

THE CLAIMS OF CHRISTIANITY

EXAMINED

FROM A RATIONALIST STANDPOINT.

BY

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“To believe without evidence and demonstration is an act of ignorance and folly.”—VOLNEY.

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PREFACE.

IN the following pages there is no attempt to criticise all the alleged evidences in favour of Christianity. The aim of the writer has been to fairly examine the principal claims that have recently been put forward on behalf of the orthodox faith. It is hoped that the examination that has been made, and the facts given in these pages, may be of some practical service to the young and earnest searchers for truth.

C. W.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE purpose of the following unpretentious contribution to the modern criticism of the claims of orthodox Christianity is to present to the reader, from a Rationalistic standpoint, a popular, brief, and impartial examination of the evidences which are set forth in support of the supernatural and unique character of the Christian religion. The object of the writer has been to ascertain if there is sufficient reason to justify the maintaining of the various positions that are now taken by Christian exponents in the defence of their faith. The nature of the evidence required for such a purpose, and the different subjects to which it is applied, together with the questions that are defended, are all duly considered.

We have taken the recently-published "Handbook of Christian Evidences," by Dr. Alexander Stewart, Professor of the Theological University of Aberdeen, as a basis for our critical examination; but we have not attempted to reply in detail to all the positions laid down in his book. We have preferred to give a general summary of the arguments that may be advanced against his conclusions, so that those who read both treatises may be the better able to form an accurate judgment on the various questions dealt with. The "Handbook" is issued specially for the young, with the expressed hope "that it may be the means of strengthening the faith of inquiring minds, at a time when the most sacred truths are subjected to unsparing criticism." The Professor has stated his case calmly, and we trust it will be found that we have been equally calm in presenting the Rationalistic view. We desire that those who read the "Handbook" should carefully peruse the following pages, and we hope that its contents may strengthen the discriminating power of inquiring minds at a time when all rational persons should be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh them a reason concerning the hope that is in them."

We sincerely hope that no believer in Christianity will hesitate to read and to well ponder over what is here written. If what we have stated be studied with an earnest desire to arrive at truth, good results only will follow, for, as Bacon says, it is "error alone that suffers through conflict with truth." Principles unable to withstand the test of investigation are destitute of what should be one of their highest recommendations. Belief without critical examination has too often perpetuated error and fostered credulity. If Christianity be fallacious, why should not its fallacy be made known? If, however, it be true, its truth will be the more apparent as its claims are honestly investigated and examined. Dr. Collyer observes, in his lectures on miracles, that "he who forbids you to reason on religious subjects, or to apply your understanding to the investigation of revealed truth, is insulting the character of God, as though his acts shrink from scrutiny—is degrading his own powers, which are best employed when they are in pursuit of such sublime and interesting subjects." Dr. Chalmers, the eminent Scotch divine, also remarks: "We should separate the exercises of the understanding from the tendencies of the heart. We should be prepared to follow the light of evidence, though it may lead us to conclusions the most painful and melancholy. We should train our thoughts to all the hardihood of abstract and unfeeling intelligence. We should give up everything to the supremacy of argument, and be able to renounce without a sigh all the tenderest prepossessions of infancy the moment that truth demands of us the sacrifice."

SECTION I.

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

It is reasonable to demand that definite evidence should be furnished in support of extraordinary claims. Proof that would be sufficient to win our belief in an ordinary matter-of-fact occurrence would be inadequate to establish the truth of those claims which are generally put forward on behalf of Christianity. According to Webster, evidence is "that which elucidates and enables the mind to see truth ; proof arising from our own perceptions by the senses, or from the testimony of others, or from the induction of reason." Thus we have three methods through which evidence is obtained, and we propose to consider if either one of them is of any value in establishing the claims of Christian exponents.

1. *Consciousness.*—This method can only be of service where truths are self-evident, which those claimed for Christianity are not ; therefore, if they can be corroborated at all, it must be from external sources. If Christian truths were self-evident, there would be no necessity for the repeated efforts that are being constantly made to ascertain what the truths are. Moreover, we find that different persons have different conceptions of what Christianity really is, while many fail to recognise in any way its alleged verities. It appears to us that this would not be so if Christian claims were based upon self-evident truths, for in that case they would command ready assent from every honest inquirer.

2. *Testimony.*—This method, to be valuable as evidence, should be thoroughly trustworthy, and ought to come to us through channels that are, beyond all doubt, unimpeachable. But, in reference to Christianity, the very opposite is the fact. Its testimony is found in the New Testament, which, as the Rev. Dr. Giles observes, contains "contradictions that cannot be reconciled, imperfections that would greatly

detract from even admitted human compositions, and erroneous principles of morality that would have hardly found a place in the most incomplete systems of the philosophers of Greece and Rome" ("Christian Records," Preface, p. 7). John W. Haley, M.A., in his work on "An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible," also states (pages 1 and 2) that "no candid and intelligent student of the Bible will deny that it contains numerous discrepancies; that its statements, taken *prima facie*, not infrequently conflict with or contradict one another, may safely be presumed. This fact has been more or less recognised by Christian scholars in all ages." Haley further alleges in the same work (page 2): "Moses Stuart ('Critical History and Defence of Old Testament Canon,' page 193; revised edition, page 179), whose candour was commensurate with his erudition, acknowledges that 'in our present copies of the Scriptures there are some discrepancies between different portions of them which no learning or ingenuity can reconcile.' To much the same effect Archbishop Whately ('On Difficulties in Writings of St. Paul,' essay 7, section 4) observes: 'That the apparent contradictions of Scripture *are* numerous.....is too notorious to need being much insisted on.'" Now, we submit that testimony, coming through such a doubtful channel as these eminent Christian writers have stated the New Testament to be, cannot be depended upon as furnishing reliable evidence in favour of the extraordinary claims of Christianity.

3. *The Induction of Reason.*—The evidence to be derived from this method in support of Christianity is exceedingly slight. Reason gives no authority for the belief in the Fall of Man, Original Sin, Vicarious Sacrifice, the Trinity, the Miraculous Conception, Hell, and Eternal Torments. To us it seems most unreasonable to expect that all mankind, with their different trainings and varied mental capacities, should be compelled to accept one particular faith under a threat of the infliction of a most cruel and agonising penalty (see Acts iv. 10-12; Mark xvi. 16; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9); to believe that a good God would so have arranged matters that the majority of his children would be doomed to eternal perdition (see Matt. vii. 13, 14; Matt. xx. 16), and that God should have ordained some men to condemnation and others to dishonour before they were born (see Jude 4; Romans

ix. 15-22). These are but a few specimens of a system against which reason revolts. The only "evidence" that can fairly be produced in favour of orthodox Christianity is that of faith and revelation. It was by these agencies that the greatest Bible blessings were said to have been obtained, and through which it is reported that St. Paul himself was convinced of its truth (see Hebrews xi. ; Gal. i. 12). Such "evidence," however, is impotent to have any practical argumentative force to-day.

In dealing with Christian evidences, we must not overlook the fact that the present age is one of unlimited inquiry, which should neither be baffled nor arrested—a time when many of the old landmarks of theology are being removed. We have thus to make a new survey of the controversial field, in order to ascertain our correct position. Indeed, we are frequently cautioned by modern Christian writers that we must attack the *latest* views put forth concerning their faith. This appears to us a reasonable request, for no sensible general would waste his powder upon forts that had been abandoned by the enemy. But the fact that Christians have been compelled to take up new positions in defence of their faith is certainly no evidence in its favour, but rather the opposite. Still, as they have forsaken their old citadels, it is necessary to follow them to their new battle-ground. The changes that have taken place in the advocacy of Christianity are indeed remarkable, and they afford striking evidence against the assumption of its being a God-sent religion. Let us note a few of its principal mutations. At a period not very remote the whole of the Bible was believed to be the "word of God ;" Christians of to-day assert that only a portion of the Scriptures should be so described. Hence plenary inspiration has been given up, and we are now informed that the Bible *contains* the "inspired word," but that the whole of it is not inspired. The question, however, here arises, How are we to distinguish the inspired from the un-inspired? Is the human to decide what is divine? If yes, the reason of man is superior to the revelation of God. If no, by what evidence are we to judge what is truth and what is error in the Bible? Miracles are now said to require evidence to prove their truth, whereas in former times they were cited to prove the *truth* of Christianity. Prophecy is now thought to be the desire of the human heart, and is no

longer depended upon as the infallible foreteller of future events. The fact that unbelievers have heroically faced death in attestation of what they deemed to be true has caused Christian exponents to give up the contention that martyrdom proves the truth of that for which a man becomes a martyr.

Now, surely it cannot reasonably be alleged that these changes and modifications afford any evidence of the stability of the Christian faith. To affirm that the Christians of the past were in error in their conceptions of the nature of Christianity does not remove the difficulty, because we have no evidence that the Christians of the present time are more correct in their representations of Christianity than were their predecessors. Both have had the same sources from which they drew their conclusions. Besides, what guarantee have we that Christians of future generations will not condemn the nineteenth-century interpretation of their faith? The mutability which has hitherto characterised the Christian religion will, in all probability, continue as knowledge increases and mental freedom expands. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that, if Christianity were perfect at its inception, every subsequent change must necessarily have deteriorated its value; while, if it were not perfect at its origin, and if the alterations which it has undergone have improved it, then its present condition is the result of man's ingenuity, and the faith of to-day is not the production of what is called Divinity.

Professor Stewart, in his "Handbook," says: "The evidences of Christianity do not claim to be demonstrative, but to have a high degree of probability—as high as in the case of other principles which determine human action." But there is no analogy between Christianity and "other principles which determine human action." We have no evidence upon which we can depend as to the origin and early history of the Christian faith, and therefore we cannot consistently apply the law of probability to its birth and infancy. In human affairs we establish "a high degree of probability," either by personal investigation or upon the trustworthy testimony of others. In the case of the establishment of Christianity, however, we can adopt neither of these methods. Of course, personal examination is impossible; and, apart from the New Testament, there is

no reliable testimony, either sacred or secular, as to the birth, life, and death of Jesus. Supposing the Gospel account of his birth is accepted, even then only one person could testify as to its accuracy, and she maintained silence upon the subject. No other person then living could have vouched for its truth. How, therefore, is it possible for us to possess any evidence of the miraculous introduction of Christ into the world? At the most we have but an account of a rumour that is supposed to have been circulated two thousand years ago; and this rumour did not, it appears, reach the historians living at the time when the birth is said to have taken place. Even two of the special biographers of Christ seem to have known nothing of the event. This is where good testimony would be valuable; but it is nowhere to be found in the two Gospels referred to.

It is quite useless to talk about "the nature and value" of the evidences of Christianity, as many theologians do, inasmuch as the institution of the faith is not the subject of any history that has survived to the present day. The documents that are alleged to have contained its earliest credentials cannot be traced. It is admitted by Biblical scholars that nothing was known of the New Testament for nearly two centuries after the events therein recorded were said to have happened; and it is also acknowledged that, from that period to the present, the book has been altered again and again. Now, remembering that these very Scriptures contain the only evidence of the primitive history of Christianity, it will be seen that such evidence cannot be of any real value in the attempt to establish the validity of the Christian claims.

An important fact in connection with the value of Christian evidences is this, that the very nature of many of the events recorded in the New Testament is such that it is impossible to secure any evidence to prove that they took place. The age of implicit belief has gone, and the intelligent minds of to-day cannot be satisfied by being told that ages ago things occurred that are now known to be contrary to the experience of the world and to the laws of nature. The knowledge that certain phenomena result from natural causes should prevent men from ascribing them to agencies above, beyond, or outside nature. Hence evidences, to carry conviction, ought to refer to matters which accord with what is known of

nature and of man. The fact is Christian evidences do not do this, for they are cited to prove the truth of a system which teaches many absurd improbabilities that no sane man would now believe upon any amount of testimony. For instance, what evidence would prove to the existing generation that a child could be born without a human father, that the human body could possess at one time hundreds of devils, and that dead men could be raised to life from their graves? Such things are opposed to all reason, and yet they form a part of the teachings of Christianity.

