

No. 2.—TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

CHRISTIANITY :
WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT.

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STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION, AND THE METHOD OF INQUIRY.

It was said before, that Religion, like Love, is always the same thing in kind, though both are necessarily modified by other emotions combining therewith, and by the conception of the object to which the emotion is directed. Thus Love is modified, as it chances to co-exist with weakness or strength; folly or wisdom, selfishness or morality,—qualities in the *subject* who loves. By these qualities the *degree* of Love is determined. It is modified also by the qualities of the *object*; as love is directed towards a child, a wife, or a friend. Hence come the different modification of Religion as it co-exists with faith or fear, wisdom or ignorance, love or hate, in the worshipping *subject*; and again, as the object of worship is conceived to be one being, or many beings, or all being—as he is conceived of as the absolutely Perfect—or represented as finite, cruel, capricious, and unlovely. The only Perfect form of Religion is produced by all the powers of a man's nature acting harmoniously together. All manifestations of Religion proceed from the religious sentiment in man, and are more or less imperfect representations of that sentiment, as its action is more or less impeded or promoted by various causes.

If this be so, it follows that the religious Sentiment or Principle in man bears the same relation to each and all particular forms and teachers of Religion, that Reason bears to each and all particular systems or Teachers of Philosophy:—that is, as no one teacher or system of Philosophy, nor all teachers and systems taken together, have exhausted Reason, which is the groundwork and standard-measure of them all, and is represented more or less partially in each of them,—and therefore, as new teachers and new systems of Philosophy are always possible and necessary until a system is discovered which embraces all the facts of Science, sets forth and legitimates all the laws of nature, and thus represents the Absolute Science which is implied in the Facts of nature, or the Ideas of God,—so no one teacher or form of Religion, nor all teachers and forms put together, have exhausted the religious Sentiment, which is the groundwork and standard-measure of them all, and is represented more or less partially in each; and so new teachers and new forms of Religion are always possible and necessary until a form is discovered which embraces all the facts of man's moral and religious nature, sets forth and legitimates all the laws thereof, and thus represents the Absolute Religion as it is implied in the Facts of man's nature, or the Ideas of God. As no system or teacher of Philosophy is greater than Reason, and competent to give laws to nature, but at the utmost is only co-ordinate with Reason, and competent to discover and announce the laws of nature previously existing; so no former teacher of Religion can be greater than the Religious Sentiment,

and competent to give laws to man, but at the utmost is only co-ordinate with the religious Sentiment, and competent to discover and announce the laws of man previously existing. In one word, Absolute Science answers exactly to Reason, and is what Reason demands; Absolute Religion answers exactly to the religious Sentiment, and is what the religious Sentiment demands. Therefore, until Philosophy and Religion attain the Absolute, each form or teacher of either is subject to be modified or supplanted by any man who has a truth not embraced by the Philosophy or Religion at that time extant. However, there are certain primary truths of Science and Religion, which alone render the two possible, and which are possessed with more or less of a distinct understanding by all teachers of the two, and attain greater prominence with some. Though the system may have many faults accidentally connected with it, though others may point out the faults and develop the system still farther, yet the first principles remain. Thus in science the maxims of Geometry, in Morals the first truths thereof, must reappear in all the systems.

Now to make a special application of these general remarks: Christianity can be no greater than the religious Sentiment, though it may be less,—as the water can of itself rise no higher in the pipe than in the fountain, though, if the pipe be defective, it may fail of its former height. Religion is the universal term, and absolute Religion and Morality its highest expression. Christianity is a particular form under the universal term—one form of Religion among many others. It is either absolute Religion and Morality, or it is less, greater it cannot be, as there is no greater. Christianity, then, is a form of Religion. As it is actual, it must have been *revealed*; if it is true, it must be *natural*. It is therefore to be examined and judged of as other forms of Religion, by Reason and the religious Sentiment. It is true or false; perfect or imperfect.

The question, then, reduces itself to this: Is Christianity the Absolute Religion? To answer the question, we must know, first, what Christianity is; secondly, what Absolute Religion is. If Christianity is not the Absolute, we must of course look for a more perfect Revelation of Religion, just as we look for improvements in Science till Philosophy becomes absolute. But if Christianity be this, or involve it, and nothing contradicts or impedes this, then we can expect nothing higher in Religion,—for there is no higher,—but have only to understand this, and develop its principles; applying it to life, in order to attain perfect religious welfare.

