at all surprising that the non-Christian population of the Roman empire, in the first Christian centuries, should have supposed the name of the founder of the new religion to be *Chrestus*, and have called his disciples *Chrestiani*, without intentional reference to any good qualities ascribed to them; for which, indeed, we know that they were very far from disposed to give them credit.

This phase of the mythical hypothesis, where Christ is presented as an ideal concentration of the goodness manifested by his alleged followers, being thus shown to be untenable, there remains for examination only the other phase, which, resting

^c vi. 54, ix. 25, vi. 9.

^d xxxix.

^e See note on Tertullian *Apol.* c. 3, in Migny's Edition of the Fathers.

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on a supposed modification of the idea of the Messiah consequent on the destruction of Jerusalem, admits of a chronological test, in the inquiry whether there is satisfactory evidence of the use of the name Christian before that event. Now we have, in the works of two eminent Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, who lived in the latter half of the first and the commencement of the second Christian century, distinct evidence of the use of this name five years before the siege of Jerusalem, and its connection with a person called Christus, who is stated to have lived about thirty-five years previously. The passage in Tacitus has often been quoted, but from its importance to the present argument I repeat it here, in the words of Gibbon's translation. Tacitus, after narrating the conflagration of Rome, the suspicions which attached to the Emperor Nero of having ordered the city to be set on fire, and the steps he had taken to avert this charge by religious ceremonies intended to appease the anger of the deities to whom he ascribed the calamity, states "that, to divert a suspicion which the power of despotism was unable to suppress, the emperor resolved to substitute in his place fictitious criminals. With this view he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men, who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth, and not only spread itself over Judæa, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized discovered a great

number of their accomplices, who were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city as for their hatred of the human kind. They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied by a horse race, and honoured by the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the (Christians)^f deserved indeed the most exemplary punishment, but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that these unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare, as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant.”^g

With this passage must be put in apposition the following account of Nero's measures in Suetonius.^h “Many things were censured and repressed, and that severely, and some ordered. A limit was set to expenditure. Public suppers with gratuitous doles of food were established. It was provided that nothing cooked but pulse or pot-herbs should come into the cooks' shops, while previously all kinds of victuals were exposed there. *The Christians, a class of men who hold a new and mischievous superstition, were subjected to capital punishment.* The four-horse chariot games, in which, by an inveterate license, cheating and robbery were sanctioned, with a right of going everywhere, were forbidden; the troops of pantomimics were banished with the pantomimes.”

Now, unless it can be shown, either that these pas-

^f The name is not repeated in the original.

^g Tac. Ann. xv. 44, Gibbon c. xvi.

^h Vit. Ner., c. 16.

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sages have been interpolated into the writings of Tacitus and Suetonius, or that those authors applied to the year 65 A.D. names not known till a later time, and confused the persons whom Nero put to death, on the charge of having set fire to Rome, with the body known as Christians at a later epoch, they completely upset the mythological hypothesis now under our consideration, by proving that the Christian name was in use and connected with a Christ who had suffered at a date anterior by several years to the time when, according to this hypothesis, the idea of such a Christ first arose. The author of 'The Twelve Apostles' shows too much acquaintance with classical literature to allow of our supposing that he was not aware of these passages in Tacitus and Suetonius, and too much logical power to allow of our supposing that he did not see how fatal they are to his hypothesis, unless they can be got rid of in one or the other of the modes indicated above. Unfortunately, he does not tell us which of these alternatives he adopts, but prefers to ignore the positive testimony of Tacitus and Suetonius to the existence of Christians in the reign of Nero altogether, and to rely for his external proof of the unhistorical character of Jesus upon certain negative evidences, to which I shall fully advert subsequently. I am therefore driven, in dealing with these passages, to refer to the observations of other writers, who have discussed them from a point of view opposed to Christianity—such as Mr Taylor, in the work already cited; Mr Robert Cooper, in his 'Infidel's Text Book;' and Mr Lumisden Strange, in his 'The Bible: is it the Word of God?;' especially Mr Taylor, who seems to have been a man of considerable, though not very profound learning, and to whom his successors appear to have been indebted for most of their arguments on the subject before us.

Of the alternatives above stated Mr Taylor adopts the first decidedly, in regard to Tacitus, and hints at rather than contends for the second, in regard to Suetonius. He adduces various reasons for supposing the passage in Tacitus to be a forgery, which I produce here, in a somewhat condensed shape, with my replies to them.ⁱ

1. The passage is not quoted by Tertullian, though he had read and *largely quotes* the works of Tacitus, and in his Apology is so hot upon it, that his missing it is almost miraculous.

Reply. Tertullian quotes Tacitus twice only, and both times the same passage—namely, an absurd account given by him of the origin of the Jews, and of their worshipping a deity with an ass's head.^j But he does assert the existence of statements in the Roman historians, implying that Nero persecuted the Christians at Rome, which is what Tacitus and Suetonius state.^k

2. Tertullian has spoken of Tacitus in a way that it is absolutely impossible he could have spoken of him, if his writings had contained such a passage.

Reply. He calls him "the most loquacious of the great liars,"^l an epithet agreeing well with the more detailed abuse of the Christians to be found in Tacitus, than in Suetonius.

3. The passage is not quoted by Clemens Alexandrinus, who sets himself entirely to the task of adducing and bringing together admissions and recognitions which Pagan authors had made of the existence of Christ and Christianity.

Reply. Clemens applies himself to collect passages

ⁱ Diegesis, p. 394—396.

^j Apol. c. 16, In. Nat. c. 11.

^k Consultite commentarios vestros, in illis reperietis Neronem primum, in hanc sectam tum maxime Romæ orientem, Cæsariano gladio fuisse.—Apol. 5.

^l Mendaciorum loquacissimus.—Apol. c. 16, In. Nat. c. 11.

from heathen writers anterior to Christ, which might be regarded as an unconscious anticipation of his character and acts. To deal with historical notices of Christ and Christianity was entirely beside the object of his work.

4. The passage has not been stumbled upon by the laborious, all-seeking Eusebius, who could by no possibility have missed it, and whom it would have saved the labour of forging the testimony of Josephus, adducing the correspondence of Christ and Abgarus, and the Sibylline Verses, or forging a revelation from Apollo in attestation of Christ's conception.

Reply. The object of Eusebius in citing the statements referred to by Mr Taylor, of which I by no means defend the authenticity, though I do not know what proof Mr Taylor could furnish that Eusebius himself forged them, was not to establish the fact of the existence of Jesus, or that of a body of Christians before the siege of Jerusalem,—facts that probably no one in the fourth century dreamt of disputing,—but to adduce testimony favourable to the Christian beliefs about Jesus, or to the character of Christians; and, as the passage of Tacitus was quite useless for this purpose, Eusebius had no motive for referring to it.

5. There is no vestige of the existence of the passage before the fifteenth century.

Reply. It is clearly referred to by Sulpicius Severus at the close of the fourth century, though without naming Tacitus, in a passage which is as follows: ^m "Nor could Nero in any way prevent the supposition that the fire had been ordered. Therefore he turned the reproach upon the Christians, and perpetrated the most cruel tortures on innocent persons—inventing new modes of death, that they should be sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs.

^m Sacr. Hist. 2, c. 29.

Many were nailed to crosses, or roasted in the flames. More were reserved to be burnt instead of lamps at night, when the day had waned."^a

6. It rests on the fidelity of a single individual, who had the ability, opportunity, and the strongest possible inducement of interest, to introduce the interpolation.

Reply. To what the last words allude I cannot imagine, but the statement generally rests upon a blunder of Mr Taylor, who supposed that there were no MSS. of Tacitus in existence, but such as were copied from a printed edition published by Johannes de Spire at Venice in 1468,^o of which he seems to have imagined that the original had disappeared. But in fact there are, in the Medicean library at Florence, two ancient MSS. of Tacitus, both containing this passage. The *first* mentioned in letters of Poggio of the 21st Oct., 1427, and the 3rd June, 1428, is stated to have been written in the eleventh century by order of Desiderius, abbot of the monastery of Casino, and to have come into the possession of the Medici from the convent of St Mark at Florence. From it numerous copies are said to have been made in the twelfth century, by which the works of Tacitus

^a The following phrases in Sulpicius agree too closely with the very peculiar phraseology of Tacitus to allow of the resemblance being accidental :

Sed non ope humanâ decedebat infamia, quin jussum incendium crederetur.—*Tacitus.*

Neque ullâ re Nero efficiebat, quin ab eo jussum incendium putaretur.—*Sulp. Sev.*

Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis contexti laniatu canum interirent.—*Tacitus.*

Quin novæ mortes excogitatæ, ut ferarum tergis contexti, laniatu canum interirent.—*Sulp. Sev.*

Aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi ; atque ubi defecisset dies in usum nocturni luminis urerentur.—*Tacitus.*

Multi crucibus affixi, aut flammis usti. Plerique ad id reservati, ut cum defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur.—*Sulp. Sev.*

^o Diegesis, 394.