The best evidence that can be adduced to prove the truth of any religion is the reasonableness of its doctrines and the practicability and usefulness of its ethics. With such advantages its truth becomes self-evident, and requires no elaborate treatises to prove its value. Now, it is of these two particular features that Christianity is deficient; its doctrines are mystical and absurd, and, so far as it has any unique morality, it is incapable of being reduced to practice in daily life. Of its doctrinal folly there is ample evidence in its teachings as to the Trinity, the scheme of salvation, and the perplexity of Free Will; of the impracticability of the ethical inculcation the Sermon on the Mount is a sufficient witness. It is true this "Sermon" has been called the Magna Charta proclaimed by Christ, although it has never been made the basis of any human government. Its injunctions are so antagonistic to the requirements of modern civilisation that no serious attempt has ever been made to put them in practice. It may be mentioned that the genuineness of the "Sermon" has been boldly questioned by Professor Huxley, who writes: "I am of opinion that there is the gravest reason for doubting whether the Sermon on the Mount was ever preached, and whether the so-called Lord's Prayer was ever prayed by Jesus of Nazareth" ("Controverted Questions," page 415). The late Bishop of Peterborough said: "It is not possible for the State to carry out all the precepts of Christ. A State that attempted to do so could not exist for a week. If there be any person who maintains the contrary, his proper place is in a lunatic asylum" (*Fortnightly*, January, 1890). Even supposing the historical claims for Christianity were supported by evidence, that would not be a sufficient set-off against the evidence of

our time as to the inadequacy of Christianity to suit mundane requirements.

Before the claims of Christianity can be evidentially established, it must be proved that Christianity has self-evident truths and trustworthy testimony, and that its teachings harmonise with cultivated reason. In its history no self-interest or party zeal must be imported ; candour and sincerity should be manifest, and bias and prejudice excluded. In its pages the difference between what was known to be true, and what was but the mere belief of the time, must be made clear. Such so-called historical evidence as consists of the imaginations of poets, the theories of dreamers, or accounts of pretended supernatural events, is to our mind utterly worthless for the purpose of establishing the truth and value of any moral system. Taking the New Testament as the only source of evidence as to Christ and his religion, the student is advised to ascertain, if possible, for himself whether or not it is of the nature of genuine history. To us it resembles what Livy says of Scipio Africanus, that the account of his life, trial, death, funeral, and sepulture was so contradictory that he was unable to determine what tradition or whose writings he ought to credit. The whole question of Christian evidence resolves itself into this : Is it probable enough to deserve implicit belief ?

Now, to sum up our estimate of Christian evidences. To us they appear to be destitute of all the essentials of true evidence, and to be entirely worthless in proving that Christianity is aught but a natural growth. We consider that during its various stages of development it has yielded to the force of its environments, whereby many of its elements have been changed and modified to suit the tastes and requirements of those who professed it at different epochs of our history. We fail to discover a particle of legitimate proof to justify the orthodox claim that Christianity had a supernatural origin, that it has had an unbroken history, and that to-day it stands pre-eminently above all other systems as a practical monitor of human conduct.

SECTION II.

GOD AND RELIGION.

PROFESSOR STEWART'S chapter, in his "Handbook of Christian Evidences," on "God and Religion," is a fair sample of orthodox exposition and defence. It is intended to justify the belief in a God who is described as the "First Cause, a self-existent Being, the Creator and Regulator of the Universe;" and also to establish as a fact "the reality, power, and universality of religion." This, however, it should be remembered, has nothing to do with the question of Christian evidences, inasmuch as, if the main contentions of this chapter were proved to be correct, it would not necessarily prove the existence of the Christian Deity, or that Christianity is "a universal phenomenon of human experience and history." The fact seems to be overlooked that there are other gods believed in besides the one depicted in the Bible, and that there are several religions professed which have but little in common with Christianity. The duty of an expounder of Christian evidences appears to us to be to endeavour to show that the Theism of the Scriptures is reasonable, and that the religion based upon its teachings is true. Whatever is urged in reference to other religions may, or may not, be accurate; but it is of no value as Christian evidence.

Let us illustrate our meaning upon these points. The God believed in by Voltaire, Paine, Francis William Newman, and most of the adherents of what is termed "Advanced Theism," is certainly not the same Deity as is believed in by so-called Christians, and therefore, if the existence of the God of the advanced Theists were demonstrated, it would not follow that the reality of the Bible God was established. The ablest of our modern Theists will not attempt to defend the "Supreme Being" of either the Old or the New Testament. The same argument applies to religion. It is not

enough for an expounder of Christian evidences to make the general statement that religion is a fact, and to urge that a belief in some form of it is universal. Even if this were true, that would not prove the evidential claims made on behalf of the Christian system, which must be judged by its own merits. It is admitted that other religions, Buddhism for instance, is as sublime in its teachings as Christianity, and that the followers of Buddha are more numerous than the disciples of Christ. Up to the present time Christianity is not known by two-thirds of the human race ; and among the one-third, where a knowledge of it obtains, the majority of the people have no practical faith in its teachings. As a matter of fact, religion *per se* may be true, while the Christian form of it may be false. Orthodox believers seem to ignore this truth. We need not dwell here upon the original meaning of the term "religion," or upon the fact that with the Romans it did not signify merely theological worship, but it meant justice to the State and to the community. It is only necessary for our present purpose to remind the reader that Christian evidences have failed to show that the religion of the New Testament is unique, or that it is superior to other religious systems. The theory that Christianity has the advantage of the authority of revelation to support it has no force whatever, for, as Max Müller, in his "Science of Religion" (page 45), observes, "the claims to a revealed authority are urged far more strongly and elaborately by the believers in the Veda than by the apologetical theologians among the Jews and Christians."

Professor Stewart, like most Christian advocates, puts it that the study of the Christian evidences must be preceded by "a conviction of the existence of God and of the reality and power of religion." Now, we submit that persons who are already convinced need no evidence to convince them, and, therefore, to seek for evidence to prove what is regarded as having been proved is, to say the least, a work of super-erogation. Much importance is attached by Christian exponents to the alleged universal need that is said to be felt for religion. But the truth of this allegation will depend entirely upon the definition that is given of religion. If by the term we mean love, truth, justice, and benevolence, the cultivation of man's moral nature, and the exemplifica-

tion in our daily actions of fidelity to our professions, and due consideration for the rights and comforts of others, then, doubtless, most civilised person are religious. But if by religion we mean the teachings of theology and its doctrines, then its universal need has not been proved. Neither has it been shown that such religious ideas are innate; they are acquired as the result of early training and of general education. (See F. J. Gould's "Concise History of Religion," vol. i., pages 10, 11, and 12.)

Professor Stewart endorses, as indeed most Christians do, among the definitions of religion, the following: "Religion consists fundamentally in the practical recognition of a constraining bond between the inward life of man and an unseen person." "The perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man." Now, to assert that religion, as it is here defined, is universal is the height of presumption. We know of no one who can recognise a "bond" between himself and "an unseen person," or who has the faculties to perceive "the infinite," who is able "to influence the moral character of man." The question is not if such a "bond" and "the infinite" exist, but can we know of them? If, as we allege, we cannot, then they form no part of practical religion, which is, when properly understood, the ruling principle of a man's life. Now, we do know of many persons who acknowledge that they have no belief whatever in theological religion, and these facts are sufficient to destroy the contention of its universality. We repeat that there is a marked difference between the universal belief in some of the elements that are found in all the different religions of the world, and the universality of one particular form of religion. The former may be true, while the latter we know to be false, which proves that Christian evidences are of no value upon this point. For facts to prove that the belief in any one theological religion is not universal, the reader is referred to Sir John Lubbock's "Origin of Civilisation," Tuttle's "Career of Religious Ideas," and to vol. i. of F. J. Gould's "Concise History of Religion." In these works ample evidence is furnished upon the authority of travellers and missionaries, whose names are there given, that tribes and races of men have been found where there was not the slightest belief in any form of religion. Sir

John Lubbock, on page 467 of his work above mentioned, says: "It has been asserted over and over again that there is no race of men so degraded as to be entirely without a religion—without some idea of a Deity. So far from this being true, the very reverse is the case. Many, we might almost say all, of the most savage races are, according to the nearly universal testimony of travellers, in this condition." Burton states that some of the tribes in the Lake Districts of Central Africa "admit neither God, nor angel, nor devil" (page 468). "In the Pellew Islands Wilson found no religious building nor any sign of religion.....Some of the tribes (of Brazilian Indians), according to Bates and Wallace, were entirely without religion."

Professor Stewart frankly admits that "it is not by argument we obtain our conviction of the existence of God," but he adds: "Formal arguments in support of this conclusion are not useless." As this position is a very popular one among a certain section of Christians, and, moreover, as it is regarded as a part of the Christian evidences, it deserves a brief notice. In the first place, it appears to us that, if argument will not secure conviction, there is no utility in attempting to supply it; yet "four forms" of an argument are given by Professor Stewart to prove the existence of God. They are as follows:—

1. The First Cause. The belief in this is considered to be more reasonable than to believe either in an unending series of natural causes, or that things came "into existence without a cause." Here, it will be observed, creation is assumed without a particle of evidence being given in its favour; while no notice is taken of the theory of the eternity of the universe. Now, if it is unreasonable to believe that anything could come into existence without a cause (which we think it is), what about the alleged First Cause, which is held to be *uncaused*? Is it not more reasonable to believe in the *uncaused* of that of which we know something than in the *uncaused* existence of that of which we know nothing?

2. It is stated that, as there are in the works of nature marks of intelligence and purpose, the author of nature must be intelligent. The weak and inconclusive feature in this argument lies in the inference that intelligence in nature must have had an intelligent author. This very

point, upon which some evidence is required, is simply assumed without even any attempt being made to give reasons for the assumption. If the intelligence in nature needed a higher intelligence to produce it, is it not fair to suppose, upon the same principle, that this higher intelligence would require for its production a still higher intelligence? Further, if, in consequence of the existence of intelligence, it be more rational to believe that the universe was caused than to believe that it is self-existent, then must it not be equally rational to consider that this still higher intelligence was caused?

3. The allegation here is that our minds are so constituted that we are driven to the conclusion that God is a being that *must be*. This is but an assertion, and, until some evidence is given in its support, it proves nothing. The same may be said of space, which we cannot conceive of either beginning or ending.

4. We are here told that we have a feeling of responsibility to a personal and moral Being, and, therefore, we are led to infer his existence. To this we offer an unqualified denial; for no such feeling of responsibility is found among savages or untaught persons. To attempt to show that the presence of a moral sense in cultivated man is a proof of the existence of a supernatural power is really too illogical to require further comment than to say that it is a pure assumption, and cannot possibly afford any evidence of a logical conclusion.

The case of Religion and God stands thus: The former, to be acceptable to the refined intelligence of the present age, should be free from all theological mysticism and doctrinal absurdity; and the latter can only be a question of subjective faith, not capable of argumentative demonstration. Christianity has not the required freedom, and, therefore, it is desirable that it should yield to a better faith—one that is more in harmony with the genius and mental culture of the nineteenth century. As to the God of the Christians, with his Biblical record of folly, cruelty, and injustice, we allege that such a being is not suited as an object of worship; while in the earthquakes, cyclones, and volcanic eruptions that are constantly destroying the lives of thousands of innocent men, women, and children we fail to see any proof of love and kindness on the

part of what is termed the God of Nature. In our opinion, no moral argument can be based upon Theism in the presence of the fact that these calamities and disorders obtain in the world. So long as the lion and the tiger roam the forest pursuing their work of devastation and devouring their prey ; so long as vice flourishes, and virtue pines in want and misery ; so long as "fraud glitters in the palace, and honesty droops in the hovel," so long shall we be ready to exclaim with the Rev. George Gilfillan, who, in his "Grand Discovery of the Fatherhood," in noticing the horrors and the evils that exist around us, asks : "Is this the spot chosen by the Father for the education of his children, or is it a den of banishment or torture for his foes ? Is it a nursery, or is it a hell ? There is no discovery of the Father in man, in his science, philosophy, history, art, or in any of his relations." Well may Dr. Vaughan, in his work, "The Age and Christianity," write : "No attempt of any philosopher to harmonise our ideal notions as to the sort of world which it became a Being of infinite person to create, with the world existing around us, can ever be pronounced successful. The facts of the moral and physical world seem to justify inferences of an opposite description from benevolent."