To ascertain what is Absolute Religion is no difficult matter; for Religion is not an external thing, like Astronomy, to be learned by long observation, and the perfection of scientific instruments and algebraic processes; but something above all, inward and natural to man. As it was said before, Absolute Religion is perfect obedience to the Law of God—perfect Love towards God and man, exhibited in a life allowing and demanding a harmonious action of all man's faculties, so far as they act at all. But to answer the historical question, "Did Jesus of Nazareth teach Absolute Religion?" is a matter vastly more difficult, which it requires learning, critical skill, and no little pains-taking to make out. To answer the first question, *What is Christianity?* is a very difficult thing: no two men seem agreed about it; the wickedest of wars have been fought to settle it. To answer the query, are we to take what is popularly called Christianity? No Protestant thinks the Christianity of the Catholic Church is Absolute Religion; nor will the Catholic think any better of the Protestant faith. A pious man, free from bigotry, and capable of judging, would surely make very short work of the question, and decide that Christianity, as popularly taught by both these Churches, taken together, is not absolute Religion.

But we must look deeper than Protestantism and Popery:—we must distinguish Christianity from the popular Conceptions of Christianity—from its Proof and its Form. To do this, we must go back to the fountain-head, the words of Jesus. We must then take these words in the abstract, separate from any church; apart from all authority, real or pretended; without respect of any application thereof to life that was made by its founder or others. If all churches have believed it, if miracles have been wrought in its favour, if its application have been good in this or that case, still it does not follow that Christianity is absolute and final: the Church has been notoriously mistaken on many points. Miracles are claimed for Judaism, Mahometanism, and Idolatry; each heresy is thought by its followers to work well. We must look away from all these considerations. If Jesus of Nazareth lived out his idea, and was the greatest of saints, it does not follow that his idea was absolute, and therefore final;—if he did not perfectly live it out, the reverse does not follow. The good life of a teacher proves nothing of any speculative doctrine he entertains, either in morals or mathematics. A man would be thought insane who should say Euclid's demonstration of the forty-seventh problem was *true*, because Euclid lived a good life, and raised men from the dead; or that it was *false*, because he

lived a bad life and murdered his mother. If Christianity be the Absolute, it is independent of all circumstances—eternally true, as much before its revelation as after it is brought to light and applied to life. Before its revelation, it was active, but unknown; afterwards, known to be active. To illustrate this point: the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. This is eternally true, and applies to all triangles, that were, are, or are to be conceived of. It was just as true before any one discovered and declared it, as afterwards. Its truth depends not on the fact that Thales or Stilpe demonstrates the theorem, nor in the authority of him who asserts it. Its truth exists in the very nature of things, or, to use other words, in the ideas of God. It was just the same before creation as afterwards. Other things remaining the same, even Omnipotence cannot make these three angles to be more or less than two right angles, for Infinite power of course excludes contradictions.

Now there are two things: first, Religion as it exists in the facts of a man's soul; and secondly, Religion as taught by Jesus of Nazareth. The first must be eternally true; but it follows from no premise that the second is eternally true. He may have taught absolute Religion, or an imperfect form; he may have omitted what was essential, or have added what was national, temporal, personal. In either case, Christianity is not the Absolute Religion. But if it has none of these faults, and really conforms with this ideal standard, or involves this, and if nothing therein contradicts it, then Christianity is the Absolute Religion; eternally true, before revelation, after revelation; the Law God made for man, and wrote in his nature.

Then, again, if the character of Jesus was not a perfect manifestation of this perfect Religion which he taught or implied; if his application of it to life was limited by his position, his youth, his indiscretion, fanaticism, prejudice, ignorance, selfishness, as some have contended, it does not make the Religion he taught any the less perfect in itself; if true at all, it is eternally true;—if Christianity be true at all, it would be just as true if Herod or Catiline had taught it. Therefore, if the *intellectual* character of Jesus had never so many defects; if he entertained false notions about himself, his office, ministry, destination—respecting ancient history and Jewish literature, the existence and agency of devils, and in general, respecting things past, present, and to come; if he entertained the absurdest notions at the same time with his pure doctrine; nay, if he had never so many *moral* deficiencies,—if he denounced his enemies, and was frightened at danger, and fled away from death, or had even recanted his most vigorous statements,—still his religious *doctrine* remains unaffected by all of these circumstances. To make this point clear by recurring to a former illustration: A philosopher may show that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, yet lead an immortal life, believe in witches, devils the philosopher's stone, and imputed righteousness. His absurd belief and wicked life do not affect the truth of his theorem.

Now, then, to determine what Christianity is, we must remove all those extraneous matters relating to the person, character, and authority of him who first taught it; we must separate it from all applications thereof which have been made to life; must view it by itself, as doctrine, as life, and measure it by this ideal standard of absolute Religion. After we have determined this question, we may then judge of the applications of Christianity to life, of the character of its Revealer, and try both by the standard he offers.

REMOVAL OF SOME DIFFICULTIES—CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN RECORDS.