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were spread through Italy, France, Britain, Germany, and Spain; and from one of these copies Johannes de Spire's edition appears to have been printed. The second MS. seems also to date from the eleventh century; and contains a statement relating to the works of Apuleius, written on the same set of skins, showing that the original, of which the present MS. is a copy, was made towards the close of the fourth century.^p

7. The passage, though unquestionably the work of a master, and entitled to be pronounced a *chef d'œuvre* of the sort, betrays a *penchant* for that delight in descriptions of bloody horrors, as peculiarly characteristic of the Christian disposition as it was abhorrent to the mild and gentle mind and highly-cultivated tastes of Tacitus. It has a character of exaggeration, and trenches on the laws of natural probability. It is indeed not conceivable that Nero should have been so hardened in cruelty, and wanton in wickedness, as this passage would represent him.

Reply. The most startling atrocity, the burning men alive in dresses of combustible materials as living torches, is well attested by Juvenal,^q Seneca,^r Martial,^s and Tertullian.^t

^p See Preface by F. Ritter to edition of Tacitus of 1848, p. 45—50.

^q vii. 235. *Ausi quod liceat tunicâ punire molestâ.* Daring what may be punished by a vest of pain. The old scholiast describes this "tunica molesta" as "ex chartâ facta, pice illitâ in quâ ignibus pœnæ addicti ardere solebant"—made of paper smeared with pitch, in which those sentenced to punishment by fire were wont to burn. Ib. i. 155. *Tædâ lucebis an illâ quâ stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant.* You will shine by that torch with which those glow who smoke while standing with the neck fixed. Scholiast, Nero clothed malefactors with pitch and papyrus, and ordered them to be brought to a fire that they might burn.

^r Epist. ii. ad Lucill. *Cogita hoc loco carcerem, et circus, et equuleos, et ancum, et illam tunicam alimentis ignium et illisam et textam.* Here think of the prison, and the circus, and the horses, and the hook [instruments of torture], and that tunic smeared with and woven of the food of fire. These lines appear

8. Such good and innocent people as the first Christians must be supposed to be could not have provoked so great a degree of hostility. They must have sufficiently endeared themselves to their fellow citizens to prevent the possibility of their being so treated.

Reply. The whole character of the Christian apologies shows that, from whatever cause, the first Christians did call forth great hatred from certain classes, as they called forth contemptuous disdain from other classes.

9. So just a man as Tacitus unquestionably was could not have spoken of the professors of a purer religion than the world had ever seen as justly criminal, and deserving exemplary punishment.

Reply. It does not appear that Tacitus ever examined into the tenets of the Christian religion. The charge of "hatred of mankind,"^a which is his only definite accusation, is very intelligible, if we bear in mind the anticipation of the speedy coming of Christ to judge all men, which we know, from St Paul's epistles, that the Christians of that age generally entertained, and the consequences attached by Christian belief to that judgment.

10. The account is inconsistent with the 1st

to have been written while the atrocities were fresh in Seneca's memory, shortly before his own death, which took place the year following the burning of Rome.

^a X. 25, 5. Nam quum dicatur, Tunicâ presente molestâ, Ure manum, plus est dicere non facio. For when in presence of a vest of pain the order is given, "Burn your hand," it is more courageous to say, "I won't do it;" because this might lead to the burning of your body.

^b Apol. § 50. Licet nunc sarmenticios et semiustos appelletis, quasi ad stipitem dimidio axis revincti sarmentorum ambitu excoriamur. Though now you call us faggot men and half-axis men, as if being bound to the stake by half our axis we were scorched by the encircling faggots.

^c Odium generis humani.

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Epistle of St Peter,^v where Nero is spoken of as the minister of God for good, and the Christians are assured that, so long as they are followers of that which is good, no one would harm them.

Reply. There is no necessary contradiction between the two accounts, even if the Epistle was written in the age traditionally assigned to it. Nero, according to Tacitus and Suetonius, in the beginning of his reign, gave a promise of good government, to which the Epistle may refer, supposing such passages as ii. 12, iii. 13, and iv. 14 do not point to a period of persecution and trial of the Christians, as has often been contended, rather than to one of tranquillity. And if it were written during the reign of Nero, no other evidence would be required for overthrowing the hypothesis which would make the origin of Christianity be subsequent to the siege of Jerusalem. But the Tübingen school of critics allege strong grounds for placing the date of the Epistle in the time of Trajan.^w

11. It is inconsistent with the statements of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, who expressly states that the Christians up to his time—the third century—had never been the victims of persecution; and that it was in the provinces lying beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire, and not in Judæa, that Christianity originated.

Reply. Melito lived not in the third, but in the second century. He dedicated an epistle to Marcus Antoninus in defence of the Christians, which Eusebius in his *Chronicon* places in A.D. 170, and which cannot be later than the accession of Commodus, A.D. 180; and he expressly mentions Nero and Domitian "as having been inclined, through the persuasion of certain envious and malicious persons,

^v iii. 13.

^w Schwegler *Nach Apost. Zeitalter*, ii., 11—17.

to bring our doctrine into hatred ; but your godly ancestors," he continues (Trajan and Hadrian) "corrected their blind ignorance, and rebuked oftentimes by their epistles the rash enterprises of those who were ill-affected towards us." ^x Melito does not mention Judæa at all, but says only that "our philosophy first flourished among the Barbarians, and from thence having spread over thy people, under the illustrious reign of Augustus, thy predecessor, it has been an eternal benefit to thy kingdom." The use of barbarian in this passage is agreeable to the Greek practice in speaking of every nation who were not Greeks. Instances abound; I cite two only. Plutarch says of his own contemporaries, "The people have no need of statesmen for procuring peace, since all war, whether with Greeks or Barbarians, is taken away and banished for ever." ^y So Philo ^z speaks of "Caius, after the death of Tiberius Cæsar, taking the command of all the earth, and sea, the Barbarian races with the Hellenes, and the Hellenes with the Barbarians." Melito probably meant simply that the Christian faith, having originated in Judæa, had thence spread to Greece and Italy.

12. Tacitus, in no other part of his writings, makes any allusion to Christ or Christianity.

Reply. This silence is quite consistent with the tone of the passage under consideration, which shows a contemptuous indifference to Christian ideas as a religion. Tacitus noticed Christianity only when it came into collision with a political question.

In reviewing generally Mr Taylor's objections to this passage in Tacitus, we see that whatever strength they possess apart from his confident assertions depends on his supposition, *first*, that no allu-

^x See Euseb. ii., H. E. 26.

^y 'Political Precepts,' § 32.

^z De Virtutibus, ii. 546. Mangey's edition.

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sion to the passage can be discovered before the fifteenth century ; *secondly*, that there then existed a writer who had the opportunity, the disposition, and the ability to compose an account of the persecution of the Christians under Nero, in what Gibbon calls "the inimitable style of Tacitus," and thus palm off a forgery on the literary world. Nothing in the context causes any suspicion that the passage has been interpolated. On the contrary, although it is possible to strike out the sentences in Tacitus relating to the persecution of the Christians by Nero without making a gap in his narrative, his story is more consistent with itself if they are retained; because the next paragraph begins with a statement implying the lapse of some considerable time since the conflagration, which the account of the proceedings against the Christians fills up.^a And when we find that the passage is quoted by a writer of the fourth century instead of having been unnoticed till the fifteenth; that MSS. containing it were widely circulated throughout Europe two or three centuries before the date of the supposed forgery; and that one ancient MS. where it occurs has internal evidence of having been copied from an original writer in the fourth century, I can discover no reason for accepting Mr Taylor's hypothesis as having even a shade of probability. The genuineness of the passage of Tacitus must, I think, be considered as established, and becomes a strong proof that, five years before the siege of Jerusalem under Titus, there were at Rome a considerable body^b of persons commonly called Christians, who traced their origin to a *Christus* put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius.

^a Interea, conferendis pecuniis pervastata Italia, provinciæ eversæ, sociique populi.

^b "Multitudo ingens," says Tacitus.