SECTION III.

THEISM AND OTHER "ISMS."

IN this section of his "Christian Evidences" Professor Stewart rejects Materialism, Pantheism, and Agnosticism, because they do not furnish a satisfactory "explanation of the universe." The usual Christian allegation is here made that, if we do not accept the theory offered by Theism (it should be said by *Christian* Theism), we are logically bound to submit another to take its place. But to this we emphatically demur, for it does not follow, because the above "isms" fail to give an adequate explanation of the universe, that Christianity supplies the omission; that is what should be proved, but it is not. The assertion that God created matter and life is no *explanation* of the one or the other. In the light of modern science, it is evident to us that the Bible account of the supposed origin of the universe and the creation of man—which contains the Christian theory—is utterly erroneous, and no evidence is produced to establish its validity.

It is not enough, therefore, for expounders of the Christian evidences to show that Agnosticism or Materialism has no theory to explain the why and wherefore of existence; they must, in order to make good their claim, prove that *their* hypothesis is a reasonable one. For instance, it must be demonstrated, as stated in the Old Testament, that the universe and Adam and Eve were created in six days, about six thousand years ago; that man was made from the dust of the earth, and that woman was made from one of his ribs; that the human race has degenerated from an original state of perfection; that death was the result of sin upon the part of Adam; and that, in the time of Noah, a universal flood "prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days," covering "all the high hills and the mountains," destroying "every living substance" that was then in existence, except

Noah "and they that were with him in the ark." Further, before the Christian theory can be accepted as being true, evidence should be forthcoming that man by nature is necessarily corrupt, and that in him "dwelleth no good thing" (see Romans iii. 23, vii. 18; 2 Cor. iii. 5; Phil. ii. 13, iii. 21; Psalm li. 5.); that the majority of those who are now living are doomed to suffer after death the tortures of a burning hell (see Matt. vii. 13 and 14, xxii. 14; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9); that it is possible for all mankind to believe one thing—namely, salvation through Christ (see Acts iv. 10, 11, 12; Mark xvi. 16); and that the New Testament is accurate in describing persons who were suffering from physical disease as being possessed with devils. Now, the reader is requested to particularly note that, from a Christian point of view, the question is not, are there any other theories of the universe apart from the one given by Christianity that will satisfy the critical test? As Christians claim that their theory is correct, it should be made to harmonise with the facts of science, philosophy, and experience. Up to the present, so far as we are aware, no such harmony has been established.

The very fact that the theory of evolution has been accepted even by many Theists, as a partial explanation of phenomena, is evidence that the Christian theory is not considered satisfactory. Granted that evolution does not come within the domain of demonstrated science, it does, however, agree with the science of probability, and Bishop Butler has said, "Probability is the guide of life." It should not be here overlooked that probability cannot apply to that of which nothing is known, hence it can have no reference to the alleged origin of the universe, or to its supernatural government, for these are questions of speculation, not of knowledge. The very thought of a beginning of the universe is unthinkable, as Dean Mansel observes: "Creation is, to the human mind, inconceivable." As to the term "supernatural," it means, in popular language, something higher than nature. But, if there is a sphere higher than nature, and yet often breaking through nature, nature itself must be limited by something, and the question arises, By what is such limitation fixed, and what is the boundary line which marks it off and separates it from the supernatural? Further, supposing such a line to be well known, so that

no difficulty could arise in pointing it out, a still more difficult problem presents itself for solution—namely, how man, who is a part of nature, and able only to come into contact with nature, can push his knowledge into that other sphere which, being non-natural, cannot be at all accessible to a natural being? If the supernatural region be synonymous with the unknowable, it cannot clearly concern us, simply because we have no faculties with which to cognise it, and no powers capable of penetrating into its profound depths.

In examining the claims of Christianity, we must enforce our contention that we have nothing to do with any other system but that of Christianity, for the reason that, if there were twenty other theories, and all were proved to be false, that would not make the Christian theory true. Materialism and Agnosticism have no theories as to the origin and government of the universe by an external power; and while in our present inquiry we are not concerned to defend either of these "isms," we desire to correct an error into which Professor Stewart has fallen. In reference to Agnosticism, he observes: "The truth in Agnosticism is that man's knowledge of God.....is, though real, imperfect and inadequate." This is an inaccurate statement of the Agnostic position, which recognises no *knowledge*, either adequate or inadequate, of the existence of God. Agnosticism declares that the subject is outside our gnosis, and, while refusing to dogmatically deny Deity's existence, it alleges that we can know nothing of him, since such a being as the one described by Theists transcends all our powers and faculties. The Agnostic is always willing to carry on his investigations into nature to the utmost extent of his ability. He seeks to wring from her the secrets hidden through all the ages of the past; he pushes his inquiries from point to point, and learns all that can be known of the marvellous processes of life and mind; but the incomprehensible he seeks not to comprehend, and the unknowable he does not make the idle attempt to know. This course he deems more courageous, more dignified, and more candid than that adopted by the dogmatic theologian, who, yearning for a knowledge of the absolute, and yet failing to discover it, lacks the courage to avow his inability to achieve the impossible.

SECTION IV.

THE QUESTION OF REVELATION.

THE positions taken by orthodox Christians upon the question of Revelation are: (1) That the Old and New Testaments contain a special revelation from God; that there are some parts of the Bible which are not divinely inspired, but are simply the recorded opinions of the writers, and that the New Testament is of more importance to Christians than the Old, because the latter was intended for the Jews. Some Christians, however, urge that, in order that the Jews may participate in the salvation offered through Christ, it is necessary that they should accept the New Testament as well as the Old. (2) That Biblical revelation was necessary, inasmuch as nature is not only insufficient as a guide to mankind, but that on many "an occasion of our sorest need" it "is blind and deaf to our beseeching." Such is the statement of Professor Stewart, who adds: "We find it impossible to believe that a Supreme Being who is good would leave man without needed guidance, and that One who is wise and powerful could not discover a method of affording such guidance." (3) That the doctrine which denies that God "has revealed himself, except through nature and conscience, finds itself involved in difficulties when confronted with the problem of physical and moral evil." These are the three principal features which differentiate Christianity from natural religion.

As to the first position. If the *whole* of the Bible is not a revelation from God, how are we to decide what portions *are* inspired and what are not? If each person is to decide the question for himself, then, as the Rev. Dr. Caird has shown, other Bibles that inculcate teachings which are very different from those taught by Christianity may be considered as "divine revelations." Besides, this "explanation"

makes the man decide what is "divine," which is fatal to the claims of Christianity. Moreover, against the validity of this Christian position the following objections appear to us to deserve attention : Could revelations which are contradictory in themselves emanate from a mind that is infinite and unchanging ? If the later revelation contains something which is superior to anything found in the earlier, is it not a reflection upon an all-wise and all-good God that he should have so long deprived his children of the superior communication ? Supposing that God sent the Old Testament to the Jews, it is reasonable to presume that he knew what would be sufficient for them. Is it not, therefore, orthodox impertinence to endeavour to force upon them the New Testament ?

Another point that should be remembered is that, if this alleged new revelation were a direct communication from God, it could only have been so to the person or persons to whom it was made. A revelation to Paul would not be a revelation to us, and therefore it could be of no evidential value to the present generation. There is also to be considered the doubtful channel through which the New Testament has come down to us ; the many abridgments and interpolations to which the documents have been subjected must necessarily have prevented it from being evidence in support of the Christian claims. Again, it does not appear that the writers of the New Testament professed that what they recorded was a revelation from God ; they only claimed it to be a narration of what they saw, heard, and gathered from the traditions of earlier periods. This seems to be the Rationalistic view that should be taken of the entire Bible, inasmuch as the numerous errors and contradictions which it contains make the fact self-evident that the book, as we have it to-day, could not possibly have been a revelation from a perfect Being.

The second position taken by Christians as to revelation is based upon the double fallacy of supposing that the New Testament gives us a better guide for human conduct than we find in nature ; and that the God of Revelation is not "blind and deaf to our beseeching." Here, as in previous sections, we find orthodox assumptions taking the place of legitimate evidence. Can there be any doubt that the two important guides, cultivated reason and scientific facts, are

to be attributed to nature? Where are these guides to be found in the Christian Revelation? In it faith is regarded as being higher than reason, and reliance upon prayer as of more value than dependence upon science. It should be borne in mind that at one period of our history an attempt was made to accept this revelation as a guide of life, but it was found thoroughly inadequate as a monitor in human actions. The very effort to make it so completely paralysed the progress of science, the advancement of education, and the ethical growth of the age. Even now, when the "Peculiar People" follow the teachings of this revelation as a guide, the results are unfortunate, for the consistent believers are punished for adhering to the assumed revealed instructions. It is only where reason and science, aided by human experience, guide the actions of mundane life that we find advancement going on to a higher and nobler civilisation.

Those who profess to believe that the God of Revelation is not "blind and deaf to our beseeching" should produce some evidence that their belief has a sound basis. It is of no value as evidence to remind us that Revelation promises that prayers shall be answered, unless it can be shown that the promises were fulfilled. And this, we submit, has not hitherto been done. Have we not on record too many instances where loving parents have spent hours in "beseeching" that the lives of their children should be spared; of earnest prayers being offered up that pain and agony should cease; that poverty and despotism should no longer mar the happiness of the race? Were not special supplications sent to the God of Revelation to avert the deaths of Prince Albert, the Duke of Clarence, the late Emperor of Russia, Abraham Lincoln, and Garfield? In these cases not only personal, but national "beseechings" were made to the God of Revelation that the lives of these men should be saved; but he was "blind and deaf" to all "beseechings." It is no answer to say that in these instances it was not God's will that the prayers should be answered, for, if that were so, it shows the folly of "beseeching" him to do anything. The Bible tells us that God "knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Psalm xlv. 21); that he "doeth according to his will, and none shall stay his hand" (Daniel iv. 35); and that he "never changes" (Mal. iii. 6). If these "revealed" words

are to be relied upon, where is the utility of "beseeching" him to help us at all? He knows when help is required, and, if he intends to render it, he will do so; but, if he does not, no "beseeching" will be of any avail, for he "never changes."

The third position involves the problem of the existence of physical and moral evil in the world. Professor Stewart, in his "Christian Evidences," admits that there are difficulties connected with this question, and he contends that the Deists with their "God of Nature" cannot remove the difficulties, but that the Christians with their God of Revelation can. Referring to John Stuart Mill's essay, "On Nature," the Professor says: "It must be acknowledged that, if natural laws be all, and natural ends the only ends to be achieved, it is difficult to avoid the horns of Mill's dilemma, by which we are called upon to reject either the power or the goodness of God. And what is true of physical evil is still more apparent when we turn to consider moral evil. Perfect as the system of the world may have been when it left the hands of its Creator, who can doubt, in the face of daily experience, that it has somehow gone wrong? Christianity recognises this." Here it may be asked: "If the system of the world" were originally perfect, how could it have "gone wrong"? And, if God were all-powerful, why did he allow it to go wrong? The Christian's answer is, that God could not give man liberty of choice, without his having the option of going wrong. This is the proffered harmony between the existence of a God of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, and the existence of physical and moral evil. We fail to see where the goodness of God is manifest here, for, from a human standpoint, we consider that, if a being had the power to keep the world right, it should have been impossible for it to have "gone wrong." It is admitted that there is physical evil in nature, and moral evil in man; therefore they must both possess a power independent of, and opposed to, infinite power. Is not this both absurd and contradictory?