The method of acquiring a knowledge of Absolute Religion is plain and easy; but to get a knowledge of the doctrine taught by any teacher of ancient times is more difficult. This, however, may be said in general, that there are three sources of knowledge accessible to men; two of these are direct, and one indirect: first, *Perception* through the senses; by this way we only get an acquaintance with material things and their properties;—second, *Intuition* through Reason, Conscience, the Religious Sentiment, by which we get an acquaintance with spiritual things, which are not objects of sense;—third, *Reflection*, a mental process, by which we unfold what is contained, or implied, or suggested in perceptions or intuitions. Then, as a secondary, but not an ultimate source, there is *Testimony*, by which we learn what others have found out through perception, intuition, or reflection. Now thoughts or objects of thought may be classified in reference to their sources. The truths of absolute Religion are not matters of Sense, it is plain. If objects of Reflection or Intuition, they must be obvious to all who have the intuitive or reflective faculty, and will use it; they, therefore, are matters of direct personal experience;—not so a knowledge of any given historical form of Religion.

As it has been before said, the great truths of Religion are matters of intuition; God helping the faithful who use their faculties justly. Therefore, theoretically, each may depend on his own intuitions, as each thinker on his own reflections;—if not faithful, the aid, the counsel, the example of the good man, help us to the truth. The wise and the pious are the educators whom God appoints for the race; by their superior gift, they help feeble men to understand what else the latter might never have reached. The same rule holds good in both Philosophy and Religion: the weak need the help of the strong, youth of experience, the faithless of the faithful. The works and words of the saint help the sinner to the source of truth. This is the office of prophets and apostles.

In historical questions, respecting events that took place out of the sphere of our observation, we must depend on the testimony of others who report what they have seen and heard, felt or thought. To determine what Christianity is, we must depend on the testimony of the Evangelists, who profess to relate the works and words of Jesus,—and of the Apostles, who reduced his thought to organization, and applied it to life. To speak of the four Evangelists:—admitting, for the sake of argument, that we have their evidence, and that the books in our hands come really from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that they bore the relation to Jesus which they claim;—the question comes, Are they competent to testify in the case?—can we trust them to give us the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Admitting that they were honest, yet if they were but *men*, there must be limitations to the accuracy of their testimony. They must omit many things that Jesus said and did—perhaps both actions and words important in estimating his doctrines. They can express only so much of their teacher's opinions as they know; to do this they might perhaps modify, at least colour, the doctrine in their own minds. They might sometimes misunderstand what they heard, mistake a general for a particular statement, and the reverse; a new doctrine of the teacher might accidentally coincide in part with an old doctrine, and he be supposed to teach what he did not teach; a parable or an action might be misunderstood; a quotation misapplied or forgotten, and another put in its place; a general prediction, wish, or hope, referred to a specific time or event, when it had no such reference. He may have merely allowed things which he was afterwards supposed to have commanded. The writers might unconsciously exaggerate or diminish the fact; they might get intelligence at second hand, from hearsay, and popular rumour. Their national, sectarian, personal prejudices, must colour their narrative; they might confound their own notions with his, and represent him as teaching what he did not teach. They might not separate fact from fancy; their love of the marvellous might lead them astray. If they believed in miracles they would ascribe prodigious things to their teacher; had they a faith in ghosts and devils they would naturally interpret his words in favour of their own notions, rather than in opposition thereto. If the writers were ignorant men; if they wrote in one language, and he spoke in another; still more, if they wrote at some distance of time from the events, and were not skilled in sifting rumours, and separating fact from fiction—the difficulty becomes still greater. These defects are common, more or less, to all historical testimony;—in the case of the Evangelists they constitute a very serious difficulty. We know the character of the writers only from themselves; they relate much from hearsay; they mingle their own personal prejudices in their work; their testimony was not reduced to writing, so far as we know, till long after the event; we see they were often mistaken, and did not always understand the words or actions of their teacher; that they contradict one another, and even themselves, that they mingle with their story puerile notions and tales which it is charitable to call absurd. Such testimony could not be received if found in Valerius Maximus and Livy, or offered in a court of justice, when only a few dollars were at stake, without great caution.

Now the difficulty in this case is enormous;—it has been felt from an early age. To get rid of the evil, it has been taught, and even believed, that the Evangelists and Apostles were miraculously inspired, to such a degree that they could commit no mistake of any kind in this matter, and had none of the defects above hinted at. The assumption is purely gratuitous; there is not a fact on which to base it. From the doctrine of inspiration as before laid down, it appears that such infallibility is not *possible*; and from an examination of the facts of the case, it appears it was not *actual*. The Evangelists differ widely from the Apostles; the Synoptics* give us in Jesus a very different being from the Christ whom John describes; and all four make such contradictory statements on some points, as to show that they were by no means infallibly inspired; for in that case, not only the smallest contradiction would have been impossible, but, without concert, they must all have written exactly the same thing; yet John omits the most surprising facts, the Synoptics the most surprising doctrines.

* Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

What has been said is sufficient to show that we must proceed with great caution in accepting the statements of the Gospels. The most careless observer sees inconsistencies, absurd narrations; finds actions attributed to Jesus, and words put into his mouth, which are directly at variance with his great principles and the general tone of his character. Still there must have been a foundation of fact for such a superstructure; a great spirit to have commenced such a movement as the Christian; a great doctrine to have accomplished this, the most profound and wondrous revolution in human affairs. We must conclude that these writers would describe the main features of his life, and set down the great principles of his doctrine, its most salient points and his most memorable sayings, such as were poured out in the highest moments of inspiration. If the teacher were true, these sayings would involve the rest of his doctrine, which any man of simple character, religious heart, and mind free from prejudice, could unfold and develop still farther. The condition and nature of the Christian records will not allow us to go farther than this, and to be curious in particulars. Their legendary and mythical character does not warrant full confidence in their narrative. There are certain main features of doctrine in which the Evangelists and the Apostles all agree, though they differ in most other points.

THE MAIN FEATURES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Now to leave out of mind the Notions about Christianity which prevail in this or that church, age, council, or writer; to get clear of the peculiarities of this or that Apostle and Evangelist; to make a separation from the opinions of Jesus about prophecy, demonology, and other matters but accidentally connected with Religion; to take his own highest statement, the thing in which all the Evangelists and Apostles agree, and which has been the heart of the Christian movement—we find the doctrine of Jesus is a simple thing: LOVE TO MAN—LOVE TO GOD. The whole of Christianity is summed up in these two elements—its moral, its religious side, practical and contemplative. All the moral and religious teaching of Jesus—the sermon on the mount, so called, the parables of the Synoptics, the discourses of John—are but an amplification of these, an application of them to life; a statement of the blessedness of obedience, the sadness of disobeying. To take the account as it stands: A man asks what he shall do to fulfil the idea of man, and have “eternal life?” He bids him keep the moral law, written eternally in the nature of man; specifies some of its plainest prohibitions, and adds, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” When asked the greatest commandment of the Law, he thus sums up all the Law, and the Prophets also: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”* Here is the sum of Christian doctrine. He gives the highest aim for man—“Be perfect as God.” He declares the blessedness, present and eternal, of such as do the Will of God—the Spirit of God shall be in them, revealing Truth; the kingdom of God shall be theirs. He gives no extended form of his views in Theology, Anthropology, Politics, or Philosophy. But the great truth of God’s goodness, and man’s spiritual nature, are implied in all his teachings. He dwells little on the Immortality of the Soul—much less than some “Heathens” before him; but it is everywhere implied. As the doctrine was familiar, he dwells little upon it.

In the course of his teaching, he dwells much upon sin, for it was all around him. Taking the highest view of man’s nature, power, and duty, he must above all mourn at man’s lot when not faithful, and call loudly on his brothers to flee from a state so sad. Matthew would make his first address to be, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” He speaks of the change from sin to a divine life as a *new birth*—a common expression, to denote the greatness of the change. He promises reconciliation with God, on condition of a new life.

He speaks of himself—if we may trust the words of the record so minutely—as the *life*, the *light*, the *only way* to salvation—that is, the teacher who shows the only way. He considers himself as *sent* by God—his doctrines and works not his own, but the Father’s. Yet he never speaks of his connection with God as peculiar; never calls himself the Son of God in any sense wherein all good men are not all the sons of God; never speaks of his doctrines or his works as peculiar to himself, which others could not do and teach. He promises that his disciples shall do greater works than his; the Spirit of Truth shall teach them more than he had done. Since he never speaks of his relation to God as peculiar to himself, but, on the contrary, as shared by all; since he calls the peacemakers God’s children; says the pure in heart, and all who are of God, shall see Him; that God abides in the hearts of all who love him; and since he defends his divine Son-ship on the

* Matth. xxii. 37, 39, and the parallels in Mark and Luke.

ground that the Jewish Scripture calls men sons of God to whom the Word of God came—it is plain that he represents himself as but the type of that relation which all good men sustain to God; that his strength, inspiration, exceeding tranquillity, his rest of soul, and union with God, are what all men may share.

To sum up the main points of the matter more briefly : In an age of gross wickedness, among a people arrogant and proud of their descent from Abraham—a mythological character of some excellence; wedded to the ritual Law, which they professed to have received by miracle from God, through Moses—another and greater mythological hero; in a nation of Monotheists, haughty yet cunning, morose, jealous, vindictive, loving the little corner of space called Judea above all the rest of the world, fancying themselves the “chosen people” and special favourites of God; in the midst of a nation wedded to their forms, sunk in ignorance, precipitated into sin, and, still more, expecting a Deliverer who would repel their political foes, reunite the scattered children of Jacob, and restore them to power, conquer all nations, re-establish the formal service of the Temple in all its magnificent pomp, and exalt Jerusalem above all the cities of the earth for ever;—amid all this, and the opposition it raised to a spiritual man, Jesus fell back on the moral and religious Sentiment in man; uttered their oracles as the infinite spoke through them; taught absolute Religion, absolute Morality—nothing less, nothing more; laid down principles wide as the Soul, true and eternal as God.

