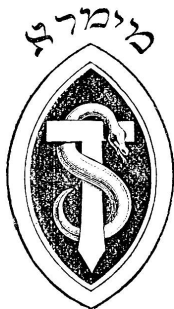


THE
TACTICS AND DEFEAT
OF THE
CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY.

BY
THOMAS SCOTT.



Great men are not *always* wise; neither do the aged *always* understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will show my opinion. Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. And lo! there was no reasoner for Job, or an answerer of his sayings among you. I, therefore, will answer also my part, I also will show my opinion.—BOOK OF JOB.

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SINCE my 'Challenge to the Members of the Christian Evidence Society' was published, the series of lectures to which the address of Archbishop Thompson was to serve as an introduction has been given to the world; and we have now before us at least an outline of the grounds on which that which this Society calls the Christian religion is supposed to stand. The expression may be pardoned if I say that the attitude assumed by these self-styled upholders of Christianity is one of the most astonishing phenomena in the history of man,—so astonishing that many have thought, and some have asserted, that the Christian Evidence Society has never meant anything serious by the flourishing of its trumpets, and that, far from seeking to overthrow its adversaries, it has sought by its martial music only to cheer and encourage its own adherents. This is, of course, an imputation of conscious dishonesty; but all that I need say is that it is for the members of the Society to repel it, not for me.

But if we look upon these lectures as *bonâ fide* attempts to convince those who are supposed to be liberals, or sceptics, or infidels (whatever be the name assigned to them), then, I repeat, the position of these self-styled Christian advocates is most astounding.

6 *The Tactics and Defeat of the*

The issue to be met by the Christian Evidence Society is this. Here is a religion which asserts that man was created perfectly innocent and good; that by transgression he fell, and that his fall made it impossible for the Father to admit man again to His mercy, except by a redemption of blood; that all the children of Adam became, further, in consequence of their first parent's sin, children of wrath and inheritors of a fire in which they should be tormented for ever; that, in course of time, after a revelation supernaturally imparted and supernaturally attested, the second Person of the triune Godhead became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary without the intervention of any earthly father; that the child born of Mary was a perfect man, but was also Almighty God; that the birth of this child was announced by wise men from the East, and by the songs of angels in the sky; that, after escaping the malice of his enemies, and having repelled the temptations of the evil spirit or devil, he began the work of his mission, and continued for two or three years preaching and teaching and doing wonderful works; that he calmed the sea, healed the sick, and raised the dead, announcing at the same time his own resurrection, which took place about thirty-six hours after he died on the Cross; that after another interval of forty days he rose up into heaven from Mount Olivet, and that a band of angels told his disciples, as they looked up after his departing form, that as he had gone, so he would come again, to judge the quick and the dead.

This outline of the belief of the various bodies of Christendom may be filled up in various ways, and be modified by various colours; but, on the whole, it will probably be allowed by all to be a correct outline, and the conclusion at once follows that, although this belief may contain a philosophy, yet its basis is asserted to be altogether historical, and to consist of

a series of facts or events in the history of the world as real as the struggle between the Crown and the Parliament in the reign of Charles the First. It is obvious that to this scheme of belief the objections taken may be or rather must be of two kinds. It may be asserted (1) that the philosophy is false, or (2) that the facts on which it is stated to rest never took place. It may be held (1) that the views of the Divine Nature set forth in this creed are horrifying and immoral, that they impute the worst injustice to God, and that the enunciation of them is one of the greatest calamities that have befallen mankind; or (2) it may be held that the narratives which are said to furnish authority for this belief either do not furnish it, or are untrustworthy as historical documents.

Now, it is perfectly clear that the business of a society which professes to treat of *Christian Evidences* is to address itself to the establishment of these alleged historical facts or incidents. It is foolish to raise the superstructure before the foundation has been safely laid; and although the building raised without foundations may impose on some, it is plain that the labour will be thrown away if any reply that their first concern is to know whether the foundation exists at all, and that they have no intention of discussing the merits of the philosophy or creed, until the existence of that foundation has been placed beyond all doubt. With this issue the introductory address of Archbishop Thompson had, as I have shown in my *Challenge to the Society*,* nothing whatever to do. His words might have some relevance for those who have been perplexed or convinced by Positivists, or Darwinists, or Atheists, whatever these may be; but they were utterly wasted for all who say, "This is not our present concern: what we want to know is this, was Jesus conceived without the intervention of

* *Challenge*, p. 6.

a human father, or was he not? Did he actually raise the widow's son or Lazarus from the dead, or did he not? Had he anything to do with John the Baptist, or had he not? Did he keep his Messiahship a secret from all but two or three, and at the same time did he preach it publicly, and make it a subject of controversy everywhere? Is the story of his own resurrection generally credible, and are there good historical grounds for the alleged event that at last he went up in visible tangible form with visible raiment to a heaven which always stands over the Mount of Olives? If these and the thousand other questions of fact, of mere fact, which we must go on to ask, are not satisfactorily answered, then the foundation of which you speak does not exist, and your Christianity has no authority, and therefore no claim on my acceptance."

To speak of a man who puts the matter in this way and insists that his demands shall be fairly met, as being necessarily an infidel, is not only mere waste of breath; it is disingenuous shuffling, and may perhaps deserve a shorter and a harsher name. He may be an infidel: he may suppose that there is no God, or that men are descended from monkeys, or that mind is only a modification of matter, or that men should worship their grandmothers; but he may also hold no such views. He may turn round on the self-styled Christian advocate and say, "I am a truer Christian than you are. I have really a Gospel to preach to you and to all men, the very Gospel which Christ preached. I believe that all things are the work of an Eternal Mind or Spirit, to which my mind or spirit stands in a definite relation. I believe that this Eternal Mind or Spirit is absolutely just, true, and loving; and I cling to all the consequences which are involved in this conviction. I believe that as His Will is to bring us to our highest good, in other words to bring our mind into perfect conformity with his Divine