The defenders of the claims of Christianity seem to ignore the following logical conclusions from their premises: If the Christian Deity be the creator of all things, then he must necessarily be the "God of Nature," and, in consequence, he is responsible for the pain and misery produced

by such calamities as volcanoes, with their red-hot lava ; the earthquakes and epidemics that destroy millions of human beings ; the explosions in the mines which cause the agonising deaths of husbands, fathers, and sons, upon whom whole families are dependent for the means of existence ; the railway accidents ; and the storms at sea. Now, these calamities occur either with or without God's interference. If with his interference, he is not all-good ; if without, he is not kind and benevolent ; and if they happen in spite of him, he is not all-powerful. Hence we agree with J. S. Mill when he says : " For, however offensive the proposition may appear to many religious persons, they should be willing to look in the face the undeniable fact that the order of nature, in so far as unmodified by man, is such as no being, whose attributes are justice and benevolence, would have made with the intention that his rational creatures should follow it as an example " (essay, " On Nature," p. 25). A new version of the Doxology would not be here out of place, and it should read something like this :—

" Praise God from whom all cyclones blow,
Praise Him when rivers overflow,
Praise Him who whirls the churches down,
And sinks the boats, their crews to drown."

Briefly, the Rationalistic objections to the orthodox claims of a book-revelation from God are as follows : That in the New Testament nothing of any value is revealed that was unknown to the world before. That the God of Revelation, being the creator of all things, is responsible for the physical and moral evils in the world. That the same being who arranged for the redemption of man planned his fall, and surrounded that event with conditions that rendered moral freedom of no avail. That, if Adam and Eve before the Fall did not know good from evil, the power of choice to them was useless. That to postulate one infinite will as an absolute ruler of the universe, and then to add millions of finite wills, which are capable of thwarting the Infinite one, is, to say the least, absurd. That no evidence has been produced which shows that the God of Revelation listens to human " beseechings," and supplies the wants of mankind more than does the " God of Nature." Finally, that cruel and unjust as nature is (which it ought not to be if it is the

production of a good God), in it are contained the remedies for all the evils that can be removed. When this nature is modified and improved by man, it is found to be the only source from which the means are obtained that enable us to augment human happiness, and to promote the physical, intellectual, and ethical advancement of the human race.

SECTION V.

MIRACLES.

THE question to be kept in view in this section is : Supposing miracles were ever wrought, would that be evidence that Christianity is a divine system? To prove that miracles have happened does not necessarily substantiate the claims of Christianity, because other religious systems also profess to be based upon the miraculous. Even the Bible admits that miracles occurred without divine aid. For proof of this the reader is referred to Deut. xiii. 1-3 ; Matt. xxiv. 24 ; Acts viii. 9, 10. Here it is clearly stated that miracles were actually performed by agencies the very opposite to those claimed by Christianity.

Professor Stewart says the miraculous is "evidence of the real and reliable character of the revelation, and of the divine source of the power, manifested in Christianity." But this is a fallacy upon the very face of it. What have miracles to do with the "reliable character of the revelation" upon the practical duties of life? If Christ did raise the dead, and perform other wonders, it would not make him accurate when he taught that this world should be considered as being only of secondary importance ; that utter indifference should be manifested as to the future of mundane life ; that a state of poverty is desirable ; that prayer is a reliable source of material help ; that salvation cannot be obtained except through him ; that the possession of devils was the cause of physical and mental disease ; or that the world was to have come to an end during the lifetime of those to whom he was speaking. Because the "revelation" very properly advises children to honour their parents, it does not, therefore, follow that it is "reliable" when it says that Christ was born without a human father, or that he could have been in two places at the same time. Neither does it

corroborate the statement that Christ the Son, who was "born of a virgin," was as old as God the Father, and that the Devil has been more potent than either of them. To make good the claims of Christianity here put forth, their reliability must be established apart altogether from an appeal to miracles.

The Christian claim, that the miracles which Christ is said to have performed prove that he was more than man, is equally fallacious. As already stated, wonders as great as those ascribed to Christ have been accomplished by persons who are admitted to have been but human. Besides, some of the miracles credited to Christ do not harmonise with that wisdom, utility, and justice which are said to be characteristic of divinity. As evidence of this, the reader is requested to peruse the account of his cursing the fig-tree (Matt. xxi.); of his reckless destruction of another person's property by casting a herd of swine into the sea, so that they "perished in the waters" (Matt. viii. 32); and of his turning water into wine (John ii.).

Dr. Middleton, in his "Free Inquiry," speaking of miraculous events, writes thus: "If either part be infirm their credit must sink in proportion; and, if the facts especially be incredible, they must of course fall to the ground, because no force of testimony can alter the nature of things." If the unbiased reader will test the miracles of Christ by the rule that this eminent Christian sets down, it will be seen how groundless the miraculous claims of Christianity really are. For, beyond doubt, many of the Christian "facts" are incredible; and, therefore, as the Doctor observes, "they must of course fall to the ground." Is it credible that "Lazarus should come from his grave, bound hand and foot with graveclothes," after he was dead, and decomposition had set in? That certain saints who were dead and in their graves should rise and go into the city, and be heard of no more? That Christ should feed a hungry multitude of "about five thousand men, besides women and children," with five loaves and two fishes, and, when all were filled, that there should be twelve baskets full remaining? Such tales would not be believed to-day in connection with human affairs. Why, then, should they be thought reliable in support of claims at which "reason stands aghast, and faith itself is half confounded"?

It is worthy of note, as showing the weakness of the claim that Christ's miracles prove his divinity, that where he performed some of his principal works many of the people were not convinced of the genuineness of his professions. Faith was a necessary requisite for the belief in miracles. Where scepticism existed, Christ's occupation as a thaumaturgus was gone. Matthew informs us (xiii. 58) that Christ "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." But, had the object of miracles been to prove the divine mission of Christ, it was in the midst of unbelief that they should have been wrought. Jesus seems to have succeeded tolerably well with his wonders among the ignorant, the insane, and the deaf and dumb people. When, however, he came in contact with thoughtful unbelievers, his *prestige* was gone. Hence, we read in Matthew (xi. 20): "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not;" and in John (xii. 37): "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." Here is a clear admission that, in Christ's time, his best miracles were disbelieved and rejected. Is it expected that in the nineteenth century we are more credulous than were our predecessors eighteen hundred years ago?

The question of the reality, or otherwise, of miracles is not here involved. Still, it may be urged, as against the Christian claims, that, if the stories of the miracles of the New Testament were true, the attributes of an omnipotent, good, all-wise, and impartial God would be destroyed. Further, the perfection of his government would be rendered impossible. A miracle, as understood by the Church, implies a special act upon the part of God, and his interference with natural sequences. Now, all acts of God—supposing him to be the being Christians regard him—must be good acts. If, therefore, it were wise for God to perform certain acts eighteen hundred years ago, it would have been equally wise for him to have done so four thousand years previously. So long, therefore, as he abstained from performing those acts, so long did he withhold advantages from his children, and thereby deal unjustly towards them. To urge that an act of God may be good and necessary at one time, and not at another, is to reduce the government of God to a level with that of man, and to admit that the

“divine” economy is neither uniform nor perfect. Again, granting the existence of God, all sequences were arranged by that God. If arranged by him, they were so arranged from eternity. Anything which acted contrary to that arrangement was either the result of an after-plan on God’s part—in which case he is not all-wise and immutable—or the arrangement took place in spite of God; and in that case he is not all-powerful. We only know of existence as it is, and we judge of its nature and power from experience and investigation. From these sources of knowledge we learn that at certain degrees heat will burn, water will drown, and poison, in given quantities, will destroy life. To believe otherwise is for man to leave facts and reason, and to revel in fancy and credulity. The forces in nature, so far as we have discovered them, are regular in their order, and “constancy of succession marks their operations.” These are truths that science has made known in modern times, and, if they were always relied upon, no claim could consistently be made for the reality of miracles.

The Rationalistic view of the miraculous claims of Christianity may be thus briefly stated: (1) That it is impossible to prove from experience that Christ’s miracles were ever performed. (2) That the only approach to evidence of their reality is testimony, which is far from being reliable. (3) That it is not reasonable to suppose that God would work miracles, and at the same time endow man with faculties which enabled him to reject them. (4) That it is true some events have occurred that have not yet been accounted for by natural law. If this were not the case, science would now have no unsolved problems to deal with. But we know that many events that were once thought to be unaccountable science has now traced to natural law; thus “the supernatural of one age has become the natural of another.” (5) To the allegation that religious interests require a departure from the ordinary laws of nature, we reply that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary laws has not been defined, and it cannot be defined until the extraordinary law is understood; and, when it is understood, actions in conformity thereto will not be considered miraculous. (6) If it be true that God specially interferes in the order of the universe, all certainty in human affairs is an impossibility. (7) If a person to-day were to say that one

who was dead had been brought back to life, we should feel certain that that person had been deceived. Our conclusion would be based upon natural law, which there is no reason to suppose could ever have been violated. (8) Even if we admit the existence of supernatural power, before we can logically attribute any event to that power, should we not be prepared to state where the natural ends, and where the alleged supernatural begins? Should we not, also, have some means of recognising the manifestations of that power? Because we are not able to explain the why and the wherefore of certain effects, that does not justify us in saying they are supernaturally produced. Until man knows all that nature can do, let him not presume to assert what it cannot do.

SECTION VI.

THE PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

PROFESSED Christians regard Christ as the foundation and centre of their faith. Whatever weaknesses may be thought to belong to other alleged evidences of the truth of Christianity, it is said that Jesus is the invulnerable rock, without flaw or imperfection. This extravagant and unprovable claim is sought to be maintained by Professor Stewart and other Christian defenders upon the following grounds:—(1) That the superior excellence of Christ's character is acknowledged by opponents of Christianity. (2) That the outlines of his life are historical, and that the portraiture given of him in the Gospels harmonises with the belief of the earliest Christians. (3) That this portraiture, in the words of Professor Stewart, "must be either an invention or an idealised picture, or be drawn from actual knowledge of the person represented." It is contended that it is impossible for it to have been either of the first two, and, therefore, his character "is a strikingly original one." (4) It is further alleged that, if the claims which Christ puts forward in his own name are not justified, they evince a fanatical self-delusion, and are fatal to his moral reputation.

Such is the latest evidence given for the purpose of proving the orthodox claims for Christ. That it is inadequate for the purpose we hope to demonstrate; for, even if we admit that the facts are as stated in the first three positions here set forth, it does not, therefore, follow that the claims of Christianity are established. The fact that certain Sceptics hold a high opinion of Jesus; that the earliest Christians based their belief on the portraiture of the Gospels, which are supposed to be, in their "main outlines," historically accurate; and that the character drawn of Christ is original, can in no way prove the truth of all that

is taught by the Christian faith. For instance, it would be no proof that Christ was equal with God ; that he was in every particular perfect ; that his death atoned for the sins of the world ; and that his teachings are of practical value in regulating the mundane affairs of to-day. Before we can accept such positions as furnishing any evidence of the truth of the claims of Christianity, it must be shown : (1) That the opinions of the Sceptics were correct ; (2) that the outlines of Christ's life are consistent, and in accordance with natural law ; and (3) that the portraiture given of Jesus in the Four Gospels is a correct one.