Such, then, is the religious doctrine of Jesus. It was always taught with direct application to life—not as Science, but as daily Duty. Love of God was no abstraction. It implied love of Wisdom, Justice, Purity, Goodness, Holiness, Charity. To love these, is to love God; to love them, is to live them. It implies abhorrence of evil for its own sake; a desire and effort to be perfect as God, to have no wrong action, wrong thought, or wrong feeling; to make the heart right, the head right, the hand right; to serve God, not with the lips alone, but the life—not only in Jerusalem and Gerizim, but evrywhere—not by tithing mint, anise and cummin, but by judgment, mercy, and faith—not by saying, “Lord! Lord!” “Save us, good Lord!” but by doing the Father’s will. It implies a Faith that is stronger than Fear, prevails over every sorrow, grief, disappointment, and asks only this, “Thy will be done!”—a Love which is strongest in times of trouble—which never fails when human affection goes stooping and feeble, weeping its tears of blood; a Love which annihilates temptation, and in the hour of mortal agony brings a fair angel from the sky; an absolute trust in God, a brave unconcern for the morrow, so long as the day’s duties are faithfully done. It is a love of Goodness and Religion for their own sake, not for the Bribe of Heaven, or the dread of Hell. It implies a reunion of man and God, till we think God’s thought, and will God’s will, and so have God abiding in us, and become one with Him.

The other doctrine, Love of Man, is love of all as yourself, not because they have no faults, but in spite thereof. To feel no enmity towards enemies—to labour for them with love—pray for them with pitying affection, remembering that the less they deserve, the more they need,—this was the doctrine of Love. It demands that the rich, the wise, the holy, help the poor, the foolish, the sinful; that the strong bear the burdens of the weak, not bind them anew. It tells a man that his excellence and ability are not for himself alone, but for all mankind, of which he is but one, beginning first with the nearest of the needy. It makes the strong the guardians, and not the tyrants of the weak. It said, “Go to the publicans and sinners, and call them to repentance;—go to men trodden down by the hoof of the oppressor! rebuke him lovingly, but snatch the spoil from his bloody teeth;—go to men sick with desolation, covered all over with the leprosy of sin, bowed together and squalid with their inveterate disease; bid them live and sin no more.” It despairs of no man; sees the soul of goodness in things evil; knows that the soul in its intimate recess never consents to sin, nor loves the Hateful. It would improve men’s circumstances to mend their heart—their heart to mend their circumstances. It does not say alone, with piteous whine, “God save the wicked and the weak,” but puts its own shoulder to the work; divides its raiment, and shares its loaf.

To say all in brief, these two cardinal doctrines demanded a DIVINE LIFE, where every action of the hand, the head, the heart, is in obedience to the Law of the Soul—in harmony with the All-perfect. This was Christ’s notion of worship. It asked for nothing ritual, formal; laid no stress on special days, forms, rites, creeds. Its rite, its creed, its substance, and its form, are all contained in that one command, LOVE MAN AS YOURSELF; GOD ABOVE ALL.

Thus far the application was universal as the doctrine. But he taught something which is ritual—*Baptism and the Supper*. The first was a common rite at the time, used even by the “heathens.” In a nation dwelling in a warm climate, and so fond of symbols as the Jews, it was a natural expression of the convert’s change of life. Sensual men

must interpret their Religion to the senses,—as the Hollanders have their Bible in Dutch. It seems to have been an accommodation to the wants of the times, as he spoke the popular language. In the same spirit he keeps the Passover, and bids the restored leper offer the customary sacrifice. Did he lay any stress on this watery dispensation? count it valuable of itself? Then we must drop a tear for the weakness; for no outward act can change the heart, and God is not to be mocked, pleased, or served with a form. Is there any reason to suppose he ever designed it to be permanent? It is indeed said that he bade the disciples teach all nations, “baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”* But since the Apostles never mention the command, nor the forms, since it is opposite to the general spirit of his precepts, it must be put with the many other things which are to be examined with much care before they are referred to him. But if it came from him, we can only say, There is no perfect Guide but the Father.

The second form,—was it of more account than the first? Who shall tell us the “Lord’s Supper” was designed to be permanent more than washing the feet,—which the Pope likewise imitates? Did he place any value on the dispensation of wine? design to extend it beyond the company then present? If we may trust the account, he asks his friends, at supper, to remember him when they break bread;—it was simple, natural, affectionate, beautiful. Was this a foundation of a form to last for ever—a form valuable in itself, essential to man’s spiritual welfare—a form pleasing to Him who is All in All? To say Jesus laid any stress on it as a valuable and perpetual rite, is to go beyond what is written;—it needs no reply. The thing may be useful, beautiful, comforting to a million souls; truly it *has* been so. In Christianity there is milk for babes, and meat for men, that the truth may be given as they can receive it. Let each be fed with the Father’s bounty.