Mind, so also He has the power to do this; that this Power and Will are bringing about the perfect vindication of his justice, and that his justice and mercy are synonymous terms. I hold that, whatever be the origin or descent of man, God has never been absent from any of His creatures; that from the first dawnings of his sense He has been educating and training men, by a long process indeed and a painful one, through the indefinite series of ages until they have reached their present state, and that He will continue this work in the long series of ages yet to come. I believe that because we live in Him now, we shall continue so to live after we have undergone the change which we call death; that the denial of this cuts at the root of all morality and law, because it cuts at the root of all love; for what is the meaning of growth in the knowledge of God, what is the meaning of patience, forbearance, truthfulness, unselfishness, if the wheels of a steam-engine may end all my concern with them at any moment, or if I may escape from my duty by throwing myself into the sea? I need not go further. I have said enough to show you that I am not an infidel, and, as I think, to show you that my faith is vastly higher, and is far more nearly and really the faith of Christ, than is yours. If, then, you imply in any part of the discussion which may follow that I am an infidel, or that I reject your conclusions through moral obliquity, I shall at once leave you as a person who has placed himself beyond the courtesies of an impartial judicial inquiry. And yet I, who believe what I have told you that I believe, I who cling far more than you do to the real teaching of Jesus, have examined the narratives which profess to relate his life; and after the scrutiny of years my deliberate conclusion is, that, as historical documents, these narratives are generally untrustworthy, not so much for those portions which relate events confessedly extraordinary

or supernatural, as for those portions which relate the most ordinary matters. I need not weary myself by going afresh through a history which has been carefully analysed already; I content myself with saying that I have read all your lectures or essays, and a hundred other books which say much what you have said, and that I have found in them nothing which answers the questions put in the 'English Life of Jesus,' nothing which even tends to prove that the contrary of the conclusions reached by the writer or writers of that work are tenable, nothing which meets the objections to which Dean Alford was challenged to reply in the pamphlets entitled 'Commentators and Hierophants,' nothing which faces the issue put forward later in the 'Challenge to the Members of the Christian Evidence Society;' and I insist now that you shall meet these objections and answer these questions, or confess your inability to meet and answer them. If (to use words which you may already have heard) you refuse to answer or keep silence, I shall take your refusal or your silence as an acknowledgment of defeat, and shall be justified in publishing it as such to the world."

If the members of the Christian Evidence Society have any honesty or sense of fairness and truth, it will be impossible for them to deny that their duty is to address themselves to men who speak as I have made my imaginary inquirer speak in the foregoing sentences. What they have to show is, that the narrative of the visit of the wise men, for instance, is consistent with that of the purification of Mary and the circumcision of Jesus in the temple; that the Gospels which say that during his whole ministry only two or three were made aware of his Messiahship may be reconciled with the other Gospel, in which his character is known to the disciples before they receive their call to be apostles, is declared everywhere, and made the subject of repeated and vehement contro-

versy in the most public places of Jerusalem; that the narrative which relates the incidents following the crucifixion is as free from difficulties, inconsistencies, and contradictions as a narrative of great events must be before it can be accepted by an honest judge and an impartial jury in a court of justice. In short, to go through the whole subject, refuting at every step the conclusions set forth, after examination of the evidence in each case, in the 'English Life of Jesus,' without the least reference to the truth or the falsehood of any form of philosophy or belief, including among these all the forms of Christian faith or opinion—this, and nothing less than this, is the work of the Christian Evidence Society, if they really think that their belief has any historical foundation at all—if they really allow, as Archbishop Thompson has allowed, that these alleged facts, which constitute the foundation of their belief, are not to be taken for granted, but are to be proved by evidence such as would satisfy honest men approaching the subject without prejudice or prepossession, or any secondary motives whatsoever.

The lectures which have followed Archbishop Thompson's introductory essay abundantly show what, in point of fact, we have to expect from these so-called defenders of the faith. The writers of these papers have handled, after their sort, topics of various kinds. We have essays on materialistic theories, on science and revelation, on Positivism and Pantheism; but all these may at once be swept aside. For the present we have nothing to do with Comte, or Darwin, or Huxley, or any of their theories, arguments, or conclusions. The only question which we have to ask relates to the facts on which the Christianity of the Christian Evidence Society is supposed to rest; and that question may be put in four words, Are these things so?

Among these lectures, three only seem by their

titles likely to treat this question. We might have supposed that Dr Stoughton's paper on Miracles would have gone, *seriatim*, through all the miracles related in the New Testament, showing that each really is an historical incident, just as an English historian would examine the question whether the Gowrie conspiracy was really planned by the earl and his brother, or whether it was or was not a vile plot on the part of James VI. to kill and take possession, and murder the memories as well as the bodies of his victims. Instead of this, as we turn over Dr Stoughton's pages, we find ourselves rambling in the old labyrinth of arguments which are to show that miracles were to be expected, and that in the ministry of Jesus they are not to be overvalued or undervalued. All this has been repeated again and again; but if we look for any evidence which is to justify our acceptance of the narrative of the miracle at Cana, we shall look for it in vain.

The case remains unaltered when we turn to Dr Harold Browne's paper on "Christ's Teaching and Influence on the World." We have here some references to supposed facts, but they are mere references, and no more. Bishop Browne has painted what he supposes to be an historical picture; but as he simply assumes the general trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives, his paper, also, must be set aside, as failing to meet the real point at issue. It is obvious that his remarks have no force for those who will say that their estimate of the influence of Christ on the world is not altogether that of Bishop Browne; and that, even if it were, this would not help us to determine whether the Sanhedrim placed a guard of Roman soldiers at the grave of Jesus, and afterwards bribed them to tell Pilate a lie, or whether they did not.

There remains only Mr Cook's paper on "The Completeness and Adequacy of the Evidences of Chris-

tianity." The title certainly seems to show that the editor of the "Speaker's Commentary" understands the real work of the Society, and that he is prepared honestly to do that work. Let us see how he sets about it.