In connection with this last point it should be remembered that during the early centuries no one definite uniform opinion as to the nature and character of Christ obtained among his followers. E. P. Meredith observes that "at a most early period of the Christian era there appear to have been great doubts as to the real existence of Christ. The Manichees, as Augustine informs us, denied that he was a man, while others maintained that he was a man, but denied that he was a God (August. Sermon, xxxvii., c. 12). The Fathers tell us that it was in the times of the apostles believed that Christ was a phantom, and that no such person as Jesus Christ had ever had any corporeal existence. There is, therefore, considerable force in the expressions of a modern writer, that the being of no other individual mentioned in history ever laboured under such a deficiency of evidence as to its reality, or ever was overset by a thousandth part of the weight of positive proof that it was a creation of imagination only, as that of Jesus Christ. His existence as a man has, from the earliest day on which it can be shown to have been asserted, been earnestly and strenuously denied ; and that not by the enemies of the Christian faith, but by the most intelligent, most learned, and most sincere of the Christian name who ever left to the world proofs of their intelligence and learning in their writings, and of their sincerity in their sufferings" ("The Prophet of Nazareth," pp. 287-8).

Even at the present day contradictory ideas are entertained as to the real personality or character of Christ. Trinitarians believe him to be God, but the Unitarians regard him only as a man ; while the Swedenborgians think him a "divine humanity." The General Baptists maintain that

he died for all men, and the Particular Baptists assert that he died only for an elect number. Many of Christ's admirers look upon his character as being perfect; others admit that, being human, his character must necessarily be imperfect. Christian Socialists claim him as a great social and political reformer; but their more religious opponents aver that he was a spiritual regenerator, and that he spoke the truth when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." In the New Testament there are clearly two portraits given of Christ: the one, gentle and loving; the other, harsh and unforgiving. From the one come the sympathetic words: "Father, forgive them;" "Suffer little children to come unto me;" and the command, "Love one another." From the other proceed the gloomy and revengeful exclamations: "He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God;" "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;" "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, etc., he cannot be my disciple." Now the question is, As these two portraits are diametrically opposed to each other, and given by the same authorities, which is the correct one?

In reference to the fourth position put forth to prove the claims of Christianity, it differs from the other three, inasmuch as it is evidential; but the evidence is not for, but against, orthodox claims. The argument urged therein is that, if Christ were not what, according to the Gospels, he professed to be, he was a victim to a fanatical self-delusion, which would indicate weakness in his moral character. The question, then, is, Was Christ what he claimed to be, and did he do what he promised to accomplish? Moreover, were his actions governed by reasonable modesty, or were they performed under the influence of uncontrolled enthusiasm? To decide this question, the New Testament is our only standard of appeal, and therein we find that the Gospels represent Christ as claiming to be equal with God, and yet he was not impervious to human weaknesses and imperfections. He suffered from hunger (Matt. iv. 2); he gave way to anger (Mark iii. 5), and to petty passion (Matt. xxi. 18, 19); he lacked power (John v. 19-30); and he was limited in wisdom (Mark xiii. 32). Further, he acknowledged that he could do nothing of himself (see John v. 19 and 30). He announced that he "proceeded

forth and came from God" (John viii. 42); but he failed to justify this claim to his townsmen, for they said of him: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and Judah, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that he saith I came down from heaven?" So unpopular, however, he became at Nazareth that "all they in the synagogue rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Mark vi. 3, John vi. 42, Luke iv. 28, 29). Even his own relatives had no faith in his pretensions to miraculous power; they accused him of secrecy, and told him to "Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest; for there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him" (John vii. 1-5).

In moments of enthusiasm Christ made promises which he never fulfilled. In Matthew (xix.) we are told that he promised that certain of his followers should "sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel"; but there is no record that such an event ever took place. He also assured believers in him that they should "cast out devils," "take up serpents, and, if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark xvi. 17, 18). Will his followers test his promise in these matters? Moreover, he emphatically said: "If two of you shall agree upon earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven" (Matthew xviii. 19). " whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 13, 14). Now, here Christ claims to be in a position to guarantee that the prayers of his believers shall be answered. But was he justified in so doing? Experience says, No; for, in spite of prayers asking that scepticism should cease, it has increased as time rolled on, until to-day it is more extensive than it ever was. What has been more prayed for than the unity of Christendom? Jesus himself prayed

that his followers might be one (John xvii. 21) ; yet, from his time, divisions among Christians have gone on increasing, and each sect prays in vain for the conversion of the others.

That many of the acts ascribed to Christ were of a fanatical kind is evident. For instance, his riding into Jerusalem upon an ass and a colt (Matthew xxi.) ; his entering the Temple, overthrowing the money-changers' tables, and whipping the merchants from the building with "a scourge of small cords" (John ii. 15) ; his cursing the fig-tree, because it did not bear fruit out of season ; his designating those who came before him as "thieves and robbers" (John x. 8), and his vituperations against certain persons, calling them "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" No wonder that his friends thought he was "beside himself" (Mark iii. 21), and that the Jews considered "he hath a devil, and is mad" (John x. 26). The Rev. Charles Voysey says Christ could "not have been God, because he was not a perfect man. He had faults which neither I nor my readers would venture to imitate without loss of self-respect. His mind gave way, and he was not responsible for what he said." Instead of regarding Jesus as an impostor, the rev. gentleman said that "he was simply mistaken, and finally insane" (*Fortnightly Review*, January, 1887). Perhaps this will account for his delusions in reference to prayer, his belief in people being possessed with devils, that believers could drink poison and suffer no injurious results, and that the world was to come to an end during the lifetime of the people of his day. Now, if fanaticism and self-delusion are fatal to moral reputation, as Professor Stewart says they are, then Christ's moral character must be impaired, for the Gospels allege that he was a victim to both these drawbacks.

What, then, does the evidence at our command in reference to the claims of and for Christ prove? Simply this: That for many centuries contradictory and varying beliefs have obtained in connection with a person called Jesus, who is supposed to have lived nearly two thousand years ago ; that he is regarded as having been the founder of the Christian religion ; that his birth was miraculous, his life and teachings unique, his death unparalleled, and that he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. These are the

fundamental claims urged on behalf of orthodox Christianity; and we submit that there is no historical evidence, sufficiently trustworthy, to justify such claims. We look in vain among the writings of Jewish and heathen historians, who lived in or near the time when the events are said to have happened, for any testimony of their occurrence. Besides, the incidents are so contrary to human experience, and the New Testament, which records the events, is so contradictory in narrating them, that, according to the general law of evidence, the claims have no logical demand upon our credence. The fact is that the reports found in the Gospels as to when and where Christ was born, his genealogy, his sayings and doings, and his death, resurrection, and ascension, are too conflicting and inconsistent for their credibility to be relied upon. Moreover, the theories based upon the supposition that the narratives were accurate are so discordant, and have been so varying in their development, that it is difficult to conceive they were supported by fact. The Church, which accepted a theory in one age, often rejected it in another; while views that were regarded by some Christian exponents as being orthodox have been condemned by others as heterodox. And to-day the very beliefs that were based upon the records of the New Testament are either modified or entirely discarded, not only by secular scholars, but by learned divines. The new view entertained by "advanced Christians" is that Christ is an "ideal;" but this position is not a sound one, inasmuch as the question arises, An ideal of what? If the better parts of an ideal are marred by that which is erroneous and impracticable, the ideal is not a safe one for human guidance. That this is so in reference to the Christ of the Gospels is, to our mind, beyond doubt. Surely, with these facts before us, it is unreasonable to attempt to exact implicit belief in events destitute of logical coherence and of historical corroboration.

We believe that the more dignified and correct course to take, from a Rationalist point of view, is to estimate the value of the traditions that have grown up around the name of Christ, by the peculiar features belonging to the ages of their growth, and by the intellectual light of the nineteenth century. Modern thought must not be fettered by ancient speculation. If it could be proved that the history of

Christ were historical, it would not make the impracticable portion of his teachings useful to us ; and if it could be shown that he was an impostor, it would not rob any truth he taught of its real value. In this utilitarian age *what* is said should be considered of greater importance than *by whom* it is said. Personally, the origin of Christianity has but little interest for us ; we are the more concerned as to its truth and utility. Like all religious systems, the one bearing the Christian name is a combination of the true and the erroneous, the real and the imaginary, and our duty is to discriminate between fact and fiction, and to accept the one and to reject the other. Neither do we consider that the admission that Jesus might have lived necessitates our regarding him either as a supernatural being or as an impostor. Supposing he lived, he might have been, as we think he was, self-deceived, his better judgment being overwhelmed by his fanatical nature. Christians, while admitting the existence of Buddha and Mohammed, will not grant that they were divine personages, or that their teachings were perfect ; but the time is past for those religious founders to be denounced as impostors. Why should a different rule be applied to Christ ? His teachings are not superior to theirs, the progress of his faith has not been more extensive than theirs, and certainly his followers have not been more numerous than those of Buddha.

What, then, is the Rationalist view of Christ ? It is, briefly, this : That, assuming the New Testament account of him to be accurate, we must regard him as a man who possessed but limited education, who was surrounded by unfavourable influences for intellectual acquirements, who belonged to a race not very remarkable for literary culture, who retained many of the failings of his progenitors, and who had but little regard for the world or the things of the world. Viewed under these circumstances, we can, while excusing many of his errors, recognise and admire something that is praiseworthy in his character. But, when he is raised upon a pinnacle of greatness as an exemplar of virtue and wisdom, and as surpassing the production of any age or country, he is then exalted to a position which he does not merit, and which deprives him of that credit which otherwise he would perhaps be entitled to. He revealed nothing of practical value, and

he taught no virtues that were before unknown. No doubt in his life there were many commendable features ; but he was far from being perfect. While he might have been well-meaning, he was in belief superstitious, in conduct inconsistent, in opinions contradictory, in teaching arbitrary, in faith vacillating, and in pretensions great. He taught false notions of existence ; he had no knowledge of science ; he misled his followers by claiming to be what he was not, and he deceived himself by his own credulity. He lacked experimental force, frequently living a life of isolation, and taking but slight interest in the affairs of this world. It is this lack of experimental force throughout the career of Christ that renders his notions of domestic duties so thoroughly imperfect. As a son, he lacked affection and consideration for the feelings of his parents ; as a teacher, he was mystical and rude ; and, as a reasoner, he was defective and illogical. Lacking a true method of reasoning, possessing no uniformity of character, he exhibited a strange example—an example injudicious to exalt and dangerous to emulate. At times he was severe when he should have been gentle. When he might have reasoned he frequently rebuked. When he ought to have been firm and resolute he was vacillating. When he should have been happy he was sorrowful and desponding. After preaching faith as the one thing needful, he himself lacked it when he required it the most. Thus, on the cross, when a knowledge of a life of integrity, a sensibility of the fulfilment of a good mission, a conviction that he was dying for a noble and righteous cause, and fulfilling the object of his life—when all these should have given him moral strength we find him giving vent to utter despair. So overwhelmed was he with grief and anxiety of mind that, we are told, he “began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” “My soul,” he exclaimed, “is sorrowful even unto death.” At last, overcome with grief, he implores his father to rescue him from the death which was then awaiting him.*

* For further evidence that the orthodox view of Christ is erroneous, and that he was no general reformer, the reader is referred to the present writer's pamphlet, “Was Christ a Political and Social Reformer?” where this phase of his character is fully dealt with.

SECTION VII.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

THE alleged resurrection of Christ is an important feature in his history. In fact, the orthodox defenders of Christianity stake the truth of their entire faith upon the reality of this one event, which is an exceedingly illogical thing to do. For, supposing Christ did rise from the dead, that would be no evidence that the whole system of orthodoxy is true and reasonable. Of course the fallacy in this instance originated with St. Paul, who is reported to have said: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. xv. 14). "What advantage it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." This is really the most irrational and selfish test that was ever submitted to prove the validity of any claim. It makes the usefulness of Christianity to depend not upon its ethical value, but upon a theological dogma. The utter selfishness of the test is apparent, for it puts personal gain before all considerations of general good. If all belief in the resurrection were ignored, should we then have no duties to perform, and no consolation to support us in the battle of life? Would all love for mankind and interest in their welfare cease? Should we have no hearts to gladden, no homes to make happy, and no characters to improve and elevate? The faith that makes the sunshine of existence, the recognition of duty, and the cultivation of virtue to depend upon the belief in a "risen Christ" is low and grovelling in the extreme, and it is thoroughly opposed to the Rationalist view of the nature and capabilities of the manifold energies of the human race. Fortunately, such a sordid and degrading view of life is as false as it is despairing; for, long before the story of the resurrection was heard of, the noblest virtues were fostered and the highest possible

happiness was realised ; and even to-day it is the same among millions of the human family where the belief does not obtain.