The existence of a body of persons thus named in Rome at this time is confirmed by the passage already cited from Suetonius, on which Mr Taylor remarks only "that he hopes the Christians will not be offended, if he hopes that it may not apply to them," certainly a very feeble form of critical objection. No doubt Mr Taylor felt the absurdity of supposing that any Christian would have introduced a description of his co-religionists as men who "held a new and mischievous superstition" into Suetonius, between two passages relating the one to cooks' shops and the other to horse races; and so endeavoured to ride out of the difficulty, that the passage proves the existence in Rome under Nero of a body of Christians considerable enough to have become the subject of penal enactments, by a miserable joke. But the way in which Suetonius introduces this notice, and the way in which Tacitus refers to the death of Christ by order of Pontius Pilate, not as to a rumour but as to an ascertained fact, raises a question of considerable interest, namely, whether those acts of Pilate^c referred to by Justin Martyr and Tertullian did not really exist, and form a solid foundation upon which the unscrupulous piety of Christian writers in later times reared that fabric of forgeries preserved to us under the name of the Gospel of Nicodemus,^d and thus have brought into question the existence of any official documents relating to the history of Jesus? In the time of the first Roman Emperors, says Dr Lardner,^e "there were acts of the Senate, acts of the city, or people of Rome,

^c Tōn epi Pontiou Pilatou genomenōn actōn. Justin Martyr, I. Apol., p. 76, 84. Paris 1686. 63, 82 Bened. Ea omnia super Christo Pilatus et ipse jam pro sua conscientia Christianus retulit. Tertullian, Apol. 23.

^d Fabricius Codex, Apocryph. N. T., i. 214.

^e 'Heathen Testimonies,' c. ii., from which the following statement is condensed.

acts of other cities, and acts of the governors of provinces. Of all these we can discern clear proofs in ancient writers of the best credit." Thus Julius Cæsar ordered that the acts of the Senate as well as daily acts of the people should be published.^f Augustus forbid the publication of those of the Senate.^g Tacitus mentions a senator appointed by Tiberius to draw up these acts.^h Elsewhere we find them referred to as containing speeches from which the oratorical talent of Pompey and Crassus might be appreciated.ⁱ The acts of the people appear to have been journals containing accounts of public trials and affairs, punishments, assemblies, buildings, births, deaths, marriages, divorces, &c.^j They were kept at other places besides Rome, as, *e.g.*, at Antium, whence Suetonius learned the day and place of birth of Caligula, and which he refers to as official documents.^k And Philo speaks of acts or memoirs of Alexandria^l being sent to Caligula, "which he read with more eagerness and satisfaction than anything else." That there should have been similar acts or reports of remarkable occurrences sent up from the governors of the provinces to Rome is therefore in itself probable, and would explain in a satisfactory manner the positive statement as to the death of Christ by order of Pontius Pilate made by Tacitus; though Dr Lardner does not cite, nor have I been able to discover, any reference to such acts by Roman historians. But it seems improbable that either Justin Martyr or Tertullian would have appealed to records of this nature, in writings addressed to the

^f Suet. Vit. J. C., c. 20.

^g Suet. Vit. Aug., c. 36.

^h Ann. i. 5.

ⁱ Tac. Dial. de Oratore, 37.

^j See instances in Lipsius Excursus on Tac. Ann. v. 4.

^k Vit. Cal., c. 8; Vit. Tib., c. 5.

^l *Hypomnētikais ephēmerisin.* De Leg. ad Caium, 1016 A. Mangey.

Emperor and Senate of Rome, as apologies for their religion, if it were not generally known that such records existed. So that the reference is in itself a pretty good evidence of the fact.^m And at all events, the acts of the people of Rome must have contained full details of events so sensational as the conflagration of the city, and the steps taken by Nero to throw off suspicion from himself upon the Christians, which would supply Tacitus with official information of the name ascribed to the victims of imperial cruelty and cunning; as they probably furnished to Suetonius the materials for his summary of Nero's police regulations. Now this is all that is required to take the statement of the existence of bodies of Christians at that time in Rome entirely out of the domain of legend and myth.

To the positive evidence of the existence of Christianity as a religious belief before the date of the siege of Jerusalem, furnished by these passages in Tacitus and Suetonius, must be added, as a strong confirmatory proof, the statement of Pliny the younger, in his often cited letter to the Emperor Trajan, written probably in A.D. 107 or 108.ⁿ In this letter he speaks not only of the great numbers of "persons of all ages, of every rank and of both sexes," who were in danger of suffering as Christians, but of "some who declared that they had ceased to be Christians twenty years before." Surely it is far more likely that such a spread of the new faith to a point so distant from Jerusalem as Bithynia, repre-

^m The statements of Tertullian, however, make it nearly certain, and those of Justin Martyr at least probable, that the documents to which they referred were not copies of official records, but accounts similar to those circulated among the Christians in later days as the acts of Pilate, in opposition to which Eusebius states that acts derogatory to Christ were forged by the heathen in the persecution of Maximin., E. H. i. 9, and ix. 5.

ⁿ Lardner, 'Heathen Test.' c. v.

sents the results of a propaganda continued for three-quarters of a century, rather than that a period of about thirty-five years should have sufficed for the incubation and production of the supposed myth—its acceptance among a certain class of Jews, its diffusion among their Gentile converts, and the attainment of a following so considerable as that described by Pliny, in a province remote from Judæa?

But here again recourse has been had to the weapon which we have found used against the testimony of Tacitus—suspicion of *forgery*. The learned Dr J. S. Semler entertained doubts as to the genuineness of this letter, and his doubts are paraded, as if they were unquestioned certainties, by Mr R. Cooper, who expands them into a statement “that *the German literati* have long been of opinion that this letter is a forgery.”^o As the main ground for this conclusion, he adduces the objections, “that the letter is found in one MS. only of Pliny’s letters, and not in the others,” and that Pliny states that the Christians used to meet before daylight and sing a hymn to Christ as to a God; whereas, says Mr Cooper, “the belief in the Divinity of Christ was not established till the Council of Nice, in A.D. 325”; whence Mr Cooper suggests that the letter was forged during the century intervening between Pliny and Tertullian, A.D. 216, by whom it is quoted. How the forger came to introduce a form of address to Christ, which, according to Mr Cooper, did not come into use till a century after Tertullian’s death, he does not condescend to explain. But, in fact, Tertullian’s quotation, while it proves the existence both of the

^o See ‘Infidel’s Text Book,’ or Lectures on the Bible, London, 1846, pp. 56, 57. Mr Cooper cites Semler’s *Neue Versuche die Kirchen Historie der ersten Jahrhunderten aufzuklaren*, 1788, pp. 117—226,—a work of which I have not been able to obtain a sight.

letter ascribed to Pliny, and the reply ascribed to Trajan, at the time when his apology was written, does create some suspicion that the particular expression to which Mr Cooper objects may have been introduced at a later date, for he makes Pliny say that the Christians sang a hymn to Christ *and* God, instead of to Christ *as* to God; which is the reading of our present copies of Pliny.^p So that, to say nothing of the obvious answer to this objection, that Pliny, who does not profess to report the exact words used by any Christian, and, in this letter, speaks of having required those who were charged before him "to repeat after him an invocation to the gods, and make offerings of wine and incense to the statue of *Trajan*, which, for that purpose, he had ordered to be brought out with those of the deities," may have somewhat misapprehended the nature of the addresses made by the Bithynians to Christ, the objection vanishes before the same kind of doubt to which it owes its existence. The *other* objection, that the letter is not to be found in some of the best MSS. of Pliny's letters, states a fact, but omits to state that the omission is not confined to this particular letter, but extends to the *whole correspondence* between Pliny and Trajan, which forms the 10th book of his letters, and apparently was not published till some considerable time after Pliny's death, while the bulk of his other letters were collected and published during his life, or immediately after his decease, whence these letters were not found in many copies of his works.^q

As for the *German literati*, they are so far from

^p *Christo et deo*, instead of *Christo quasi deo*. This is stated to be the reading of the best MSS. of Tertullian. Others have *ut deo*. Eusebius renders the phrase *dikēn theō*, which seems to show that he read 'quasi' in Pliny.

^q See Preface to Titze's Edition of 'Pliny,' Leipsic, 1823.

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having "generally concluded this letter to be a forgery," as Mr Cooper asserts, that edition after edition of Pliny's letters has been published in Germany, since Semler's work appeared, in which this letter is treated as genuine. Its genuineness is ably defended by a recent editor, Moritz Döring,^r who observes, as appears to me with perfect justice, "that it is difficult to see what object could be gained by forging it. An enemy of Christianity would have shown his desire for persecution more openly. A secret Christian could not have hoped to stop it by such means;" that is to say, by suggesting the adoption of a mixture of leniency and severity, involving death to those who refused to recant,^s with the statement that, by the adoption of this course, coupled with free pardon to such as would worship the Roman deities, "the temples, which had been almost forsaken, were beginning to be more frequented, and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, to be revived;" and "that victims were everywhere bought up, whereas, before, there were few purchasers." How too can we suppose that any Christian would have been contented to ascribe the conduct of martyrs, who "resisted even unto death," only to "contumacy and inflexible obstinacy;"^t or would not have insinuated some words of pity, if not of praise, for the two deaconesses, whom Pliny put to the torture, instead of simply stating that he "discovered nothing but a bad and extravagant superstition."^u On the other hand, can we imagine that an enemy to Christianity would make Trajan direct, as he does in his reply to Pliny, that the Christians

^r In an Edition published at Freyberg, 1843.