I am compelled to quote from my "Challenge to the Society," and here as there, I insist that from the only question to which I have to demand an answer, "that which is called external evidence to the truth of the Gospels is altogether excluded. I have nothing to do with the testimony of Clement, or Justin, or Tertullian, or Origen, or Jerome, or Augustine, or any other patristic writer whatsoever—with the truth of the teaching of Jesus, or the high character of his Apostles. No external evidence can impart authority or weight to narratives which are, in themselves, incredible, or self-contradictory, or mutually destructive; and I have the right to insist that they who consider themselves my opponents, will make no attempt to divert the controversy to this utterly irrelevant issue." *

The whole series of tracts put forth by the Society makes it abundantly clear that they mean steadily to confine themselves to this issue, and to ignore every other. At starting, Mr Cook takes refuge under the wing of the great men whose writings are supposed to uphold Christianity, in his acceptance of the word. He refers us to the long series of writers stretching from the earliest centuries to Grotius and Leibnitz, to Luthardt, Steinmeyer, and Delitsch; but even this he cannot do without using expressions which come with a bad grace from one who is supposed to be speaking as an impartial examiner of evidence. England, we are told, holds a place among the foremost champions of the cross. He rejoices to think that, "at this present hour, men sound in the faith, full of the love and light of Christ, are bringing

* Challenge, p. 12.

the resources of profound learning and vigorous intellect to bear upon the chaotic turmoil of anti-Christian influences. Within this present year several works have reached me in which infidelity is confronted, both in the sphere of general cultivation, and in the abstrusest fastnesses of philosophy." * Is this the language of a man who approaches his task without prejudices, prepossessions, or secondary motives? What does he mean by the word infidelity, and by what right does he employ, without definition, an ambiguous term? Would not a really truthful and honest man say, "I have to show you that Christianity rests on a basis of historical events; and, until I have shown you that the miracle at Gadara, or the confusion of the Roman soldiers at the moment of the resurrection, took place as certainly as the battle of Hastings, or the discomfiture of the Gunpowder Plotters in the vaults of Westminster, I have no right to speak of myself as orthodox, or of others as infidels; I have no right even to imply that the teaching of Christ was better than that of all other men, or even that it is true. I have first to prove that the Magi came to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and that, while Joseph and Mary were carrying the infant Jesus straight from Bethlehem into Egypt, they also spent a considerable time at Jerusalem; I have to show that Peter first learnt the Messiahship of Jesus by Divine revelation towards the close of his ministry, and, also, that he was distinctly made aware of the fact before he received his call to become one of the Apostles; I have to show that Judas really was dead, or had fallen from his apostleship, when St Paul declares that Jesus was seen of *the twelve* in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. When I have 'proved all this, I may then breathe freely as having practically got through my task. Until I have done this, I cannot apply to my own

* See Mr Cook's Essay, p. 3.

faith or religion a single epithet which is to imply its superiority to any other religion whatsoever, unless I openly abandon my historical position, and compare these systems of belief on their own merits as such."

Nevertheless, having spoken of men sound in the faith as doing battle with infidels (that is, with those who venture to think that Jesus cannot have been in Jerusalem and in Egypt, in Cana and in the desert with the devil, at one and the same time), Mr Cook goes on to say that his purpose is "to show that those evidences of Christianity which are accessible to every careful inquirer are complete and adequate."* We are naturally tempted to stop at these words, and to say that this is the very thing we want, and that now we may hope to learn how Jesus could have been seen after the resurrection and before the ascension by the twelve Apostles, when, at that moment, there were only eleven Apostles living. We are tempted, at least, to suppose that an effort will be made to meet some one or more of such historical difficulties. But, as we go on with the rest of the sentence, we are made aware that Mr Cook's evidence is not at all of this sort, and therefore is not intended to dispel any such perplexities. His evidences are complete, inasmuch as they meet "the fair requirements of our moral and rational nature;" they are adequate "with reference to their purpose, which is not to teach the truth, but to bring us into contact with the central and fundamental truths of our religion, and with the Person of its Founder." It is well to be candid: it is also a good thing to be clear. If Mr Cook had said that his evidence was not to teach us the truth of facts, he would have, at the least, deserved the credit of perspicuity, although he might by so speaking have put himself in a difficult position in a discussion with a Mahometan or a Brahman; for the Brahman might say, "What force

* Essay, p. 4.

can your words have for me, when I can use precisely the same words to those who doubt about the truth of my creed? If any one imparts to me his doubts whether Agni has three tongues, or whether Vishnu was really incarnate seven times, or whether Indra really killed Ahi, I can tell him quite as easily as you can, that the evidence which I have to lay before him is not to teach him the truth, but to bring him into contact with the central and fundamental truths of our religion,—these truths being the goodness, and justice, and long-suffering, and mercy, and love of the One Being, whose perfections are variously but feebly set forth under the names of Brahma, or Vishnu, or Prajâpati, or Krishna.”

Having thus declared the nature of Christian evidence, Mr Cook goes on to say that persons who meet to consider the evidences of revealed religion may be supposed to have “previously satisfied themselves of the existence and personality of God,” and that “materialism under any form, and Christianity in any stage, are mutually exclusive.” But what is the use of saying this when the question is confined simply to the reality of certain alleged historical facts? What object can Mr Cook have in saying “we can only argue now with those who admit the possibility of a revelation,” unless he defines first what he means by revelation? What will he say to a man who replies, “Certainly I believe not merely in the possibility of a revelation, but in the fact of one; but perhaps I carry back this revelation somewhat further than you do, for I am disposed to say, with Max Müller, that ‘it was an event in the history of man when the ideas of father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, were first conceived and first uttered. . . It was a revelation, the greatest of all revelations, when the conception of a Creator, a Ruler, a Father of man, when the name of God was for the first time uttered in this world.’”

What will Mr Cook say if such a man should add, "The history of human speech seems to show that language for a long series of ages expressed nothing but the merest sensuous conceptions; but the idea of a Creator, a Ruler, a Father of all men is not a sensuous conception: hence a long series of ages had passed before men came to form this idea and to express it. If the history of language be read truly, this is a plain historical fact; how am I to reconcile this with what you tell me, that the very first man spoke face to face with God, and hid himself from his sight in the bushes of the garden of Eden?"

The truth is that Mr Cook is not at ease unless he is dealing with what he calls "broad facts," in other words, with facts, or supposed facts, of which he can speak in sufficiently vague terms.

"Here is one fact," he tells us, "that at the central point of the world's history, central both in time and in historical import, equidistant from the end of what men are agreed to call the pre-historic period, and our own time, the man Jesus arose and claimed to be, in a sense altogether apart from other men, the Teacher and the Saviour of the world. He claimed a direct mission from God,—nay, more, to be, in a sense to be hereafter ascertained, the Son of God. He assumed that the truth which he had to teach was new, inasmuch as it was one which man could not discover for himself, but, at the same time, one to which man's conscience would bear testimony, which could not, therefore, be rejected without sin. As credentials of his mission, He appealed to works which those who accepted him, and those who opposed him, admitted could not be wrought without supernatural aid. To one work, as the crowning work of all, he directed his followers to appeal, as one capable of being attested and incapable of being explained away, even His own resurrection from the dead."*

* Essay, p. 6.