Although, from a Rationalist standpoint, the reality or otherwise of the resurrection of Christ should have no influence upon personal conduct, it may be interesting to inquire upon what grounds the belief in it rests. The account of such a marvellous event as the restoration from death to life of one upon whom the salvation of the world was supposed to depend should be supported by the clearest of evidence. But no such evidence exists, which is very remarkable, if the event were to be considered the strongest proof of the truth of Christianity. We have not the testimony of any eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Early historians are silent in reference to it, and the accounts in the Gospels are inconsistent and contradictory. Even the extraordinary phenomena which are said to have happened at the death of Christ (Matt. xxvii.) are not mentioned by Seneca and Pliny, although each of them, as Gibbon informs us, "in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature—earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses—which his indefatigable curiosity could collect."

Having, then, no historical evidence of the resurrection, let us see if there is any value in what the New Testament says upon the subject. We have not space to present the many contradictions contained in the Gospels as to the incidents which are reported to have occurred at the resurrection ; but, if the reader will examine these carefully, it will be found that the four writers differ materially upon the following points : The number of women who went to the sepulchre ; the number of "angels" or "men" the women found there ; the words spoken by the "angels" or "men ;" the giving of the information of what they had seen ; to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection ; and, finally, where the appearance of Christ after the resurrection took place. Such conflicting statements as are recorded in the four Gospels would not be received as evidence, even upon ordinary matters, in any of our law courts to-day. Some of these allegations *must* be false, and it is not impossible that none of them are true. Not being able to decide which is correct, we discard them all as being of no evidential value.

In Matthew (xx. 18, 19) it is recorded that Jesus said :

“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death ; and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge him, and to crucify him, and the third day he shall rise again.” Now, if these words were spoken, we may fairly suppose that such definite language would have made a deep impression upon his friends and disciples. But it does not appear to have done anything of the kind, for, as Greg observes : “We have ample proof that *no such impression was made* ; that the disciples had no conception of their Lord’s approaching death—still less of his resurrection—and that, so far from their expecting either of these events, both, when they occurred, took them entirely by surprise ; they were utterly confounded by the one, and could not believe the other. We find them shortly after—nay, in one instance, instantly after—these predictions were uttered disputing which among them should be greatest in their coming dominion (Matthew xx. 24-27 ; Mark ix. 34-5 ; Luke xxii. 25, 30), glorying in the idea of thrones, and asking for seats on his right hand and on his left in his Messianic kingdom (Matthew xix. 27, 28 ; xx. 21 ; Mark x. 37 ; Luke xxii. 30), which, when he approached Jerusalem, they thought “would immediately appear” (Luke xix. 11 ; xxiv. 21). The four following incidents mentioned in the Gospels strongly corroborate the theory that Christ’s words, that he would “rise again,” had no effect upon some of his friends : (1) When the two women visited the sepulchre they took sweet spices to anoint the body (Mark xvi.), which they would not have done if they expected that he would rise from the grave ; (2) when Mary Magdalene discovered that the body was gone she thought the gardener had removed it (John xx. 15), which is quite inconsistent with the belief that the resurrection had taken place ; (3) when the women reported his resurrection to the disciples “their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke xxiv. 11), although it is distinctly said that Jesus told them the event would happen ; (4) when he was supposed to have appeared, after his resurrection, to the eleven disciples at Galilee “some doubted” (Matt. xxviii. 17), while others thought that “they had seen a spirit” (Luke xxiv. 37). So sceptical were certain of the disciples about the “risen Christ” that it is

reported that he "upbraided them with their unbelief" (Mark xvi. 14).

With these Gospel admissions that the story of the resurrection was not accepted as true by many of those who lived at the time it is said to have occurred, of what value is the assertion that the event gained universal assent? Why, not only did some of the Christians disbelieve the story after all possible evidence had been produced (1 Cor. xv. 12), but the great body of the Jews and the Romans had no faith in its truth. The fact that the Jewish Sanhedrim, composed of educated Jews, and the six Roman governors, mentioned in the New Testament, who had every opportunity of judging of the genuineness or otherwise of the story, refused to believe in it, is evidence of its doubtful character. Besides, according to Mosheim, many of the early Christians thought that Christ was not crucified, but that it was Judas; and it was not until the second century, says Charles B. Waite, M.A., in his "History of the Christian Religion," that "the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, in a material body, appeared." It is evident that the writer of Matthew's Gospel did not pretend to record contemporary events, for he writes: "This saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (xxviii. 15).

The case stands thus: The resurrection itself would have been an extraordinary event, one contrary to known natural law, and opposed to all human experience. In its favour we have no testimony either of eye-witnesses or of historians who lived at or near the time Christ is alleged to have risen. The accounts given by the writers of the Gospels upon the subject are too contradictory to be received as evidence; many of the people who, it is said, had been informed that Christ would rise had no idea that he had risen, while the most learned men of the period entirely disbelieved the story. These facts afford abundant evidence that the resurrection is not a demonstrated truth.

Now, let us briefly consider the reasons given by Christian exponents in favour of the belief in this—to say the least—improbable and uncorroborated story, which, be it remembered, originated in an ignorant, uncritical, and superstitious age. In the first place, it is contended that, unless we accept the Christian account of the origin and perpetuation

of the belief in the resurrection of Christ, we are bound to furnish a better one. Logically, we are not compelled to do anything of the kind; all that really devolves upon us who cannot accept the story is to examine the case for the affirmation, and to show that the reasons given are insufficient to establish the truth of what is affirmed. Christians deny many of the pretensions of Buddha and Mohammed, and they disbelieve the stories of the resurrection of Krishna, of Adonis, of Osiris, and of many other ancient "saviours," in whom thousands of sincere devotees have believed. But these very Christians do not deem it their duty to explain how the faith in the miraculous birth, death, and resurrection of these religious heroes originated, and how it was perpetuated. Why, then, are we expected to account for the belief in such an unlikely event as the resurrection of Christ? Superstitions of various kinds, such as the belief in the miracles of the Catholic Church, in the pretensions of Joseph Smith, and in the story of the approaching end of the world, have always been found allied with ignorance and duplicity. These factors, no doubt, played an important part in the origination of the belief that Christ rose from the dead.

While it is not necessary to the position we take that we should furnish a better reason for the existence of the belief in the resurrection than the one supplied by Christianity, the following probable causes may be assigned: (1) The expectation, based upon Christ's own prediction, that he would rise again. It is true his words failed to impress some, but others of more weak and credulous natures were affected by what he was supposed to have said. (2) The revolt of the Jews against the Roman power which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem. This, no doubt, induced many of Christ's disciples to think that the end of the world was at hand in accordance with his predictions (Matt. xxiv.; Mark xiii.; Luke xxi.), and that he was coming to establish his kingdom, in which they were to be governors (Matt. xix. 28). That they were deceived would not alter the fact that these events tended to justify, to their minds, the delusion in which they believed. (3) The disciples suffered from persecution which they might have mistaken for the fulfilment of another of their Master's prophecies (Matt. xxiv. 9). These three circumstances were calculated to

encourage the idea in credulous minds that Christ had been restored to life, and that he would be with them again. Of course, they were disappointed, as the second coming of Jesus was no more a reality than was his resurrection. Besides, resurrections were believed in long before Christ's time. Ovid's prophecy, in reference to Æsculapius, was very similar to what has been said about Christ. Here are the words :—

“Once, as the sacred infant she surveyed,
The God was kindled in the raving maid ;
And thus she uttered her prophetic tale :
Hail, great physician of the world ! all hail !
Hail, mighty infant, who in years to come
Shall heal the nations and defraud the tomb.
Swift be thy growth, thy triumphs unconfined ;
Make kingdoms thicker and increase mankind.
Thy daring heart shall animate the dead,
And draw the thunder on thy guilty head ;
Then shalt thou die, but from the dark abode
Shalt rise victorious, and be twice a God.”

The belief in the resurrection has been perpetuated principally through persons accepting the faith without investigation. This has been the cause of the growth of nearly all the superstitions of the world. The fact that the belief in a personal devil, a burning hell, purgatory, and the efficacy of the mass has been retained so long is to be attributed to the lack of free inquiry upon the part of those who have accepted these theological dogmas. The same with the belief in the resurrection. How many of those who regard it as a fact to-day have sought to ascertain what evidence it has in its support? Even the majority of ministers who preach this doctrine can give no other reason for believing in it than because they find that it is taught in a certain book ; and most of the laity who endorse the belief that Christ rose from the dead are influenced by the delusion that heaven will be the reward of all who accept the belief, and that hell will be the portion of those who reject it. Even St. Paul, who is the principal witness for the resurrection, believed it on trust and faith, “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). He also thought that the end of the world would arrive in the time in which he lived, but he was mistaken. Why, then, should he be relied upon in reference to the resurrection? The supposed evidence of

St. Paul is worthless to prove that Christ rose from the dead. He was not an eye-witness of the event, and his references to it are most misleading. For instance, he says, Christ was "seen of the twelve," but Judas was dead (Matt. xxvii. 3-5), and Mathias was not chosen until after the Ascension (Acts i. 26). Then we are told "he was seen of above five hundred brethren;" yet not one of the five hundred has left the testimony that "I saw Jesus." "Last of all," says St. Paul, "he was seen of me." But how did he see him? Let the apostle answer for himself. "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth), such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth)" (2 Cor. xii. 1-3).

Some of the Spiritualists to-day profess to have "visions and revelations;" but rational minds do not accept such "visions and revelations" as matters of fact, to be depended upon to prove anything of importance. Moreover, St. Paul's idea of a resurrection was that it would be a spiritual one; and he says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv. 50); but the alleged resurrection of Christ was of his natural body, and, after he had risen, we are told he ate broiled fish just before he ascended "up into heaven" (Luke xxiv.).

Professor Stewart says: "The existence of the Church, and especially the early institution of the Lord's Day and of Easter Day, are proofs of the nature and strength of primitive belief as to the resurrection." To this we reply, that the resurrection was not a recognised doctrine of the Church until the second century. But suppose it were, it would not follow that, because the Church believed it, therefore it was true. The Roman Catholics dedicated their Church to the "Holy Virgin;" but is that evidence that Mary, who was the mother of many children, was a virgin? There is St. Peter's at Rome, although it is a disputed point that Peter ever went to Rome. As to the term "Lord's Day," Tertullian (A.D. 200) is the first writer who applies to it the resurrection, and we can find no evidence that the two were associated prior to that time. The Professor ought to know that the "Lord's Day" has no reference to the day when

Christ is said to have risen. Many conflicting opinions have been given as to its real meaning. It has been thought to refer to "the Gospel dispensation," to "the Day of Judgment," to the "first day of the week;" but, so far as it can be applied to anything, it is to the Bible Sabbath, which is Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and this was not the day of the supposed resurrection.

In reference to Easter, that was of pagan origin, and in Chambers's "Encyclopædia" (article "Easter") it is said: "With her usual policy the Church endeavoured to give a Christian significance to such of the rites as could not be rooted out; and in this case the conversion was practically easy." Christian exponents have a reckless habit of connecting certain events together as if they bore the relation to each other of cause and effect, when, in reality, there is no such relation between them. To claim that the resurrection was a fact because the Church believed it, and because the "Lord's Day" and Easter have become recognised institutions, is the very height of theological assumption. There is not a shadow of legitimate evidence to support such a claim.