^s *Confitentes, iterum ac tertio interrogavi, supplicium minatus: perseverantes duci jussi.*

^t *Pertinaciam, et inflexibilem obstinationem.*

^u *Superstitionem pravam et immodicam.*

were not to be sought for, and were in all cases to be pardoned "on supplicating our gods," without even insisting "on their reviling Christ," though this is suggested in Pliny's letter, and absolutely prohibit the reception of anonymous accusations, as "a very bad precedent and unworthy of his age." But the tone of the letters is just what might be reasonably expected from what else we know of Pliny and Trajan. Trajan expresses his hatred of the system of spies. Pliny institutes careful inquiries, and does not conceal from the emperor what is favourable to the Christians; that they pledged themselves solemnly, "not to the commission of any crime, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, or refuse to give up property entrusted to them;" but he judges their refusal to sacrifice to the gods to be a criminal obstinacy, and their belief to be a contemptible superstition, and dislikes particularly the secrecy of their meetings, and their forming a separate society, to which others of his letters show that Trajan was particularly adverse. Add that the style and language of these letters agrees perfectly with those of the other letters of Pliny and Trajan, a point by no means unimportant, when we remember that this style is far from easy of imitation. On the whole, then, there seems no reason for doubting what Tertullian and Eusebius assume, that the letters are genuine parts of the correspondence between Pliny and the Emperor Trajan.

The conclusion of the genuineness both of these letters and the passages from Tacitus and Suetonius previously adduced, is confirmed, I think, if we compare either of these authorities with the documents which a mistaken piety undoubtedly did forge, for the better confirmation of the Christian faith, such as the letters of Pilate to Tiberius, or the testimony to Christ interpolated into Josephus, which I select for

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comparison, because they are the *least* obviously absurd of these fictitious evidences.

2nd letter of Pilate.^v

"Pilate to Tiberius Cæsar. Health!

"On Jesus Christ, of whom I gave you clear information in my last, at length, by the desire of the people, as it were against my will, and without my order, a severe punishment has been inflicted. But, by Hercules, so pious and pure a man no age has ever produced, or will produce. But a wonderful struggle of the people itself, and concurrence of all the scribes and rulers existed, as their own prophets and our sybils had forewarned, to crucify this ambassador of the truth; signs in nature, which in the judgment of philosophers threatened destruction to the universe, appearing while he was hanging. His disciples thrive, not belying their master by their words, and the continency of their lives—yea, being in his name great doers of good. If I had not dreaded a sedition of the people, who were all but boiling over, perhaps this man would still live. But being rather driven by my regard for your dignity, than led by my own will, I did not oppose with my full strength that this pure blood, innocent of any charge, should by the malignity of the men, unjustly, on their clamour, as the documents explain, suffer death, and be exposed to the winds."

Extract from Josephus :^w

"At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man; for he performed many wonderful works. He was the teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to himself many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men

^v Acta Pilati, Fab. Cod. Apocryph. N. T. I., 244. The poverty of the Latin style is necessarily concealed in the translation.

^w Ant. xviii. 3, 3.

among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who beforehand had conceived a love for him did not cease to adhere to him. For, on the third day, he appeared to them again alive, the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things respecting him; and the sect of Christians, so called from him, subsists to this day."

The contrast between the tone of such passages, and those adduced above from Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, is apparent; and shows, what it is reasonable to expect that, when the Christian imagination invented testimonies, it neither made these imaginary witnesses abuse the Christian religion, nor contented itself with making them attest what no one at the time disputed—namely, the existence of a body of Christians before the middle of the first century; but applied itself to meet the matters really contested, which was, not whether Jesus had lived at the time when they asserted that he did live, but whether his life and acts had been such as they represented.

Now, in opposition to this direct evidence of the existence of Christianity before the siege of Jerusalem, borne by the concurrent testimony of two eminent writers, who were not Christians, and confirmed incidentally by the official correspondence of a third, what is adduced? Simply a list of other non-Christian writers living in that age, who make no mention of Christianity.

The author of 'The Twelve Apostles' enumerates the following alleged contemporary writers, whose silence on this subject, he says, "is most remarkable"^x :—

^x Mr Cooper, in his 'Infidel's Text-Book,' pp. 50, 51, gives a much longer list, to which Mr I. L. Strange refers in his 'The Bible; is it the Word of God?' p. 351, of writers who have said nothing about Christians, including several, though not all, of those mentioned above. The list is not remarkable for the classical knowledge of names displayed in it; and as it includes several writers who lived

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	A.D.
Josephus, born	37
Philo, the Jew, died about	42
Plutarch, flourished	80
Pamphilus, the Grammarian, flourished	30
Memnon, " "	50
Epictetus, the Philosopher, " "	90
Lesbonax, the Sophist, " "	10
Pliny the elder, died	77
Seneca, the Philosopher, died	65
Curtius, the Historian, flourished	69
Pomponius Mela, the Geographer, flourished	45
Velleius Paterculus, the Historian " "	30
Valerius Maximus " " " "	26

Exception may be taken to the dates assigned to some of these authors. The age of *Pamphilus* is doubtful. On the one hand he is called *Aristarcheios*, of which the natural meaning is a pupil of Aristarchus, who lived 130 B.C. On the other hand, he is said to have quoted Apion, who was alive in A.D. 41. Mr Fynes Clinton attaches most weight to the last statement in fixing the date of Pamphilus, and adduces another case to show that *Aristarcheios* may mean only, of the school of Aristarchus.² But, as we do not possess the alleged quotation from Apion, it is possible that the statement may be a mistake, or

in the second century, when, even according to the mythical theory, the name Christian was known, their silence tends to destroy the weight of any argument drawn from the silence of those who lived in the first century, by showing that this silence may have proceeded from other reasons than the one of the name being unknown at the time. (See p. 65). The remarks made below, on the improbability of the writers referred to by the author of 'The Twelve Apostles' mentioning Christianity, apply to the other writers mentioned by Mr Cooper, as I have ascertained by individual examination of them. I have not gone more fully into these cases here, to avoid making this tract tediously long.

¹ Misprinted Valerius.

² *Fasti Hell.*, iii. 584 ; C. N. 228.

refer to some other Apion than the noted grammarian, and that *Aristarcheios* should be taken in its ordinary meaning, which would make Pamphilus anterior to the Christian era.

The age of *Memnon* is also very uncertain; our only acquaintance with him being derived from fragments of his works preserved by Photius. Voss places him in the time of Augustus; while Orellius, in the preface to an edition of his works, published in 1816, contends that he could not have written before the time of Hadrian, or even of the Antonines.

Again, the date of *Quintus Curtius* has been placed by different editors of his works at various periods between the time of Cicero and that of the Emperor Theodosius; the epoch which seems the most probable being that of the Emperor Constantine.^a As to the Sophist, *Lesbonax*, since the only writings of his which have come down to us are two orations supposed to have been delivered during the Corinthian war, B.C. 413, it is difficult to see why his silence about Christianity should be considered remarkable.

In the case of the other writers, the question arises, what probability is there that they would notice such a fact as Christianity probably was up to the close of the first century? If we assume the historical truth of all the prodigies recorded in the N. T., the case would, no doubt, be very different from what I take it to be. Gibbon, for instance, is, I think, quite justified in arguing that Pliny the elder could hardly have failed to notice the darkness which is said to have overspread all Palestine for several hours during the Crucifixion, in his careful examination of all known instances of failure of the sun's light, if such a darkness had actually occurred. But suppose these marvels to have been simply the

^a See Dissertations in Valpy's Delphin Ed. 1826, i., p. 32.

colouring given by the belief of the Christian community in the superhuman character of Christ to the events of his life : suppose that the Christians, until after the siege of Jerusalem, were commonly regarded as a Jewish sect,^b distinguished from other sects only because "after a way which these called heresy, so worshipped they the God of their fathers ;"^c differing from them only "on certain questions touching their own superstitions, and one Jesus, which was dead, whom [the Christians] affirmed to be alive,"^d there would be no reason for expecting to find notices of Christianity by any writers other than Christian, unless it can be shown that these writers bestowed much attention upon the Jewish sects and their opinions generally. Now, so far is this from being the case, that of the writers mentioned above, the only ones not Jews who notice the Jews at all are Memnon, Plutarch, Epictetus, Pliny the elder, Seneca, and Pomponius Mela,^e and the notice which they take of the Jews is very slight. *Memnon* states only that they were subject to Antiochus, the King of Syria, whom the Romans defeated.^f *Plutarch's* notice is confined to the questions, suggested as topics for after-dinner conversation, whether the Jews abstained from swine's flesh because they worshipped that animal, or because they had an antipathy to it ; and whether Adonis, which he seems to have supposed to be the name of the God of the Jews, is not the same as Bacchus.^g *Epictetus*, in blam-

^b "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are *all zealots of the law.*" Acts xxi. 20.