Before telling us of this very broad fact, Mr Cook bids us put ourselves, "if possible, in the position of an inquirer to whom the facts might be new, and who had simply to satisfy himself as to their bearings upon his own convictions and the state of man."

I will say, in reply to these words, that this has already been attempted by the writer of 'Commentators and Hierophants,' who cites a sufficiently dispassionate inquirer to judge of certain narratives written by men whom Dean Alford styled inspired,—that is, moved by a Divine influence "specially raising them to, and enabling them for, their work in a manner which distinguishes them from all other writers in the world, and their work from all other works."* Wearisome though it may be to go over the same ground again and again, the cognate assumptions of Dean Alford and Canon Cook at once justify and compel me to quote the words in which the writer of 'Commentators and Hierophants' represents Thucydides as replying to the demands of Dr Alford: "I really do not know what to say to this. If you ask me to accept this proposition as a preliminary to the examination of these books, you ask me to abandon my judgment as an historian, and, in fact, bind me beforehand to a particular conclusion. If I accept this hypothesis before examining these books, I pledge myself to examine them with a particular view, and with one special purpose; in other words, I agree to do a dishonest thing."

We are as little justified in assuming Mr Cook's "broad fact," as in assuming, with Dean Alford, the inspiration of the Evangelists. But when we come to look into the sentence last quoted from Mr Cook's essay, what do we find but a string of assertions, almost every one of which are at least open to dispute on the mere score of facts? If by pre-historic period, Mr Cook means a period preceding the rise

* 'Commentators and Hierophants,' Part I., p. 9.

of contemporary chroniclers or historians, by what right does Mr Cook extend the series of contemporary annalists as far back as nearly nineteen hundred years before the birth of Christ? By what right again does he insist that Jesus asserted the novelty of the truth which he had to teach? Granting for a moment that the four Gospels are authentic and trustworthy, I may ask, where does Jesus assume this? where does he say anything like it, except in the passages of the fourth Gospel in which he speaks of giving his disciples a commandment, which was both new and old? If we may take the hint given in these passages, we may perhaps go far towards accounting for the impression which his teaching produced upon his hearers. It was the return to simple maxims and truths (long ago known) from the stifling atmosphere of rabbinical tradition, which made the multitude rejoice that they had found a teacher who taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. What again was the truth which man was not able to discover for himself? If Mr Cook is speaking of the Sermon on the Mount, it would be hard to say what portion of it was absolutely new. The whole passage about the straight and rough way of life, and the broad road to destruction, appears with scarcely any change in the Works and Days assigned to Hesiod. If Jesus speaks of the hairs of men's heads as being all numbered, there are Vedic hymns which tell us that the winkings of men's eyes are all numbered by Varuna. If Mr Cook asserts that, as credentials to his mission, Jesus appealed to his miracles, the very point which we wish to ascertain is whether he did so or not. If he did, it would be an important fact by all means to be noted; but we cannot take the fact for granted on Mr Cook's authority, or forget the evidence which seems to point in another direction.

"It is noteworthy," says the writer of the 'English

Life of Jesus,' "that after witnessing or hearing of many of his miracles, the Pharisees still demand of him a sign. How they could refuse this character to the events just witnessed it is hard to imagine; hence we seem almost justified in doubting whether they had witnessed them, and if we say that they asked for a sign only because they had not seen any of his mighty works, then it is singular that they should have been strangers to events which were happening constantly in the eyes of all the people." *

I am well aware that in saying even this much I am giving Mr Cook an advantage which I ought not to give him. The question turns not on the disposition of the Pharisees, but on the authenticity and credibility of the Gospel narratives, and with reference to this point too much stress cannot be laid on the argument urged in the 'English Life of Jesus,' that the contradictions in the narratives of the early years of Jesus, and of his relations with the Baptist, belong to the commonest matters of fact. "Either the Baptist knew Jesus from his infancy, or he did not. After the baptism, he either knew Jesus to be the Eternal Logos, or he did not. Either Peter was summoned by Andrew distinctly to find in Jesus the Messiah, or he was not. Either Jesus drove out the traffickers from the temple at the beginning of his ministry, or he did not. Either a few days after his baptism he was at a marriage feast in Galilee, or he was not. On all these, as on many other points, the Gospel narratives completely contradict each other and themselves. The inevitable conclusion is that *in the most ordinary matters of fact the Evangelists are not trustworthy historians*, and could not have been eye-witnesses of the events which they relate. But their accounts are not confined to matters which fall within the ordinary range of human experience. They abound in incidents which are astounding or incon-

* English Life of Jesus,' Part IV., p. 41.

ceivable, and which run counter to all impressions derived from an observation of natural phenomena. *At once, therefore, and before examining any of these narratives, we are bound distinctly to affirm that, whether as witnesses or as historians of such alleged events, the Evangelists are utterly unworthy of credit.* We are not called upon to show how these narratives came into existence, although explanations apparently adequate may not be wanting; we need not to concern ourselves with theories of absolute or relative miracle. . . . *The fact that the Gospels are unhistorical in common things, renders an examination of alleged miraculous narratives a work of supererogation.*"*

Amongst these miraculous narratives so discredited is that of the resurrection of Jesus; but by what right does Mr Cook, if he cares to place himself in the position of a dispassionate historical inquirer, speak of this resurrection as the crowning work of all, or assert that Jesus charged his disciples to appeal to it? Far from appealing to this as a crowning miracle, Jesus, it seems more likely, never professed to be a worker of miracle at all. The argument cuts both ways. If the resurrection of Jesus was the crowning miracle, then it would seem that there were other miracles of a like kind of which it was the crown. In the narrative of the Acts, as the writer of the 'English Life of Jesus' remarks, no reference is made to any miracles as wrought by Jesus except those of healing, the arguments being based entirely on the resurrection as an event beyond all conception unexpected and astonishing. But if they had been accustomed to frequent raisings of the dead, if they had sat at meat with one who had been dead in the grave four days, how could the resurrection of Jesus be in any way astonishing, even if it had been unexpected?