We have dwelt upon this and the previous section at some length, for the reason that the subjects treated are regarded by Christians as affording the greatest proof of the truth of their claims. We trust that, from our examination of the points at issue, our readers will see that at least there are to these, as to most questions, two sides; and it is for them to decide for themselves which they regard as the correct one.

SECTION VIII.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

No one, we presume, who has marked the development of religious thought will deny that Christianity has been a potent factor in the history of the world. Its nature, incentive, and general environment would naturally make it so. Nothing influences the theological mind, either for good or for evil, more than its notion of supernaturalism. If a person is induced to have absolute faith in the fatherhood and sovereignty of God, he deems it his first duty to carry out that which he considers to be the will of that God. Hence it is that during intellectual periods men's notions of Deity have been refined and cultivated, and, as a consequence, oppression and persecution of Scepticism have been more rare ; while, on the other hand, when the multitude held rude ideas of divinity, minds pure and chaste were sickened at the scenes of cruelty and bloodshed which were enacted in accordance with what was supposed to be "the will of God."*

What we desire to consider in this section is : Are the claims put forward by Christian exponents, as to the influence of Christianity upon personal character and natural progress, borne out by individual experience and the records of history ? As a rule, man is supposed to know himself better than others know him ; but there are instances in which other people can estimate a person more correctly than he can estimate himself. They will take a more dispassionate view of his character. They will be in a better position to compare him with others, and thus judge more accurately of his relations and comparative place in the scale of humanity. As with individuals, so it is with systems

* For important facts bearing upon this point the reader is referred to Earl Russell's "History of the Christian Religion" and to Buckle's "History of Civilisation."

of religions. The devotees of a certain faith are wont to regard it as being spotless, and as containing the panacea for all the imperfections of society. This is particularly the case with Christian advocates, who not only ignore all that is evil and defective in the world as belonging to their system, but credit Christianity with all the progress that has taken place in modern times. This we believe to be a theological assumption which is utterly opposed to the true history of all human improvement. The progress of a nation cannot be attributed to any one thing or to any one age, but rather to a combination of circumstances which have been in operation during many ages. For instance, had it not been for the scientific discoveries in the last century of a Watt, a Dalton, and others, the sciences with which their names are associated would not have been so easy of application to human utility as they are at the present time. It is equally true that for the freedom from religious intolerance which we now enjoy we are as much indebted to Franklin, Paine, Carlile, Hetherington, Watson, and other Freethought heroes of the past, as to any of their representatives of this generation. To judge fairly of the influence of Christianity, the following facts should be kept in view:—

(1) That it is not an original system of harmonious teachings and of uniform history. This fact we have already abundantly proved. No one who has carefully and impartially read the histories of the ancient religions and ethical systems can truly allege that the principal doctrines and moral teachings of the New Testament were known for the first time in their connection with Christianity. The able American writer, Charles B. Waite, M.A., in his "History of the Christian Religion," observes: "Many of the more prominent doctrines of the Christian religion prevailed among nations of antiquity hundreds—and in some instances thousands—of years before Christ." Judge Strange, in his work, "The Sources and Development of Christianity," shows that nearly all the Christian doctrines—the Atonement, Trinity, Incarnation, Judgment of the Dead, Immortality, Sacrifice—were of Egyptian origin, and, therefore, existed long before the time of Christ. The same writer, on page 100 of the work mentioned, says: "Christianity, it is thus apparent, was not the result of a special revelation from above, but the growth of circumstances, and developed out

of the materials, working in a natural manner in the human mind in the place and at the time that the movement occurred." "To the truths already uttered in the Athenian prison," remarks Mackay, "Christianity added little or nothing, except a few symbols, which, though well calculated for popular acceptance, are more likely to perplex than to instruct, and offer the best opportunity for priestly mystification." Sir William Jones, in his tenth discourse before the Asiatic Society, says: "Christianity has no need of such aids as many are willing to give it, by asserting that the wisest men of the world were ignorant of the great maxim, that we should act in respect to others as we would wish them to act in respect of ourselves, as the rule is implied in a speech of Lysias, expressed in distinct phrases by Thales and Pittacus, and I have seen it word for word in the original of Confucius." And the Rev. Dr. George Matheson, in his lecture on "The Religions of China," page 84, frankly states: "The glory of Christian morality is that it is not original."

(2) That to say professed Christians have performed noble and useful actions is not sufficient to make good the orthodox claims; it must be shown that such actions accord with the teachings of the New Testament. It does not follow that, because Christianity and civilisation co-exist, therefore the former is the cause of the latter. Scepticism now obtains more than at any previous period; but Christians will not grant that modern progress is the result of unbelief. Civilisation is not an invention, but a growth; a process from low animal conditions to higher physical, moral, and intellectual attainments. The real value of civilisation consists in its being the means whereby the community can enjoy personal comfort and general happiness. History teaches that the progress of a people depends upon their knowledge of, and their obedience to, organic laws. The principal causes of modern civilisation are: The development of the intellect—this rules the world to-day; the expansion of mechanical genius—this provides for the increased needs of the people; the extension of national commerce—this causes an interchange of ideas; the invention of printing—this provides for the circulation of newly-discovered facts; the beneficial influence of climate—this affects the condition both of body and mind; the knowledge and the application of science—these reveal the value and the power

of natural resources ; the spread of scepticism—this provides for the vindication of the right of mental freedom ; the practical recognition of political justice—this forms the basis of all just governments ; and, finally, the establishment of the social equality of women with men—this secures the emancipation of women from that state of domestic servitude and general inferiority in which theology had for centuries kept them. Now, these civilising elements are not to be found in the teachings of the New Testament ; but, on the contrary, as we have shown in previous sections of this pamphlet, much that is taught therein discourages a progressive spirit (see Matthew vi. 25-34 ; xix. 21, 29 ; Luke xiv. 26 ; John vi. 27 ; xii. 25 ; 1 Corinthians vii. 20 ; Romans xiii. 1, 2 ; Ephesians v. 22-24 ; and 2 Peter ii. 13-18).

(3) The personal results of Christianity have depended upon the nature and characteristics of those who accepted it as a belief. Hence persons of the most contrary dispositions and the most opposite natures have been its illustrators, expounders, and living representatives. It has found room for all temperaments—the ascetic and luxurious enjoyer of life ; the man of action and the man of contemplation ; the monk and the king ; the philanthropist and the destroyer of his race ; the iconoclastic hater of all ceremonies and the superstitious devotee. It has been, in the words of St. Paul, “all things to all men.” This heterogeneous influence upon the human character, however, is by no means the result of any all-embracing comprehensiveness in Christianity, but is rather the effect of a system characterised alike by its indefinite, incomplete, and undecisive principles. This fact explains why some men have been good in spite of their being believers in the orthodox faith, while other believers have been destitute of the nobler qualities of our nature. The power that “makes for righteousness” came not from Christianity, but from the natural proclivities of its professors. If this were not so, we might justly expect that all the recipients of the faith would have been influenced for good. That they were not thus influenced we learn from the New Testament and Christian history. “Contentions,” “strife,” “indignation,” “fraud,” and lying were indulged in by St. Paul and his contemporaries (see Acts xv. 39 ; Luke xxii. 24 ; Matthew

xx. 24; 1 Corinthians vi. 8 and v. 1; Matthew xxvi. 70, 72; 2 Corinthians xi. 8 and xii. 16). Mosheim admits that in the fourth century "the Church was contaminated with shoals of profligate Christians.....It cannot be affirmed that even true Christians were entirely innocent and irreproachable in this matter" (see Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," vol. i., pp. 55, 77, 102, 193). Salvian, an eminent pious clergyman of the fifth century, writes: "With the exception of a very few who flee from vice, what is almost every Christian congregation but a sink of vices? For you will find in the Church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard, a glutton, or an adulterer.....or a robber, or a manslayer, and, what is worse than all, almost all these without limit" (Miall's "Memorials of Early Christianity," p. 366). Dr. Cave, in his "Primitive Christianity" (p. 2), observes: "If a modest and honest heathen were to estimate Christianity by the lives of its professors, he would certainly proscribe it as the vilest religion in the world." Dr. Dicks, in his "Philosophy of Religion" (pp. 366-7), also states: "There is nothing which so strikingly marks the character of the Christian world in general as the want of candour [and the existence of] the spirit of jealousy.....Slander, dishonesty, falsehood, and cheating are far from being uncommon among those who profess to be united in the bonds of a common Christianity." Wesley, after stating that "Bible-reading England" was guilty of every species of vice, even those that nature itself abhors, thus concludes: "Such a complication of villainies of every kind, considered with all their aggravations; such a scorn of whatever bears the face of virtue; such injustice, fraud, and falsehood; above all, such perjury and such a method of law, we may defy the whole world to produce" ("Sermons," vol. xii., p. 223).

It is not true that, as orthodox believers allege, Christianity is a universal religion. Christ states that he was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew xv. 24). And when he sent his disciples forth to preach he commanded them to "go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matthew x. 5). Besides, the very nature of the faith precludes it from being suitable to all the nations of the world. Hence it has always been subject to human conditions and

national environments, and when those factors were unfavourable to its advancement it either made comparatively no progress, or its exponents altered its form that it might be adapted to the conditions by which it was surrounded. Of this fact there is abundant testimony. Tennent, in his "Christianity in Ceylon," says: "Neither history nor more recent experience can furnish any example of the long retention of pure Christianity by a people themselves rude and unenlightened. In all the nations of Europe, embracing every period since the second century, Christianity must be regarded as having taken the hue and complexion of the social state with which it was incorporated, presenting itself unsullied, contaminated, or corrupted, in sympathy with the enlightenment, or ignorance, or debasement of those by whom it had been originally embraced. The rapid and universal degeneracy of the early Asiatic Churches is associated with the decline of education and the intellectual decay of the communities among whom they were established." Dean Milman, in his "History of Civilisation," observes: "Its [Christianity's] specific character will almost entirely depend upon the character of the people who are its votaries.....it will darken with the darkness and brighten with the light of each succeeding century." Lord Macaulay says, with no less truth than brilliancy: "Christianity conquered Paganism, but Paganism infected Christianity. The rites of the Pantheon passed into her worship, and the subtleties of the Academy into her creed." Francis William Newman, in his "Phases of Faith," also remarks: "I at length saw how untenable is the argument drawn from the inward history of Christianity in favour of its superhuman origin. In fact, this religion cannot pretend to self-sustaining power. Hardly was it started on its course when it began to be polluted by the heathenism and false philosophy around it. With the decline of national genius and civil culture it became more and more debased. So far from being able to uphold the existing morality of the best Pagan teachers, it became barbarised itself, and sank into deep superstition and manifold moral corruption. From ferocious men it learned ferocity. When civil society began to coalesce into order, Christianity also turned for the better, and presently learned to use the wisdom, first of Romans, then of Greeks; such studies opened men's eyes to new apprehensions of

the Scripture and of its doctrine. By gradual and human means, Europe, like ancient Greece, grew up towards better political institutions, and Christianity improved with them."

With these historical facts at their command, it is strange that Christian writers should put forward, as they do, such extravagant and groundless claims on behalf of their faith. Professor Stewart has the temerity to claim, in his "Hand-book of Christian Evidences," the following as achievements of Christianity: (1) The introduction of the spirit of humanity and the doctrine of brotherhood of man; (2) the modern elevation of woman; (3) the abolition of slavery; (4) the extinction of the gladiatorial combats in Rome; (5) the establishment of hospitals; and (6) the fostering of art and general culture. These are some of the advantages for which it is said we are indebted to the influence of Christianity. A greater perversion of facts we have seldom encountered, as we purpose now showing.