^c Acts xxiv. 14.

^d Acts xxv. 19.

^e I must except Pamphilus, whose works I have not been able to obtain, of whom, therefore, I cannot say whether he mentions the Jews or not.

^f Ch. 25, 26.

^g Sympos. iv., Ques. 5 and 6. How unsafe is it to argue from the silence of ancient writers, as to remarkable persons in or near

ing those who assume the profession of philosophy without acting up to it, says, "Why should you pretend to be a Greek when you are a Jew? Do you not perceive on what terms a man is called a Jew, a Syrian, an Egyptian? When we see a man inconstant to his principles we say he is not a Jew, but when he has the temper of a man dipped and professed, then he is, indeed, and is called, a Jew. Even so, we are counterfeiters—Jews in name, but in reality something else."^h Again, when discoursing of intrepidity, he says, "It is possible that a man may arrive at this temper and become indifferent to those things [dangers] from madness, or from habit, as the Galileans."ⁱ Both passages have been supposed, and it seems not unlikely, do refer to the Christians; they are all that Epictetus says about the Jews. *Pliny* the elder gives a short account of the geographical position of Judæa and its natural productions, and relates that there is a river in it which dries up every Sabbath day; but of the religious beliefs of the nation he says only that they were remarkable for their contempt of the Deities,^j and that they practised a magical art, taught them by Moses and Jochabela many thousand years after Zoroaster, whom Eudoxus states to have lived 6000 years before Plato.^k *Seneca* twice alludes to the Jewish Sabbath, once in a fragment of his dialogue on "Superstition," preserved by St Augustine, where he

to their own day, to their non-existence, appears from the fact that Plutarch never mentions Persius, Juvenal, Lucan, Seneca, Quintilian, Martial, Tacitus, Suetonius, or either Pliny, with all of whom he was contemporary either in his youth or his old age. Nor is he mentioned by any Roman writer. Yet he had lived for some years in Rome and given popular lectures there. Emerson, Preface to translation of Plutarch's *Morals*, ix.

^h Book ii. 9, Upton's translation.

ⁱ Book iv. 7, *Ib.*

^j *Gens contumelia numinum insignis.* *Hist. Nat.* xiii. 4.

^k *Ib.* xxx. 1.

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accuses the Jews of "thus causing a useless waste of the seventh part of their time;" and a second time, in one of his letters,¹ in which he speaks of a "prohibition to light candles on the Sabbaths;" and this is the only notice which he takes of them. Lastly, *Pomponius Mela* simply mentions that Judæa is a district of Syria. Why should we expect that authors who take so little notice of the ancient faith of the Jewish people, who in the first Christian century had spread so widely over the Roman empire, should specially busy themselves about a recent offshoot of that faith rejected by the body of the Jewish nation, then slowly diffusing itself, principally among the poorer classes, slaves, and freed-men, and women probably more than men,^m in the great cities of the empire; and numbering, at the outside, not more than a few thousand adherents in any one of those cities.ⁿ

¹ Ep. 95.

^m 'Ye see, brethren, your calling. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, and base things, and things which are despised.' 1 Cor. i. 25—28.

ⁿ Gibbon, after a careful consideration of all the numerical data which he could find, concludes, "that the most favourable calculations will not permit us to imagine that more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the empire had enlisted under the banner of the Cross before the important conversion of Constantine," C. xv., near end; an estimate not contested by his modern editors. He remarks also that *ingens multitudo*, the expression used by Tacitus of the Christians under Nero, is the same as that used by Livy of the Bacchanals, *multitudinem ingentem alterum jam prope populum esse*. Yet the whole number was found to be 7,000. Liv. 39, ch. 14—17. Of the ancient writers whom I have examined, *Strabo* gives the fairest and fullest account of the Jewish religion. Yet even he dwells almost exclusively on the prohibition against making any image of the Deity, which seems to have made a deep impression on him as profoundly reasonable, and which he ascribes to Moses, from the purity of whose teachings he conceives that his followers had degenerated into superstitious practices. Obviously, he had not at all studied their religious history. Geog. xvi. 2, secs. 34—36. *Cicero*, his contemporary, though he lived in the age when the Romans first became acquainted with the Jews from the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey, takes no notice whatever of them.

Among the list of writers enumerated by the author of 'The Twelve Apostles' there are really two only whose silence respecting Christianity can be reasonably a subject of surprise, because, undoubtedly, both of them were familiar with Jewish thought, and paid great attention to the religious beliefs of their nation—*Philo* and *Josephus*. But *Philo* was of a generation earlier than *Jesus*. He calls himself old, that is, probably, over 70, in A.D. 40, on the occasion of his mission to Rome.^o His works, which principally consist in a series of commentaries on the Pentateuch, must have been written before that date, with the exception of the account of his embassy to Rome placed at the end of them; since he was selected for this office, in spite of his advanced years, in consequence of the influence which his learning and reputation was considered to give him. It is true that in this narrative^p he gives "an account of the state of the Jews and their afflictions under Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula," as Mr Cooper states; but this account is so far from entering into the particulars of their religious opinions, that it does not even mention the divisions of Pharisees and Sadducees, of which we learn nothing from *Philo*; though he has devoted a separate treatise to the Essenes, from his admiration of the contemplative life, withdrawn from all worldly distractions, which they led. The silence of *Philo* on the existence of a sect of Christians among the Jews cannot, under these circumstances, be considered of any weight as an argument against its existence, whatever may be the weight due to it, when adduced, as is done by Mr Cooper, to prove "that the pretensions of the Christians to the *divine* influence of their master

^o See Preface to Mangey's Edition of his works.

^p Satirically called 'Of Virtues.'

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are perfectly gratuitous;"^a a matter with which I am not now dealing.

Josephus comes under another category. But the allegation that he "does not make the slightest mention of Jesus Christ"^r can be established only if it can be shown not only that the passage quoted above is interpolated into his works, of which there appears to be no reasonable doubt,^s but also that the short incidental notice of Jesus, contained in his account of the death of James, by order of the High Priest Ananus, is an interpolation. Now this is a much more doubtful question. The passage is as follows: "Ananus, thinking that he had met with a fitting opportunity, seeing that Festus was dead and Albinus was still on his journey, convened a Sanhedrim of judges, and having brought before it the brother of Jesus, who is called Christ, named James, and some others, accused them of having broken the law, and gave them over to be stoned."^t

This passage was known to Photius, whose silence as to the passage in *Ant.* xviii. is one strong argument against it.^u It is quoted by Eusebius, and by Jerome, though inaccurately, and it appears probable that it is referred to by Origen.^v Objection has

^a 'Infidel's Text Book,' p. 51.

^r *Ib.* p. 54, 'Twelve Apostles,' p. 10.

^s See Lardner's discussion of this passage in his 'Jewish Testimonies and Credibility of the Gospel.'

^t *Ant.* xx. 9. 1.

^u Lardner's *Jewish Test.* v. 3.