But, again, did Jesus speak to his disciples, before

* 'English Life of Jesus,' Part IV., p. 40.

his suffering, either of the mode of his death or of his resurrection? The arguments against any such supposition are given in detail in the fifth part of the 'English Life of Jesus,' and I content myself with saying that nothing said by Mr Cook even tends to shake any one of them.

The path of assumption once taken, it is as easy to walk in it as on the smooth broad road which leads to ruin. As professing to work miracles (of which we have no conclusive evidence), Jesus is represented as differing from Mahomet, although the story of the night journey to Jerusalem is found in the Koran; and great stress is laid on the supposed fact that he was expected. We are here going off into the alleged external evidence, which I have already said that we are bound to cast aside altogether, if the narratives said to be thus attested are in themselves inconsistent or irreconcilable. We have nothing to do with drawing pictures like that which graces the opening pages of 'Ecce Homo;' but the assumption is not less enormous when we read that his person, his offices, his work, were foretold, and that when he did begin to teach and work, his countrymen were familiar with a long series of texts, beginning with the first, and continued to the end, of those sacred books in which they recognised descriptions of such a teacher. This is a mere assertion; the evidence contradicting it is given in the 'English Life of Jesus;' but apart from this, no more cogent evidence for the non-existence of this description, or at least for their failure to recognise it, can be found than in the fact that all the rulers of the people know nothing of such descriptions. There is, in fact, no evidence whatever that any such Messiah as Jesus was expected at all.

Nor is it less an *ignoratio elenchi*, as logicians say, when Mr Cook goes on to draw a contrast between the teaching of Jesus and that of any other man, on the ground that faith in him took root, while

(it would seem to be implied) faith in all others has died away. In the first place, facts seem scarcely to bear out the statement. It may be very well for Englishmen to say that Christianity is co-extensive with the civilisation of the world, or that "beyond the pale of Christendom the great mass of humanity, which in past ages have shown equal capacities for the highest culture, have at this present time no single representative nation, Turanian, Semitic, or Aryan, in which liberty, philosophy, nay even physical science, with its serene indifference to moral or spiritual truth, have a settled home or practical development."* If we choose to assert this, or to say that through the vast regions of Islamism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, elements of civilisation, although present, "are stunted, distorted, and, to all human ken, in hopeless and chaotic ruin," that is our opinion, an opinion not shared by the inhabitants of China or Japan. But whether the opinion be right or not, it does not touch the point at issue. Long before the Christian era, the western portion of the Aryan race had begun to show a capacity for development indefinitely beyond that of the Eastern Aryans, or of any branch of the Semitic or Turanian families. Nor can it be denied that in their law, their institutions, their modes of thought and habits of life, they exhibit to this day more than mere traces of a condition far more ancient than the rise of Christianity. But, in truth, this discussion is utterly irrelevant. The teaching of Jesus may have been indefinitely higher than that which it is represented to have been in the Gospels: it might not only have taken root, nay it might absolutely have conquered the world: and yet this victory would impart not a jot more of historical authority to the Gospel narratives, unless these narratives were possessed of historical authority already. If the whole world were Christian, and if there were no divisions

* Essay, p. 10.

among Christians, no anathematisation of particular forms of Christianity, how would this prove that Jesus kept his Messiahship secret, as he is said to have done in the Synoptic story, or that he made it a subject of constant public controversy, as he is said to have done according to the Johannine narrative? The reference to the subsequent history of Christianity is altogether out of place, and carries with it no force whatever, and we are conceding too much to Mr Cook by noticing the matter at all.

In truth, this indulgence in irrelevant remarks would be either ludicrous or contemptible, were the subject less serious and important. But the patience of unprejudiced thinkers must reach a low ebb, as they follow Mr Cook through some more of what he is pleased to term his facts, "such as the pre-eminence in Christendom, in every age, of nations which profess at least to acknowledge Him as their Lord, and as the rapid disintegration and decay of communities which have corrupted or abjured his faith."* This is indeed a dainty dish to set before honest and unprejudiced men. The first part of the sentence resolves itself into the proposition that mere profession of belief in Christ is sufficient to secure pre-eminence for a nation; but it was scarcely necessary to add that the pre-eminence must be in Christendom, for a nation professing not to believe in Him would by its own act shut itself out from that society. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear that a mere profession of Christianity is equivalent to a corruption or even an abjuration of it; hence, in the second part of the sentence, the communities which have been said by mere profession to have secured pre-eminence are said to undergo rapid disintegration and decay. This, of course, cannot be Mr Cook's meaning; what he probably means is that the Church of Rome or the Greek Church has corrupted Christianity, and that

* Essay, p. 11.

therefore nations professing the Orthodox or Latin faith are less flourishing and powerful than nations which profess Protestantism. Certainly here we have a plain issue of fact, or rather perhaps a hundred issues; and it may fairly be doubted whether we shall have done ourselves any good, even if we should succeed in completely unravelling the tangled knot. Certainly our success will not have carried us on much nearer towards determining whether the stories told about the Sanhedrim after the crucifixion of Jesus be or be not true. But a few words may not be wasted in showing the kind of thing which Mr Cook would pass off as factors in the great aggregate of "Christian Evidences." Whether the nations still belonging professedly to the Latin Communion are weak, or weaker than Protestant nations, and whether if they are weak, their weakness is really due to this cause and to this cause only, are points on which dispassionate critics would probably decline to pronounce any definite opinion: the glibness with which Mr Cook lays down his proposition is in singular contrast with the cautious method in which Macaulay, in his essay on 'Ranke's History of the Popes,' handles sundry cognate problems. After all, what are we that we should make ourselves judges? If the power of the Sultan is waning away because he refuses to subscribe to the Nicene Creed, it is hard to be rebuked for saying that the men on whom the tower in Siloam fell were sinners above all others that dwelt at Jerusalem.