Thus the dispensations of water and of wine are, perhaps, the only limitations set to the universal application of his great doctrines; and if the above views are correct, the limitation does not come from Jesus, and these forms are no more essential or valuable in themselves, no more designed to be permanent, than the Syro-Chaldaic tongue in which he spoke. Christianity having no forms essential, can accommodate itself to all; but these being its only sensuous appendages, no wonder sensual men cling to them, as the fetichist to his idol, the polytheist to his sacrifice. Render unto the senses what is theirs, and to the soul its own.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS—ITS REAL AND PRETENDED SOURCE.

ON what authority did Jesus teach? On that of the most high God, as he expressly states, and often. But to have the authority of God,—is not that miraculous? How can man have God’s authority in a natural way? Let us look at the matter.

I. THE ONLY AUTHORITY OF CHRISTIANITY IS ITS TRUTH.

Truth is the relation of things as they are; falsehood as they are not. No doctrine can have a higher condemnation than to be convicted of falsehood; none a higher authority than to be proved true. God is the author of things as they are; therefore of this relation, and therefore of *Truth*. He that delivers the Truth, then, has so far the authority of Truth’s God. Then it will be asked, How do we know Christianity is true, or that it is our duty to love man and God? Now when it is asked, How do I know that I exist; that doubting is doubting; that half is less than the whole; that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be? the questioner is set down as a strange man. But it has somehow come to pass, that he is reckoned a very acute and Christian person who doubts moral and religious axioms, and asks, How do I know that right is right, and wrong wrong, and goodness good? Alas! there are men among the Christians who place virtue and religion on a lower ground than Aristippus and Democritus, men branded as Heathens and Atheists. Let us know what we are about.

It was said above, there are, practically, *four* sources of knowledge,—direct and indirect, primary and secondary—namely, *perception* for sensible things, *intuition* for spiritual things, *reflection* for logical things, and *testimony* for historical things. If the doctrines of Christianity are eternal truths, they are not *sensible* things, not *historical* things, and of course do not depend on sensual perception, nor historical testimony, but can be presented directly to the consciousness of men at one age as well as another; and thus, if they are matters of *reflection*, may be made plain to all who have the reflective faculty, and will

* Matth. xxviii. 19, and the parallels.

use it; if they are matters of *intuition*, to all who have the intuitive faculty, and will let it act. Now the duty we owe to man, that of loving him as ourselves—the duty we owe to God, that of loving him above all, is a matter of intuition; it proceeds from the very nature of man, and is inseparable from that nature; we recognise the truth of the precept as soon as it is stated, and see the truth of it as soon as the unprejudiced mind looks that way. It is no less a matter of reflection likewise. He that reflects on the idea of God as given by intuition, on his own nature as he learns it from his mental operations, sees that this two-fold duty flows logically from these premises. The truth of these doctrines, then, may be known by both intuition and reflection. He that teaches a doctrine eternally true, does not set forth a private and peculiar thing resting on private authority and historical evidence, but an everlasting reality, which rests on the ground of all truth, the public and eternal authority of an unchanging God. A false doctrine is not of God; it has no background of Godhead. It rests on the authority of Simon Peter or Simon Magus; of him that sets it forth; it is his private, personal property. When the Devil speaks a lie, he speaketh of his own; but when a Son of God speaks the truth, he speaks not his own word but the Father's. Shall man endorse God's word to make it current?

Again, if the truth of these doctrines rest on the personal authority of Jesus, it was not a duty to observe them before he spoke; for he being the cause, or indispensable occasion of the duty, to make the cause precede the effect is an absurdity too great for modern divines. Besides, if it depends on Jesus, it is not eternally true; a religious doctrine that was not true and binding yesterday, may become a lie again by to-morrow; if not eternally true, it is no truth at all: absolute truth is the same always and everywhere. Personal authority adds nothing to a mathematical demonstration; can it more to a moral intuition? Can authority alter the relation of things? A voice speaking from Heaven, and working more wonders than Æsop and the saints, or Moses and the Sibyl relate, cannot make it our duty to hate God, or man; no such voice can add any new obligation to the law that God wrote in us.

When it is said that these doctrines of Christianity, like the truths of Science, rest on their own authority, or that of unchanging God, they are then seen to stand on the highest and safest ground that is possible—the ground of absolute truth. Then if all the Evangelists and Apostles were liars; if Jesus was mistaken in a thousand things; if he were a hypocrite; yes, if he never lived, but the New Testament were a sheer forgery from end to end,—these doctrines are just the same absolute truth. But, on the other hand, if these depend on the infallible authority of Jesus,—then, if he were mistaken in any one point, his authority is gone in all; if the Evangelists were mistaken in any one point, we can never be certain we have the words of Jesus in a particular case; and then where is “historical Christianity?” Now it is a most notorious fact that the Apostles and Evangelists were greatly mistaken in some points. It is easy to show, if we have the exact words of Jesus, that he was mistaken in some points—in the interpretation of the Old Testament, in the doctrine of demons, in the celebrated prediction of his second coming, and the end of the world within a few years. If Christianity rest on his authority, and that alone, it falls when the foundation falls, and that stands at the mercy of a schoolboy. If he is not faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who shall commit to him the true riches?