^v Origen says "that *Josephus*, who wrote the '*Jewish Antiquities*' in twenty books, being desirous to assign the cause why the Jews suffered such things, that even their temple was demolished to its foundations, says that these things had happened because of the anger of God against them for what they had done to James, the brother of Jesus, called Christ." In *Matt.*, sec. 17. Again, in his work against *Celsus*, i. c. 37, he states "*Josephus* says that these things befel the Jews in vindication of James, called The Just, who was the brother of Jesus, called Christ; inasmuch as they killed him who was a most righteous man." And afterwards, in

been taken to the genuineness, on the ground—*first*, that it implies some longer account of Jesus, of which none is given in Josephus except the passage allowed to be interpolated. *Secondly*, that the absence of a reference to Christ in any other passage of Josephus than this one, shows a settled intention on his part not to notice him, which is inconsistent with the notice here. But neither of these objections appears to me of much force. Josephus may have designedly abstained from any notice of Christ, or Christianity as a religious belief, and yet have mentioned the title commonly given to Jesus, as a means of identifying the James whom he names as condemned to death; and if he introduced the title *only* for this purpose, and his object was sufficiently attained by its introduction, he would have no reason for giving any further account of Jesus, whom we know that he did not acknowledge to be the true Messiah. The fact that the passage is quoted by Photius, who does not notice the account in Ant. xviii., proves that, at all events, the two passages are independent of each other. On the other hand, if any part of the passage is struck out, the whole must go, including the notice of James, and the sentence must be reduced to the words, “and bringing before it some, he accused them of having broken the law.” But this is an

‘Cont. Cels.’ ii, sec. 13, he says of the destruction of Jerusalem, “which, as Josephus writes, happened on account of James the Just, the brother of Jesus, called Christ; but, in truth, upon account of Jesus, *the* Christ, the Son of God.” This account is not to be found in Josephus; but the expression, “the brother of Jesus, *called* Christ,” is peculiar, and not likely to be used by Origen except as a quotation, as we may see from the continuation of the last passage. If he knew that Josephus had given an account of the death of James under the description of the “brother of Jesus, *called* Christ,” he may have ascribed to Josephus notions as to the consequences of this crime, which he had gathered from other sources; but it seems improbable that he should have done this, if Josephus had not mentioned the death of James at all.

awkward statement. It is not likely that Josephus would have said, Ananus "brought some" before the Council without any explanation of who they were. Nor is it probable that an interpolator would have divided the sentence, inserting the words from "the brother of Jesus" to "and," before "some," and "others" after it, though the Greek would have allowed him to say, with even more elegance, "others some," instead of "some others." And if the interpolator were a Christian, as is supposed, he would probably have said, "the brother of Jesus, *the Christ*," not "the brother of Jesus, *called Christ*."^w The gravest objection to the passage lies in its alleged inconsistency with the account of the death of James, given by Hegesippus and Clemens of Alexandria, as cited by Eusebius, who do not mention any trial of him instituted by Ananus, nor any others put to death with him, but describe him to have been "killed in a tumult near the temple, where some flung him down and threw stones at him; but his death was completed by a blow on the head with a fuller's pole."^x Yet, surely, it is quite possible that this may have been the actual mode of the death of James, while it had been preceded by an informal judicial process such as Josephus mentions. He does not tell us on what particular transgressions of the law the accusation turned. If the other persons accused were not Christians, or were not put to death as such, the Christian tradition would probably have ignored them. The whole proceeding was irregular, according to Josephus.^y So that it is not improbable that the attempt to execute the sentence may have

^w As in Ant. xviii. 1, where we read, "He was *the Christ*."

^x Lardner's 'Jewish Testimonies,' iv. 3.

^y So that "Albinus wrote to Ananus in great anger, threatening to punish him for what he had done, and King Agrippa took away from him the High Priesthood." Josephus, u.s.

led to a riot, in which James was killed—some persons, perhaps, attempting to rescue him from a judgment which they considered illegal.

On the whole, then, the arguments for the genuineness of this passage appear to me to preponderate over those against it; and, if it is genuine, we have in Josephus a witness not only to the fact but to the notoriety of the ascription of the title of Christ to Jesus, at a period anterior to the siege of Jerusalem; since he uses this title as a sufficient means of identifying another person, by describing him as the "brother of Jesus, called Christ."² But if this conclusion is mistaken, other cases in Josephus must put us on our guard against attaching much weight to his silence. Dr Lardner has observed that, although in the preface to his 'Jewish Antiquities' 'he engages to write of things as he found them mentioned in the Sacred Books, without adding anything to them, or omitting anything from them,' yet he says nothing about the golden calf made by the people in the wilderness, nor does he once name Mount Sion or Zion, either in his 'Antiquities' or his 'Jewish War,' though there were so many occasions for it, and it is so often mentioned in the Old Testament.^a The importance of such a caution, in dealing with Jewish authorities, is confirmed by the absence of any direct mention of Christianity in the *Mischna*, or original text of the Talmud, though this was certainly not compiled earlier than the second Christian century, and pro-

² Mr Cooper, in his 'Infidel's Text Book,' p. 54, omits to notice this passage, and thus leaves his readers under the impression that "there is not the slightest mention made of Jesus Christ in the works of Josephus except the passage interpolated in Ant. xviii.;" and yet he was not ignorant of its existence, for, in an earlier work, called 'The Bible and its Evidences,' p. 81, he quotes it, and makes to it one of the objections noticed above.

^a 'Jewish Testimonies,' iv. 4.

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bably at a still later date, and though there appear to be some covert allusions to it.^b Yet, unquestionably, this silence cannot proceed from the absence of a large body of Christians in that age.

Thus the negative testimony to which the author of 'The Twelve Apostles' attaches so much importance dwindles into insignificance when examined, and leaves unimpugned the positive testimony of Tacitus and Suetonius to the existence at Rome of a body of persons known as Christians some years before the siege of Jerusalem, confirmed by the testimony of Pliny to the extensive diffusion of the Christian faith in Bithynia between A.D. 100 and 110; evidence fatal to the mythical hypothesis advocated by this writer. Having thus a solid foundation for believing Christianity to have originated in the faith in an historical person, laid by the testimony of writers who did not share that faith, we may proceed to inquire whether this testimony is not placed beyond any reasonable doubt by the evidence of those who did share it. Mr Cooper, indeed, objects to quotations from Christian writers in support of Christian statements, that it is a *petitio principii*, proving a position by that which is denied; establishing Christian statements by Christian statements, a *modus operandi* which cannot be tolerated in an examination into their truth.^c And an objection of this nature would have much force, if the matter to be proved were of a nature likely to be coloured by the imaginations of the narrators. To take the case of Mr Cooper himself. If a question were raised as to the learning, the fairness, the cogency of reasoning, and critical sagacity displayed by him in his 'Infidel's Text Book,' the testimony of a professed disciple of Mr Cooper to the display of these qualities in his work

^b 'Jewish Testimonies,' v. 1. ii. 8.

^c 'Infidel's Text Book,' p. 69.

might reasonably be looked at with suspicion. But if the question were only when or where Mr Cooper was born, or the lectures which compose that book were delivered, to whom could we turn, with so good a prospect of obtaining correct information on these matters, as to those who might be associated with him in diffusing his Gospel of Infidelity. The Mormons may be very questionable witnesses to the character of Hiram Smith or Brigham Young, but they are the best witnesses to the dates and ordinary incidents of their lives. And so the writings of the first generations of Christians must be regarded as authorities, I will not say absolutely trustworthy, for they must always be open to reasonable criticism, yet certainly entitled to great weight, on questions concerning the time when the Christian religion began. Now on this point the New Testament gives no "uncertain sound." All the Gospels agree in connecting the appearance of Jesus as a teacher with the preaching of John the Baptist, whose date is fixed by Josephus. All agree in ascribing the crucifixion of Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the period of whose government of Judæa is well ascertained. One of the evangelists had apparently taken considerable pains to fix the time when Jesus began to teach, by reference to a number of contemporary sovereigns. And though it is doubtful whether he was in all these cases well-informed, still the fact of his having made such researches shows that he was not indifferent to the duty of an historian to fix as far as possible the time when the events recorded by him happened, and, in consequence, deserves the credit generally conceded, upon such matters, to the statements of a writer who certainly was not removed by a period of more than seventy years from the time of which he writes.

It may perhaps be objected to the statements of

the Gospels, that the existence of *some one* on whom the imagination of those who first launched the Christian faith pitched, as the solid point round which their mythical conceptions could crystallize, as has been suggested in the beginning of this essay, may be admitted without allowing an historical foundation for the statement that a Messianic character was attributed to Jesus before the siege of Jerusalem ; and that the Gospels, which cannot be shown to have been written before that event, may have antedated this belief, by assigning to a time forty years earlier ideas which really arose subsequently to, and in consequence of, this catastrophe. But the New Testament supplies other evidence not open to this objection—the evidence of three distinct witnesses, in The Acts of the Apostles, The Epistles of St. Paul, and The Apocalypse. Let us examine their testimony.