To speak briefly, Mr Cook has manufactured his history, and then proceeded complacently to assert that "the broadest and simplest facts thus stated are sufficient for the one purpose we have now in view, sufficient to induce every one who cares to know the truth, to go at once to that Man, to ask what he has to teach, what he has to bestow." Why an inaccurate

or garbled history should be a good or a sufficient preparation for going to Him, it is not easy to see; but what will Mr Cook say if we reply, that this is precisely what we wish to do, that we do wish to ask what he has to teach and to bestow? Did he then affirm from the first to his Apostles, to the Samaritan woman and her fellow-inhabitants of Sychar, and to the assembled multitudes at the great feasts, that he was the Messiah and the Logos, existing before all worlds, or did he keep this a secret from all except two or three during the whole of his ministry? Did he speak as he is said to have spoken in the Synoptics, or as he is said to have spoken in the Johannine Gospel? Are these questions to be solved by a reference to the condition of France at the present time as contrasted with the condition of Germany or of England? The fact is that if we wish to know what Jesus taught or bestowed, and if we are ever to learn it, we must travel by the road of strict historical inquiry, and take one by one the whole mass of questions examined in the 'English Life of Jesus,'—questions which I challenge Mr Cook and all the members of the Christian Evidence Society to answer.

But Mr Cook's efforts to divert us from the real points at issue are not yet ended. He next finds it convenient to make a thorough confusion between the genuineness and authenticity of any given document, and, under cover of this confusion, to insinuate that it is useless to question the orthodox position about the several books of the New Testament. We had supposed that the authenticity of a history depended on the truth of the incidents related in the narrative, and that any honest man would be able and ought to judge for himself whether the book contains palpable inconsistencies, contradictions, or falsehoods. We had thought that, if a record were forthcoming of the Peloponnesian war which asserted that Pericles strenuously urged the Athenians to concentrate all

their efforts on the extension of their dominion,* any honest man ought to see and to say that this record was in utter contradiction with the history of Thucydides, and that therefore, while both narratives could not possibly be true, it was yet possible that both might be false. It is one of the ugliest tricks of sacerdotalism to throttle the intellect by denying it liberty of investigating simple matters of fact. Boys are not told that it is such an awfully serious and difficult matter to decide whether the alleged history of Romulus or Numa is to be accepted or rejected. But Mr Cook wishes to frighten us from examining into the authority of the Johannine Gospel, and he sets about it thus :

“An investigation into the authenticity of any ancient book demands an amount of knowledge and critical ability, a soundness and keenness of judgment, which are the very rarest of qualifications. Turn to secular literature, and you will find critics arguing for ages, without any approximation to a settlement, touching the genuineness of works attributed to men whose peculiarities of genius and of style would seem to defy imitation. Who would venture, on his own judgment, to determine how much of the Homeric poems really belongs to

“‘That lord of loftiest song,
Who above others like an eagle soars?’”

I deny Mr Cook's statements, and I say that they are denied by the vast majority of scholars and critics. If these are not to accept or reject any given opinion about the Homeric poems on their own judgment, on whose judgment are they to do so? To state the matter thus is either childish or impertinent. Mr Cook is perfectly well aware that a vast number of scholars deny that there ever was one individual Homer, the author of the 'Iliad' or the 'Odyssey';

* 'Commentators and Hierophants,' Part I., p. 11.

but even if we suppose that it were universally allowed that one man dictated the 'Iliad,' standing on one leg, at the rate of two hundred lines per hour, how would this help us to determine whether the history of the Trojan war (if ever there was any Trojan war) was after the fashion described in the 'Iliad,' or as it is represented by Thucydides in the introduction to his history? Having thus made the gateway terrible, Mr Cook is good enough to say that they who will not go in blindfold at his bidding, refuse because they hate the idea of accepting documents "which, if genuine, supply substantial grounds for belief in supernatural works and a supernatural Person."

Mr Cook's facts are again wrong. The opponents whom he is professing to throw down may believe far more earnestly than himself in the righteousness and love of the Being in whom all creatures live and move; and it is impossible that they can have any disinclination, *à priori*, to give credit to books which tell the truth about Him, or about His works. But Mr Cook has again dragged us away to wholly irrelevant matters. Let us grant to him the genuineness of all the books of the New Testament: let us admit that the fourth Gospel was written by one who was a personal friend of Jesus: let us allow it to be, as Dr Tischendorf asserts, "transparently clear that our collective Gospels are to be referred back, at least, to the beginning of the second century, or the end of the first." Let us concede that the small interval still left of sixty or seventy years from the time at which the events of the history are said to have taken place, is of no real importance; and what follows? In the words of the writer of the 'English Life of Jesus,' simply this:

"Not a single inconsistency is softened, not a single contradiction is removed, not one impossible thing rendered credible. What is done is to show that,

within some twenty years after the death of Jesus, men were to be found who had been his followers and intimate friends, capable of writing down narratives which profess to give the same history, but which relate histories as different as the histories of Portugal and England—men who could represent the teaching of Jesus as being at the same time parabolic and not parabolic, simple and confusing, soothing and exasperating—men who could say that he kept his Messiahship secret till down almost to the eve of the crucifixion, and that he proclaimed it aloud from the first to friends and enemies alike. . . . What it does is to prove that the Evangelists were wilfully and consciously dishonest; and that, as writers, they are deserving of the severest censure for deliberately deceiving their readers about events of which they profess themselves eye-witnesses.” *

At this point we may very fairly stop. In the subsequent portion of his essay, Mr Cook occupies himself chiefly with frank declarations of his own opinions, and with efforts to convince his readers that, if they will but think as he does about the Person of Jesus and his character, they will feel perfectly satisfied about the authority of the Gospels—in other words, will be quite ready to believe that Jesus was in Jerusalem and in Egypt at one and the same time. By the same indirect (some might be tempted to say almost sneaking) method, Mr Cook seeks to convince his disciples that the Gospels contain the whole scheme of the Athanasian doctrine of the relation of Christ to God the Father and God the Holy Ghost. All that I have to say here is that I am now concerned with this doctrine. It may be true or it may be false; but I must first have an answer to all those questions which have been put to Dean Alford in ‘*Commentators and Hierophants*,’ and then I

* ‘*English Life of Jesus*,’ Part VI., p. 68.

must have a refutation of the whole 'English Life of Jesus,' before I can admit that we are justified in even entering on any examination of Athanasian doctrine.