II. OF THE AUTHORITY DERIVED FROM THE ALLEGED MIRACLES OF JESUS.

Of late years it has been unpopular with divines to rest the authority of Christianity on its truth, and not its truth on its authority. It must be confessed there is some inconvenience in the case; for if this method of trusting Truth alone, and not Authority, be followed, by-and-by some things which have much Authority and no Truth to support them, may come to the ground. The same thing took place in the middle ages, when Abelard looked into Theology, explaining and defending some of the doctrines of the Church by Reason. The Church said, “If you commend the Reasonable as such, you must condemn the Not-Reasonable—and then where are we?” A significant question truly. So the Church “cried out upon him” as a heretic, because he trusted Reason more than a blind belief in the traditions of men, which the Church has long had the impudence to call “Faith in God.” It is often said, in our times, that Christianity rests on miracles; that the authority of the miracle-worker authenticates his doctrine; if a teacher can raise the dead, he must have a commission from God to teach true doctrine; his word is the standard of truth. Here the fact and the value of miracles are both *assumed* outright. Now if it could be shown that Christianity rested on miracles, or had more or less connection with them, it yet proves nothing *peculiar* in the case; for other religions—fetichistic, polytheistic, and monotheistic—appeal to the same authority. If a nation is rude and superstitious, the claim to miracles is more common—their authority the

greater. To take the popular notion, the Jewish Religion began in miracles, was continued and will end in miracles. The Mahometan tells us the Koran is a miracle! that its author had miraculous inspiration, visions, and revelations. The writings of the Greeks, the Romans, the Scandinavians and the Hindoos, the Chinese and Persians, are full of miracles. In Fetichism all is miracle, and its authority, therefore, the best in the world. The Catholic Church and the latter-day saints still claim the power of working them, and, therefore, of authenticating whatever they will, if a miracle have the alleged virtue. Now in resting Christianity on this basis, we must do one of two things: either, first, we must admit that Christianity rests on the same foundation with the lowest Fetichism, but has less divine authority than the latter—for if miracles constitute the authority, then that is the best form of Religion which counts the most miracles; or, secondly, we must deny the reality of all miracles except the Christian, in order to give exclusive sway to Christianity. But the devotees of each other form will retort the denial, and claim exclusive credence for their favourite wonders. The serious inquirer will ask, "If such be the Evidence, what is Truth, and how shall I get at it?" And if he does not stop for a time in scepticism, at best in indifference, why he is a very rare man. In this state of the case, theologians have felt bound, in logic, either to prove the superiority of Christian miracles, or to deny all other miracles. The first method is not possible—the Hindoo Priest surpasses the Christian in the number, and magnitude, and antiquity of his miracles. The second, therefore, is the only method left. Accordingly most ingenious attempts have been made to devise some test which will spare the Christian, and condemn all other miracles. The Protestant saves only those mentioned in the Bible; the Catholic, more consistently, thinks the faculty *immanent* in the Church, and claims miracles down to the present day. But all these attempts to establish a suitable criterion have been fruitless, and even worse, sometimes exposing more than the folly of their authors. However, they who argue from the miracles alone, assume two things: first, that miracles prove the divinity of a doctrine; secondly, that they were wrought in connection with the Christian doctrine. If one ask proof of these significant premises, it is not easy to come by. This subject of miracles demands a careful attention. Here are two questions to be asked: first, Are miracles possible?—second, Did they actually occur in the case of Christianity?

1. Are miracles possible?

The answer depends on the definition of the term. The point we are to reason from is the Idea of God, who must be the cause of the miracle. Now a miracle is one of three things:—1. It is a *transgression of all Law which God has made*; or, 2. *A transgression of all known laws, but obedience to a law which we may yet discover*; or, 3. *A transgression of all law known or knowable by man, but yet in conformity with some law out of our reach.*

1. To take the first definition: A miracle is not possible, as it involves a contradiction. The infinite God must have made the most perfect laws admissible in the nature of things; it is absurd and self-contradictory to suppose the reverse. But if His laws are perfect, and the nature of things unchangeable, why should He alter these laws? The change can be only for the worse. To suppose He does this, is to accuse God of caprice. If He be the ultimate cause of the phenomena of the universe, to suppose, in a given case, that He changes these phenomena, is either to make God fickle, and therefore not worthy to be relied on; or else inferior to nature, of which He is yet the cause.