I am by no means disposed to take up the cudgels generally in defence of the historical character of the Acts. I admit that this work appears to have been written with the object of reconciling the Petrine and the Pauline factions, whose disputes distracted the first age of the Church, by exhibiting the two leaders acting side by side in the work of evangelisation, giving to Peter especially the "ministry of the circumcision," and to Paul that of "the uncircumcision," as if by a mutual agreement generally sanctioned by the Apostles ; while it ascribes to Peter the honour of making the first important Gentile convert, and makes Paul everywhere address himself first to the Jews, and turn to the Gentiles only when rejected by them, instead of presenting himself, as his epistles would lead us to expect, in the character of an ambassador for Christ, and announcing the principle of righteousness by the "faith which Abraham had yet being uncircumcised ;" a faith where the difference between

Jew and Greek vanished, and all alike were convicted of "having come short of the glory of God," and needing to be justified, "not by the works of the Law," but by that inner principle of trust and love by which they might be transformed into true children of their heavenly Father. I allow that the narrative of the first preachings of the Apostles at Jerusalem is steeped in a roseate mist of mythological wonders where the features of history disappear. But this does not alter the fact that the latter chapters of the Acts embody what appears to be the narrative of an eyewitness and companion of Paul, whose natural blending of "they" and "we" in the story testifies to the truthfulness of his accounts;^d while the undesigned coincidences between his statements and the letters of Paul, admirably pointed out in Paley's '*Horæ Paulinæ*,' "make out," to borrow Mr Taylor's words,^e "to the satisfaction of every fair inquirer, that neither those epistles nor that part of the Acts of the Apostles are supposititious. The hero of the one is unquestionably the epistoler of the other. Both writings are therefore genuine, to the full extent of everything they purport to be. Neither are the epistles forged, nor the history, as far as relates to Paul, other than a faithful and a fair account of a person who really existed, and acted the part ascribed to him."

I may observe, in confirmation of this conclusion, that the story of the preaching of Christianity, as we read it in this part of the Acts, is not such as might be naturally expected from the Gospels, and certainly not that which the inventor of an imaginary

^d xvi. 6-9, "they;" 10-17, "we;" 18 to xx. 4, "he" or "they;" xx. 5, to xxi. 17, "we;" xxi. 20, to xxvi. 35, "he" or "they;" xxvi. to xxvii. 37, "we;" xxvii. 38, to xxviii. 6, "he" or "they;" xxviii. 7-16, "we."

^e '*Diegesis*,' p. 376.

history would have been likely to produce. The Acts of the Apostles profess to be a continuation of the 3rd Gospel, which ends with a solemn declaration of Christ, made to the eleven Apostles immediately before his ascension, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, "and ye are the witnesses of these things."^f And the first part of the Acts narrates a story of missionary effort, spreading from Jerusalem to the countries bordering on Judæa, in apparent accordance with this injunction. But, from the xvth chapter to the end of the book, all this is changed. There is no talk of Jerusalem as a centre of propaganda: there is no mention of "the twelve," or any one connected with them, going forth among the nations. The story of missionary activity centres in the labours of a man who was not one of the original apostles, who had been at first a bitter opponent of Christianity, and between whom and "the twelve" there is no trace of a very cordial sympathy. While the only one of the latter body who is mentioned at all, James, is described as stationary in Jerusalem. Surely no one who had begun by evolving twelve apostles out of his "moral consciousness" would have gone on to assign to them a part in the preaching of the Christian faith which he records, so insignificant as this. The fact is conceivable, for fact is often stranger than fiction. The fiction is self-destructive.

Assuming, then, that Mr Taylor's judgment upon this part of the Acts is well founded, what does it show us? What are these thirteen chapters of the Acts, but records of journies made by St Paul during a long series of years, while the city and Temple of Jerusalem were still undestroyed, for the purpose of

^f Luke xxiv. 47, 48. The 1st and 2nd Gospels contain corresponding statements: Matt. xxviii. 20; Mark xvi. 15-20.

spreading through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece the faith in Jesus as the Christ?^g And with this statement, the letters of Paul, whose genuineness we have seen Mr Taylor admits, and no critic of whom I know, who has studied them, has ever denied, to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans, are in complete agreement. From beginning to end, they are full of earnest faith in Jesus Christ, "who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."^h And of these epistles, those to the Galatians and Corinthians distinctly testify to a time anterior to the siege of Jerusalem. The Galatians describes two journeys made by Paul to Jerusalem, at an interval of fourteen years.ⁱ The 1st Epistle to the Corinthians provides for the sending to Jerusalem money which had been collected "for the Saints;"^j the 2nd Epistle mentions an intended visit of Paul to Judæa.^k They testify also to the existence of those apostles which the author of 'The Twelve Apostles' denies. The 1st Epistle to the Corinthians speaks of "the twelve,"^l and twice mentions Peter under the name of Cephas.^m The Epistle to the Galatians speaks of Peter by both names,ⁿ of James, the Lord's brother,^o of John,^p and Barnabas,^q as names thoroughly well

^g See Acts xvii. 3, 18; xviii. 5; xix. 4, 18; xx. 21, 24, 35; xxi. 13; xxv. 19; xxvi. 9, 15, 23, 28; xxviii. 31.

^h Rom. i. 3, 4.

ⁱ i. 18; ii. 1.

^j I Cor. xii. 3.

^k II Cor. i. 66.

^l I Cor. xv. 5.

^m I Cor. i. 12; xv. 5.

ⁿ Peter, i. 18; ii. 7, 8, 11, 14; Cephas, ii. 9.

^o i. 19; ii. 9.

^p ii. 9.

^q ii. 14.

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known among the Christian community; and confirms to this extent the story in the Gospels.^r

I pass to the third witness mentioned above, the Apocalypse, of which the general consent of the ablest critics, founded on the distinct reference to Jerusalem as still standing in chapter xi., places the date before the destruction of that city.^s Now the Apocalypse professes to be "a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show his servants things which must shortly come to pass";^t whom it describes as the "faithful and true witness;" "the first begotten from the dead;"^u "whom every eye should see, and they also that pierced him;" and again, "as one like unto the Son of Man,"^v who was dead and is alive for ever, and has the keys of hell and of death;^w and again, as "the Lamb who has been slain," and now "is worthy to receive power, and

^r The name Cephas does not occur in the Synoptics. We learn its application to Peter, positively, only from the fourth Gospel, i. 42; and, in this Gospel, it is never used again. In the passages where Peter is afterwards mentioned, he is called Simon Peter, except where the name occurs several times in the same story, when the Simon is dropped, xiii. 63; xviii. 11, 16, 17, 18, 26, 27; xx. 3, 4; xxi. 7, 17, 20, 21; and in xxi. 15, 17, where Jesus three times addresses him as Simon, son of Jonas. In the Synoptics we find Peter without the Simon, except on the occasion of his acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, Matt. xvi. 16; and his falling at Christ's feet, Luke v. 8. But he is several times mentioned as Simon only, especially in Luke. See Matt. xvi. 17; Mark i. 29, 30, 36; xiv. 37; Luke iv. 38; v. 3, 4, 5, 10; xxvi. 31; xxiv. 34.

^s The author of "The Twelve Apostles" has apparently forgotten this reference when he asserts that the writer of the Apocalypse says *nothing* which can identify his Jesus with the Jesus of the Gospels. (Page 20). Surely he never can have imagined that the city which is described as the Holy city, containing the Temple of God, where "our Lord was crucified," xi. 1, 2, 8, is any other city than Jerusalem, or that the "Lord" can be any other than the "Jesus" from whom the whole book purports to proceed.

^t i. 1.

^u i. 5.

^v The name which Jesus commonly gives himself in the Gospels.

^w i. 13; 18.

riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing ;”^x from whose wrath “ the kings of the earth, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman should hide themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains ;”^y with whom the nations should make war, and who should overcome them, “ for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings ;”^z who, accordingly, afterwards rides forth in triumph, on a white horse, clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and followed by the armies of heaven,^a to “ tread the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God ;”^b and who, after his final victory, appears, as the light of the New Jerusalem which had descended from heaven, and had twelve foundations, and “ on them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.”^c Of these apostles the author of ‘ The Twelve Apostles ’ observes, that the writer does not mention their names, nor does he say whether they existed already, or were only to have a future existence ;^d which is no doubt literally true, though, if so, the exigencies of the fiction would seem to require that some important part in the events described in the Apocalypse as immediately imminent should be assigned to persons to whom so striking a position is attributed in their triumphant issue. But the objector overlooks the fact that the Apocalypse is fatal to his hypothesis in itself, and apart from its identification of the Jesus of whom it speaks with the Jesus of the Gospels. For this hypothesis is, that the *notion* of a Messiah who *had* suffered and *should* come in triumph, to deliver his people and establish his kingdom over the earth, arose after the destruction of Jerusalem, out of the

^x v. 12.

^y vi. 15.

^z xvii. 14.

^a xix. 11—14.

^b xix. 16.

^c xxi. 14.

^d P. 20.