But, after all, after frightening his readers with the awful difficulties of Biblical criticism and the fearful responsibility involved in saying that the fourth Gospel was not written by the son of Zebedee, Mr Cook, when the convenient moment comes, turns round and says to them, "You have to judge for yourselves. I do not profess to draw out the evidence, but simply to show what is its nature and where it is to be found." * It is true that he is speaking here of the evidence for the character of Christ; but this evidence can exist only in the measure in which the books are trustworthy, and thus we are brought again within the circle of historical inquiry. But here, also, we have the same confusions and contradictions. This evidence, he says, will have weight with them in proportion to their "capacity to discern and appreciate moral goodness. If that character does not attract, subdue, and win you, I freely admit all other evidence will be useless so far as your innermost convictions are concerned." We might ask—useless or useful for what? The latent proposition would seem to be that they who do not regard the Gospels as trustworthy historical narratives, have no capacity to discern and appreciate moral goodness. But Mr Cook goes on immediately to say that, "numerous as are the cases of individuals who have remained in, or relapsed into, a state of scepticism from various causes, intellectual or moral, few, indeed, are the cases of men who have not borne with them into that dreary region an abiding sense of the personal and supreme goodness of Jesus." This is only saying, in other words, that they retain their capacity for discerning and appreciating moral goodness—in short,

* Essay, p. 20.

that they are none the worse in this respect for holding that Jesus never uttered the discourses put into his mouth in the fourth Gospel.

Then, having allowed that almost all sceptics retain an abiding sense of the personal and supreme goodness of Jesus, (if this were said of the orthodox, Mr Cook would say that nothing more was needed,) he goes on to say, "You will soon find that you have no alternative but either to give up all that has wrought itself into your moral nature, and entwined itself around the fibres of your affections, all your convictions of the moral excellence of Jesus, or to accept Him, even as He presents Himself, the God-Man."* I need only say that, by Mr Cook's own admission, most of those who refuse to do this, still retain an abiding sense of the personal and supreme goodness of Jesus, and what would he have more? The Christian is told that his duty is to rejoice with them that are glad, and to weep with them that weep. Mr Cook's notion of the extent of Christian sympathy is wider. He would have us see only what he sees and when he sees it, and to shut our eyes when he tells us that an object staring us in the face has no existence.

It is not worth while to follow further the series of evasive or inadequate arguments with which Mr Cook seeks to hoodwink his hearers and himself. He challenges any controversialist to deny that our Lord's teaching differed from that of all the Rabbis, not merely in degree, but in kind, and he adds that "it differed in principle, in its processes, in its results, in its tone, its spirit, in every essential characteristic." † Certainly I have no intention of denying this, but I maintain fearlessly that these words apply with equal force to the teaching of the two Isaiahhs, of Ezekiel, or of Jeremiah, to the teaching, in short, of all who proclaimed a religion of the heart, and kicked against

* Essay, p. 22.

† Essay, p. 32.

the tyranny of sacerdotalism. The teaching of Jesus did not differ in kind from the teaching of the Prophets, as is set forth, doubtless to Mr Cook's perfect satisfaction, more largely in the seventh of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.

Nor is it much more worth while to note that Mr Cook makes Christianity depend altogether on the physical resurrection of the body of Jesus after his death upon the cross. If this were all, I should pass it by as an opinion or belief which he is perfectly free to hold. But the case is altered when he asserts that this event is attested under circumstances which make it impossible to doubt the sincerity of those who are said to have witnessed it. "That the attestation was given, that it was confirmed by outward effects otherwise psychologically impossible, by an immediate and complete change in the character of the disciples, and by the rapid triumph of the religion so attested, these and kindred points you will find discussed in every treatise on Christian evidence; they are, in fact, not open to reasonable doubt."*

If these words are designedly addressed to those who have already made up their minds to believe what Mr Cook believes, and who hate the very thought of having to look at the other side, I should pass them by without comment. If they are addressed to honest and unprejudiced men, who wish only to ascertain the truth of facts, they are, (whatever may have been the author's intention in writing them,) a string of lies. Let it be granted for a moment that the physical resurrection did take place. It none the less remains a fact that all the narratives of the resurrection are inconsistent, contradictory, or mutually exclusive, and therefore that, in the words of the writer of the 'English Life of Jesus,' for the *historical* resurrection we have no evidence whatever.† Mr Cook makes a simple assertion, apparently in the

* Essay, p. 39.

† Part VI., p. 39.

teeth of all the facts: the writer of the 'English Life of Jesus' goes patiently through all the narratives, and the reader may satisfy himself at every step whether the story is fairly or unfairly dealt with. With greater truth it might be asserted that few narratives could be found anywhere which convict themselves more completely than the Gospel narratives of the resurrection.*

* Mr Cook deals in assertions and assumptions. I have asserted that the writer of 'The English Life of Jesus' has examined the whole narrative in all its incidents. But it may be well that the reader should again see with his own eyes what these inconsistencies are: "The narratives of the Resurrection exhibit, if possible, even greater inconsistencies and contradictions than those which have preceded them. In Matthew (xxviii. 1, &c.) we read that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (*i.e.*, two women) came to the sepulchre, *as the day began to dawn*; that there was an earthquake, and that the angel (*one* angel) of the Lord came down, and, rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, sat upon it, and, bidding the women not to be afraid, told them that Jesus was risen, and that his disciples should see him in Galilee, whither he had preceded them; that as they depart on this errand, Jesus himself appears to them, and tells them just what the angel had said to them a few minutes before, thus making the apparition and message of the angel quite superfluous. In Mark (xvi.) *three* women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, come to the sepulchre, for the purpose of anointing the body of Jesus, *after the sun had risen*. As in Matthew, they are at a loss to know how they shall remove the stone from the door; but when they reach the spot, instead of seeing an angel sitting on the stone, they simply see it rolled on one side, and it is only when they enter the sepulchre (which the women in Matthew *do not enter*) that they see a *young man* sitting on the right side and clothed in a long white garment, who gives them the same message which the angel gives to the two Marys in the first Gospel. Then, at verse 9, the story seems to begin afresh by stating that the risen Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, just as though a narrative of the resurrection had not been given already. There is *no mention of any earthquake* in this account. In Luke (xxiv.) we are told that the women (*seemingly a great number*) who came with Jesus from Galilee visited the sepulchre *very early in the morning*, bringing spices for the purpose of embalming the body, they, like the women in the other Gospels, having not the slightest expectation that he would rise again. These also find the stone rolled away, and, entering the sepulchre, they see *two men* in shining garments, who ask them why they seek the living among the dead, and remind them (of what every one of them had utterly forgotten) that Jesus had distinctly forewarned them of his sufferings, death, and resurrection; but *no message* is given that the disciples are to seek Jesus in Galilee, nor does Jesus appear to them himself as he does in the other Synoptics. The Evangelist then adds that they went and told all these things to the eleven and all the rest, and that the Apostles especially received their information from Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, the names being for the third time different. Far from believing their report, the Apostles deride them as babblers of nonsense (Liddell and Scott, s. v. *ἄψος*, Luke xxiv. 11). Still Peter, incredulous as he is, has curiosity