(1) The great principle of love, humanity, and the brotherhood of man was understood and practised long before Christianity existed. "Love," says the great teacher of the Academy, "is peace and goodwill among men, calm upon the waters, repose and stillness in the storm, and balm of sleep in sadness." "Independently of Christian revelation," says Merivale, "the heathen world was gravitating, through natural causes, towards the acknowledgment of the cardinal doctrines of humanity" ("Conversion of the Roman Empire," p. 118). In Mencius we have the noble statement that "Humanity is the heart of man." Lecky writes: "The duty of humanity to slaves had been at all times one of those which the philosophers had most ardently inculcated.....But these exhortations [on the duty of abstaining from cruelty to slaves], in which some have imagined that they have discovered the influence of Christianity, were, in fact, simply an echo of the teaching of ancient Greece, and especially of Zeno, the founder of the sect who had laid down, *long before the dawn of Christianity* [italics are ours], the broad principle that all men are by nature equal, and that virtue alone establishes a difference between them" ("History of European Morals," vol. i., pp. 324-5; see also "The Sacred Anthology," by Moncure D. Conway,

pp. 10 and 354). Lecky also states that "the doctrine of the brotherhood of mankind" was an active factor in Rome, and that "Cicero asserted it as emphatically as Seneca" (*ibid.*, p. 361). Christ's idea of brotherhood was an exceedingly limited one, inasmuch as it was confined to those who believed in him. Even at the "judgment day" mankind are to be divided, "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from his goats" (see Luke xii. 9; Matthew xxv. 32).

(2) The position of woman, according to the Bible, is low and humiliating in the extreme. It teaches that "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis iii. 16). It enjoins that, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Ephesians v. 22-24). Women are not to speak in public, but to be under obedience, as also saith the law; they are not permitted to teach, but to learn in silence with all subjection, for the reason that "Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression" (1 Timothy ii. 11, 15). These notions are not, when accepted, calculated to elevate the character or better the condition of woman. Herbert Spencer says: "In England, as late as the seventeenth century, husbands of decent station were not ashamed to beat their wives. Gentlemen arranged parties of pleasure for the purpose of seeing wretched women whipped at Bridewell. It was not until 1817 that the public whipping of women was abolished in England. Wives in England were bought from the fifth to the seventeenth century." Contrast this with the treatment of woman before the advent of Christianity. Lecky says: "The Roman religion was essentially domestic, and it was the main object of the legislator to surround marriage with every circumstance of dignity and solemnity. Monogamy was, from the earliest times, strictly enjoined, and it was one of the great benefits that have resulted from the expansion of the Roman power that it made this type dominant in Europe. In the legends of early Rome we have ample evidence of the high moral estimate of women, and of their prominence in Roman life. The tragedies of Lucretia and of Virginia display a delicacy of honour, a sense of supreme excellence, of unsullied purity, which no Christian nation could surpass" ("European Morals," vol. ii., p. 316). "The

legal position of the wife had become one of complete independence, while her social position was one of great dignity" (*ibid.*, p. 323). Sir Henry Maine, in his "Ancient Law," says: "No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law.....The later Roman law having assumed, on the theory of natural law, the equality of the sexes, control of the person of the woman was quite obsolete when Christianity was born. Her situation had become one of great personal liberty and proprietary independence, even when married, and the arbitrary power over her of her male relatives, or her guardian, was reduced to a nullity; while the form of marriage conferred on the husband no superiority.....But Christianity tended from the first to narrow this remarkable liberty."*

(3) No one questions that slavery is taught in the Bible. But the damaging fact to the Professor's contention is that, while at the time when Christ is supposed to have lived the horrors of slavery existed on every hand, yet he was silent upon this great evil. In fact, slavery is endorsed in the New Testament, for we read: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters as worthy of all honour." "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters." "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling." "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear: not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Tim. vi. 1; Titus ii. 9; Ephesians vi. 5; 1 Peter ii. 8). While the humanity of many professed Christians prompted them to oppose slavery, among the most persistent upholders of slavery and the most determined opponents to its abolition were Christians, not only of this country, but also of nearly all the American denominations.

* For ample evidence, showing the unjust laws which Christian Councils passed, that were degrading to woman, and also the treatment she received from the Christian Fathers, the reader is referred to a very able book, "Woman, Church, and State" (chapters vii. and ix.), by Matilda J. Gage; also to "Men, Women, and Gods," by Helen H. Gardener. In these two works ample evidence is given to disprove the allegation that woman owes her improved condition to Christianity.

It is stated in "The Life and Times of Garrison" that, at an American convention held in May, 1841, he proposed: "That, among the responsible classes in the non-slaveholding States, in regard to the existence of slavery the religious professors, and especially the clergy, stand wickedly pre-eminent, and ought to be unsparingly exposed and reprov'd before all the people." Theodore Parker said that, if the whole American Church had "dropped through the Continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-slavery cause would have been further on" ("Works," vol. vi., p. 333). He pointed out that no Church ever issued a single tract among all its thousands against property in human flesh and blood, and 80,000 slaves were owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists, and 250,000 by Methodists. Even Wilberforce himself declared that the American Episcopal Church "raises no voice against the predominant evil; she palliates it in theory, and in practice she shares in it. The mildest and most conscientious of the bishops of the South are slaveholders themselves."

Neither did Christianity improve the position of the slaves, for both Lecky and Gibbon have shown that the condition of slaves was, in some instances, better before than it was after the introduction of Christianity. Prior to Christianity many of the slaves had political power; they were educated, and allowed to mix in the domestic circles of their masters; but subsequent to the Christian advent the fate of the slave was far more severe, hence Lecky observes: "The slave code of imperial Rome compares not unfavourably with those of some Christian countries. The physician who tended the Roman in his sickness, the tutor to whom he confided the education of his son, the artists whose services commanded the admiration of the city, were usually slaves. Slaves sometimes mixed with their masters in the family, ate habitually with them at the same table, and were regarded by them with the warmest affection" (Lecky's "History of Morals," vol. i., pp. 323 and 327). The Council of Laodicea actually interdicted slaves from Church communion without the consent of their masters. The Council of Orleans (541) ordered that the descendants of slave parents might be captured and re-placed in the servile condition of their ancestors. The Council of Toledo (633) forbade Bishops to liberate slaves belonging to the Church.

Jews having made fortunes by slave-dealing, the Councils of Rheims and Toledo both prohibited the selling of Christian slaves except to Christians. Parker Pillsbury's excellent work, "Acts of the Anti-Slavery Apostles," is a strong indictment against the Christian Church for its conduct in supporting slavery.

(4) It is not true that the Galilean faith removed the blots that dimmed the glory of the ancient world. Slavery, infanticide, and brutal sports remained for centuries after the erection of the symbol of the Cross. We grant that Rome, like every other country, had its vices; but Christianity failed to remove them. As Lecky observes, "the golden age of Roman law was not Christian, but Pagan" ("History of European Morals," vol. ii., p. 44). The gladiatorial shows of Rome had a religious origin; and, while some of the grandest pagan writers condemned them, they were not abolished till four hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era. And be it observed that the immediate cause of their ultimately being stopped was that at one of the exhibitions, in A.D. 404, a monk was killed. "His death," says Lecky, "led to the final abolition of the games" (*ibid.*, p. 40). It was a noteworthy fact that, while the passion for these games existed in Rome, its love for religious liberty was equally as strong; and it was this very liberty that was first destroyed in the Christian Empire (*ibid.*, p. 38). Every nation has had its national drawback, and Christian countries are no exception to the general rule. Under the very shadow of the Cross cruelties of the deepest dye have been practised. Bull-fights, badger-hunting, cock-fighting, and pigeon-shooting have all been, and still are, favourite amusements in Christian lands. What was the state of morals in England during the reigns of Henry VIII., Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and George IV.? Was there ever a period of greater moral depravity and intellectual poverty than when the Christian Church was paramount and supreme, when the saints, the bishops, and the priests were guilty of the worst of crimes, including incest, adultery, and concubinage, when "sacred institutions," filled with pious nuns, were converted into brothels and hot-beds of infanticide? (*ibid.*, 351). Rome, with all its immorality, will bear comparison with the early ages of Christianity.

(5) There is no lack of evidence to prove that consideration for the poor and the sick existed centuries before the Christian era. Such virtue is confined to no one race, and to no one religion. According to Prescott, the ancient Mexicans had hospitals in the principal cities "for the cure of the sick, and for the permanent refuge of disabled soldiers" ("History of the Conquest of Mexico," p. 140). Hospitals are evidently the outgrowth of dispensaries, and we are told that, as far back as the eleventh century B.C., the Egyptians had medical officers who were paid by the State, and who attended in some public place to prescribe for the sick who came there. These were qualified men; for at this early date there was a College of Physicians, and only those who were licensed by this college were allowed to practise. R. Bosworth Smith, M.A., writes in his "Mohammed and Mohammedanism": "No Christian need be sorry to learn, or be backward to acknowledge, that, contrary to what is usually supposed, two of these noble institutions [hospitals and lunatic asylums].....owe their origin and their early spread, not to his own religion, but to the great heart of humanity, which beats in two other of the grandest religions of the world. Hospitals are the direct outcome of Buddhism" (p. 253). About 325 B.C. King Asoka commanded his people to build hospitals for the poor, the sick, and distressed, at each of the four gates of Patna and throughout his dominions. The first Christian hospital was built by a Roman lady named Fabiola, in the fourth century A.D., so that it took some time for Christianity to begin to develop this good fruit, though Egyptians, Greeks, and Hindoos had long before shown the value of it. If it were true that the world is indebted to Christianity for benevolent institutions, it would be a sad reproach to the supposed "Heavenly Father," who, until less than two thousand years ago, failed to inspire his children with active sympathy for those who required help. Were "God's chosen people" destitute of love and consideration for their fellows? Let the Old Testament answer the question.

(6) No doubt Christianity at one period gave an impetus to art, and so it did to monkish lying chronicles. William Hole, R.S.A., however, says: "Christianity brought about the deterioration of Greek art.....In early centuries Chris-

tianity tended generally to the decay of art. When it did favour it, it was not through love of art, but for the sake of religion" (Address delivered before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute, February 16th, 1892).

The assistance that culture has received from Christian teachings is of a very doubtful character. Where in the New Testament is culture inculcated? We know that the Christian Church destroyed much of the learning of Rome, and plunged Europe into a state of mental darkness. For centuries it monopolised, with a blighting force, the agencies of intellectual training, with the result that the world was cursed with what Lecky terms "a night of mental and moral darkness," and he further adds: "Nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism.The splendid discoveries of physical science would have been impossible but for the scientific scepticisms of the school of Bacon.....Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities, not till Mohammedan science and classical Freethought and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin" ("History of Morals," vol. ii., pp. 205 and 219).

*Books recommended to Students of the Subjects discussed in
the foregoing Pages.*

- Buckle's "History of Civilisation." Especially chapters iv.-vii.
Professor Huxley's "Controverted Questions;" and his reference to
Miracles in his "Life of Hume."
Laing's "Modern Science and Modern Thought," "Problems of the
Future," and "Human Origins."
Leslie Stephen's "An Agnostic's Apology."
J. S. Mill's "On Liberty."
Schmidt's "Social Aspects of Early Christianity."
Draper's "Conflict between Religion and Science."
J. Cotter Morison's "The Service of Man."
William Addis's "Christianity in the Roman Empire."
Herbert Spencer's "First Principles."
W. R. Greg's "The Creed of Christendom."
Charles Bradlaugh's "Genesis."
Evan Powell Meredith's "The Prophet of Nazareth."
Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History."
Dr. Giles's "Hebrew and Christian Records."
Dr. Irons's "The Bible and its Interpreters."
Rev. S. Davidson's "The Canon of the Bible."
Professor Graham's "The Creed of Science."
Karl Pearson's "The Grammar of Science."
Lecky's "History of European Morals." 2 vols.
Charles Watts's "Was Christ a Political and Social Reformer?"
G. W. Foote's "Flowers of Freethought."
Constance E. Plumptre's "Natural Causation."