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reaction of Messianic hopes against the blow inflicted upon them by the destruction of the Holy city; while here we have a book full of this idea from beginning to end, written while Jerusalem was still standing, and addressed to bodies of believers in such a Messiah, who form seven churches in seven of the principal cities in the Roman province of Asia; a conclusive proof that, in whatever cause the idea of a Messiah who should triumph after having suffered originated, it did not grow out of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Thus we have in the New Testament, besides the direct testimony of all four Evangelists, three independent witnesses, whose evidence indirectly, but in each case conclusively, negatives this mythical hypothesis. Let us go one step further, to the next generation of Christian writers, and take the evidence of Papias, bishop of Hieropolis, in the beginning of the second century, from whose writings we possess various passages, preserved by Eusebius. Papias, says Eusebius,⁶ in the preface to his work, by no means gives us to understand that he had been an eye and ear witness of the holy apostles, but that he had received the orthodox doctrine from those who had known them. These are his words: "I have no hesitation in interweaving in my interpretation what I have learned from the presbyters, and impressed on my memory, since I am assured of their truth. For I did not attend, as the great mass are wont to do, especially to those who are only great talkers, but I directed my eyes to those who could testify to the truth. Not to those I turned who repeated by rote statements about which they knew nothing, but to those who knew the rules prescribed by the Lord himself

⁶ 'Ecc. Hist.' iii. 39; *Exēgēsis tōn kuriakōn logiōn*.

for the faith. When I fell in with any one who had enjoyed the teaching of the elders, I inquired of him what they had spoken? What, I asked, *have* Andrew, what Peter, what Philip, Thomas, James, what John, what Matthew *said*? or what *do* the disciples of the Lord, men like Aristion and the Presbyter John, *say*?"^f Here we find Papias distinguishing two generations of teachers, both older than himself; the first, including the well-known names of six out of the twelve Apostles, of which he speaks as wholly passed away; the *second*, disciples still alive, though his own seniors; each of whom he mentions equally as real persons, from whose teachings he hoped to receive instruction. The statement is very intelligible and natural, if there had really existed in the last generation men well known as the apostles of Jesus, but very inconceivable, if the only answer which Papias could have obtained to his inquiries had been, what it must have been supposing the hypothesis under our consideration to be true, "we have never met with *any* such persons, nor know of any one who has seen them. We know only, that we have *heard them talked about*, during the last twenty or thirty years, as the apostles of a Jesus who is said to have been crucified eighty years since." Regarded as a statement really made by a writer who lived in the age of Papias, the passage becomes, on this hypothesis, absurd; while, if it were not a genuine statement of Papias, but one made up, in order to give credence to the story of there having been a body of apostles, the inventor must have been a great bungler, to make his witness testify only to what he had heard, instead of boldly putting into his mouth the assertion that he had seen and con-

^f *Ti Petros eipen., ti Philippos, &c., ti legousin Aristion, &c.*

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versed with apostles of the Lord, as he might easily have done, if any of these apostles had lived to old age. On the other hand, if the statement is not concocted, it furnishes one of those indirect proofs that Jesus and his Apostles are not mythical but historical persons, which are the more convincing because their evidence is undesigned.

It would be easy to heap up testimony to the same effect out of the writers who succeeded Papias. But as this testimony would carry us too far from the original sources, I abstain from going into it, and confine myself to one additional piece of evidence, the lists of names of the Christian bishops in the patriarchal sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome, preserved in the Chronicon of Eusebius; of which I may observe that it is not a record confined to ecclesiastical incidents, but a general chronicle of important events, from the earliest times to the age of Eusebius, containing the names of the different bishops of these great sees, introduced under their proper dates. The names and dates are as follows :

ALEXANDRIA.	A.D.	ANTIOCH.	A.D.
Annianus	65	Euodius	43
Asilus	85	Ignatius	71
Cerdon	98	Heros	115
JERUSALEM.		ROME.	CHRON. H.E.
James (No dates.)		Petrus	36
Simeon "		Linus	66 68
Justus "		Anacletus	79 80
Then twelve others, down		Clemens	87 92
to the time of Hadrian.		Evaristus	96 100

It will be seen that, in each of the great capitals, Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome, the list of names, excluding Peter, goes up beyond the time when, according to the mythical hypothesis, the idea

of Christianity arose. Yet the statements of Eusebius appear to have been founded in every case on documents preserved in the respective churches.⁸ Some uncertainty seems to have attached to these records in the case of Rome; where Augustine gives another list of bishops, in which Clemens precedes Anacletus instead of following him, and the dates given by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History slightly differ from those given in his Chronicon. But though some suspicion is thus cast on the accuracy of the lists, it is difficult to suppose that in all these great cities the Christians deliberately fabricated the names of bishops who never existed, in order to give countenance to the notion that the Christian religion began to be taught half a century earlier than was in fact the case. And the difficulty of this supposition is increased by the circumstance that neither in Antioch nor Alexandria is the first bishop one of the Apostles, to whom the inventors of an imaginary succession of bishops would have naturally attributed the foundation of the great Christian churches; they are persons, for the introduction of whose names no other reason can be given than the simple one that they did historically fill the office of bishops in the places and at the times where and when they are mentioned.

What is there to oppose to the accumulative force of these distinct lines of evidence, from writers who were not Christians and writers who were Christians, from histories, and memoirs, and letters, and prophetic anticipations, and autobiographical notices, and official lists of names, all combining to prove that Christianity arose out of the reverence felt for an historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate, but of whom his

⁸ See the passages in Fynes Clinton, 'Fasti Romani,' ii. 535.

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disciples believed that he had risen from the dead, and would shortly come in the clouds as the judge of all mankind. Absolutely *nothing* but that certain writers do not mention Christianity, the character of whose writings gives us no reason for expecting that they would mention it; and that, when we enter into the *details* of the stories preserved to us about Jesus, we find ourselves involved in such a mass of contradictory statements that we do not know on what to rely, beyond the broad facts stated above; and the evidence as to his character furnished by the sayings attributed to him, and the impression which he appears to have produced on those among whom he lived and worked.

It does not fall within my present object to consider this historical element, either in itself or in its bearing upon religious faith. I wish only to show what I hope to have succeeded in showing, that there is far more of unwarranted assumption and unreasoning credulity involved in the disbelief of the historical origin of Christianity out of reverence for the person of Jesus of Nazareth, than is involved in the belief that it did thus originate.

But this belief, if it be confined to that which is *historically* proveable, must take up an attitude very different from the one which the defenders of what is called Orthodox Christianity commonly assume. If Jesus of Nazareth can be proved, beyond any reasonable doubt, to have been a person, of whose actions and sayings we know enough to show that he exhibited a very remarkable phase of religious feeling, which produced among his disciples an unbounded reverence for him; whose death was attended by the remarkable incident, that it was followed by the firm belief of these disciples in his resurrection from the dead; and who appeared at an epoch in the spiritual

development of our race, which has given to this reverence and belief a most important influence on the religious history of mankind, still, here the voice of history stops. When we attempt to pass beyond these limits, into the *details* of what are generally called the evidences of the Christian religion,—the direct external proofs of supernatural action,—we find ourselves in the domain of legend and myth; and all certainty as to the supposed facts vanishes with the traditional, imaginative, and contradictory character of the testimony adduced for them. If the Catholic faith as to the person of Jesus is to continue, the grounds for it must then be taken from other sources than these details; where the opponents of the belief of the Church have, I conceive, as decisive a victory in the argument as its defenders have on the question whether the Christian faith did not arise from that reverence for the person of Jesus, and persuasion that he had risen from the dead, to which the New Testament traces it.

That a new and more radical contest concerning the claims of Christianity will be carried on upon this ground I expect; and its result will, in my judgment, not be such as is usually assumed at the present day by those who contend for the application to the New Testament of the strict rules of historical criticism. But neither can it be such as those assume who contest the legitimacy of this application. Religious faith may, and I believe will, find a secure refuge in the supersensual world of ideal truths, and the external affirmation to them given by the course of man's religious development. But this faith will no longer be able to isolate itself from the general progress of the race, or represent itself as the exclusive *sesame* of an arbitrary salvation. It must be based on trust in the Universal Father, whose

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love embraces *all* his creatures, a trust which the revelation of His nature, made through the course of human history, may affirm, but for which it cannot be a substitute. And the feeling engendered by it towards the ancient channels of religious influence may, I conceive, be summed up in Goethe's words :^h

Ich wandle auf weiter, bunter Flur,
Ursprünglicher Natur,
Eine heilige Quelle in welchem ich bade,
Ist Ueberlieferung, ist Gnade.

^h Gott Gemüth und Welt, ii, 227. Edition of 1828.

I rove o'er the broad and varied field,
Of primitive nature ;
A sacred spring in which I bathe
Is tradition—is grace.