I have said enough to show that Mr Cook's Essay is worse than worthless for all except those who are ready to think what he thinks, and to say what he says; nor are the other lectures included in this series in any larger degree addressed to honest and unprejudiced thinkers, who are determined that they will not

enough to go to the tomb, where, stooping down, he beholds the linen clothes laid by themselves, and, fully convinced by this somewhat slight evidence, departs, "wondering in himself at that which was come to pass." In John (xx. 1, &c.), Mary Magdalene comes *alone* "early, when it was *yet dark*" (in Mark *the sun has risen*), and sees the stone taken away from the sepulchre (where then was the guard, who thus suffered her to approach near enough to find out *in the dark* that the sepulchre was open?) Instead of entering the tomb, as the women do in the second and third Gospels, or seeing any angel or man as they do in all the Synoptics, Mary Magdalene at once hastens back to Peter, James, and the beloved disciple, and informs them not that Jesus is risen, but that "they have taken away the Lord from the sepulchre, and *we* know not where they have laid him," thus implying that she had not gone thither alone, as stated apparently in verse 1. On hearing this Peter and the other disciple hasten to the tomb, both running, but the other disciple outruns him, and stooping down at the sepulchre door, looks in, and sees the linen clothes lying, but does not go in. Peter then comes up, and going in, sees further that the napkin which had been about the head of Jesus was not lying with the linen clothes, but was wrapped together in a place by itself. The other disciple then goes in, sees and believes. (This visit is related in words which are almost verbatim the same with those in which Luke records the visit of Peter, the only difference being that the credit of being the first believer in the resurrection is here transferred to the beloved disciple.) Without waiting for anything further, the two disciples go home again; but Mary lingers, weeping, not having reached their assurance of conviction. (Why did not the two Apostles, seeing her in this grief, stay to comfort her, and make her share their belief that Jesus was risen?) Stooping as she wept, and, looking into the sepulchre, she sees two angels in white (who, as they came since Mary and the two disciples stood at the door, must have entered through the solid rock or earth). These angels are seated, the one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain. (In Mark the "young man" is seated *on the right side*.) When they ask Mary the cause of her sorrow, she replies that it is because she knows not where the body of Jesus has been taken. Without waiting for any further words from the angels, of whose real nature she seems to have no notion, Mary turns herself back and sees Jesus standing, but fails to recognise him. (In the Synoptics the women know him at once, at the mere sound of his voice, and as in Matthew xxviii. 9, hold him by the feet and worship him.) The question of Jesus, "Why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" sounds to her as coming from no familiar voice, and as she looks at him she sees apparently nothing especially spiritual or remarkable about his person, for, supposing him to be the gardener, she beseeches him, if he has taken the body away, to tell her where he has placed it. Jesus answers by simply calling her by her name; and the spell which had held her thus far is dissolved. Mary, turning round, greets him as Rabboni, her Master, and seemingly seeks to touch him. But whereas in the Synoptics Jesus on his first appearance allows the women to embrace his feet, here he says to Mary

accept any incidents as facts until they have adequate historical evidence to justify them in so doing. In short, the Christian Evidence Society is not working for those who question or reject any portion of that evidence. It would be more candid to say this at starting. It would be more honourable to sail under genuine colours, and to admit that they write only for those who agree with what they say. As it is, the policy by which Christian advocates ignore the real points at issue, and take refuge in generalities, is becoming notorious throughout the land, and is branded more and more as utter cowardice, and as gross dishonesty and falsehood. From the Archbishop of York, downwards, the so-called orthodox clergy and laity may, like the ostrich, hide their heads in a bush, and think that no one sees them; but all who are determined that they will accept no statement except on the evidence of facts, are tempted to hold up such conduct to the contempt and derision of mankind. They assail no office, they asperse no one's character; they do but say that clergy and laity alike are bound to tell the truth about the events of the New Testament history, as about the events of all other history; and they say further, that the evasion of this duty is equivalent to deliberate and gross lying. For the present I will only add that, as this self-styled Christian *Evidence* Society has deliberately disregarded my challenge,—a challenge which, as every honest man will feel, touches the root of the matter: and,

Magdalene, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father," and then he gives her a message for his "brethren," which, however, is not a charge (as in the other Gospels) that they should go to Galilee in order to meet him, but the announcement, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This story is in almost every particular a totally different story, which *excludes* the Synoptic narratives; and the latter again differ from each other in most important particulars. As these, the Synoptic accounts, cannot be dismissed as less trustworthy than the fourth Gospel, the Johannine story is at once to be cast aside without foundation, while the contradictions of the Synoptic narratives are such as to deprive them of all credit. Hence of the *historical* resurrection of Jesus we have no evidence whatever."

36 *Defeat of the Christian Evidence Society.*

further, as this challenge was given long ago to the late Dean Alford, who treated it after a like sort, I hereby take the refusal of the Society to answer my questions as being, on their part, an acknowledgment of defeat, and I PUBLISH IT AS SUCH TO THE WORLD.

THOMAS SCOTT,
Mount Pleasant,
Ramsgate.



POSTSCRIPT.

Speaking on behalf of the Christian Evidence Society, Mr Cook has asserted that the evidences of that which he styles Christianity are complete and adequate. I appeal fearlessly to the honesty and independence of my countrymen to determine whether this be the case or not; I rely on their fairness to weigh dispassionately all the evidence bearing on the subject, as it has been preserved to us; and, in this confidence, I purpose to lay before them all the facts or alleged facts in the history which is supposed to furnish a basis for the dogmatic system of traditional Christianity. These facts, or alleged facts, will be examined fully, and in complete detail, in a new edition of the 'English Life of Jesus,' a work which will confine itself to the scrutiny of facts, without propounding any theories (after the method whether of Strauss or Rénan or any other writer) as to the mode in which the narratives of these alleged facts came into existence.

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