2. To take the second definition: It is no miracle at all, but simply an act which at first we cannot understand and refer to the process of its causation. The most common events, such as growth, vitality, sensation, affection, thought, are miracles. Besides, the miracle is of a most fluctuating character. The miracle-worker of to-day is a matter-of-fact juggler to-morrow. The explosion of gunpowder, the production of magnified images of any object, the phenomena of mineral and animal magnetism, are miracles in one age, but common things in the next; such wonders prove only the skill of the performer. Science each year adds new wonders to our store. The master of a locomotive steam-engine would have been thought greater than Jupiter Tonans, or the Elohim thirty centuries ago.

3. To take the third hypothesis: There is no antecedent objection, nor metaphysical impossibility in the case. Finite man not only does not, but *cannot* understand all the modes of God's action—all the laws of His Being. There may be higher beings, to whom God reveals himself in modes that we can never know; for we cannot tell the secrets of God, nor determine *a priori* the modes of his manifestation. In this sense a miracle is possible; the world is a perpetual miracle of this sort. Nature is the Art of God; can we understand it? Life, Being, Creation, Duration; do we understand these actual

things? How, then, can we say to the Infinite, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; there are no more ways wherein thy being acts?" Man is in nowise the measure of God.

2. Did miracles occur in the case of Christianity?

This question is purely historical,—to be answered, like all other historical questions, by competent testimony. Have we adequate testimony to prove the fact?

Antecedent to all experience, one empirical thing is as probable as another. To the first man, with no experience, birth from one parent is no more surprising than birth from two; to feed five men with five ship-loads of corn, or five thousand with five loaves; the reproduction of an arm, or a finger nail; the awaking from a four days' death, or a four hours' sleep; to change water into wine, or mineral coal into burning gas; the descent into the sea, or the ascent into the sky; the prediction of a future, or the memory of a past event;—all are alike—one as credible as the other. But to take our past experience of the nature of things, the case wears a different aspect. We demand more evidence for a strange than for a common thing. From the very constitution of the mind, a prudent man supposes that the Laws of Nature continue; that the same cause produces always the same effects, if the circumstances remain the same. If it were related to us, by four strangers who had crossed the ocean in the same vessel, that a man, now in London, cured diseases, opened the blind eyes, restored the wasted limb, and raised men from the dead—all by a mere word; that he himself was born miraculously, and attended by miracles all his life,—who would believe the story? We should be justified in demanding a large amount of the most unimpeachable evidence. This opinion is confirmed by the doubt of scientific men in respect of animal magnetism, where no law is violated, but a faculty hitherto little noticed is disclosed. Now, if we look after the *facts* of the case, we find the evidence for the Christian miracles is very scanty in extent, and very uncertain in character. We must depend on the testimony of the epistolary and the historical books of the New Testament. Now it is a notorious fact that the genuine Epistles, the earliest Christian documents, make no mention of any miracles performed by Jesus, and when we consider the character of Paul, his strong love of the marvellous, the manner in which he dwells on the appearance of Jesus to him after death, it seems surprising, if he believed the other miracles, that he does not allude to them. To examine the testimony of the Gospels: Two profess to contain the evidence of eye-witnesses. But we are not certain these books came in their present shape from John and Matthew; it is certain they were not written till long after the events related. But still more, each of them relates what the writers could not have been witness to; so we may have nothing but hearsay and conjecture. Besides, these authors shared the common prejudice of their times, and disagree one with the other. The Gospels of Mark and Luke—who were not eye-witnesses—in some points corroborate the testimony of John and Matthew; in others, add nothing. But there are still other accounts—the Apocryphal Gospels—some of them perhaps older than the Gospels of Matthew and John, and these make the case worse by disclosing the fondness for miracles that marked the Christians of that early period. Taking all these things into consideration, and remembering that, in many respects, the three first Gospels are but one witness, adding the current belief of the times in favour of miracles, the evidence to prove their historical reality is almost nothing, admitting we have the genuine books of the disciples; it is, at best, such evidence as would not be considered of much value in a court of justice. However, the absence of testimony does not prove the miracles were *not* performed, for a universal negative of this character cannot be proved.

If one were to look carefully at the evidence in favour of the Christian miracles, and proceed with the caution of a true inquirer, he must come to the conclusion, I think, that they cannot be admitted as facts. The Resurrection—a miracle alleged to be wrought upon Jesus, not by him,—has more evidence than any other, for it is attested by the Epistles as well as the Gospels, and was one corner-stone of the Christian Church. But here, is the testimony sufficient to show that a man thoroughly dead as Abraham and Isaac were, came back to life, passed through closed doors, and ascended into the sky? I cannot speak for others—but most certainly I cannot believe such facts on such evidence.

There is far more testimony to prove the fact of miracles, witchcraft, and diabolical possessions, in times comparatively modern, than to prove the Christian miracles. It is well known that the most credible writers among the early Christians, Irenæus, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome, Theodoret and others, believed that the miraculous power continued in great vigour in their time. But to come down still

later, the case of St Bernard of Clairvaux is more to the point. He lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. His life has been written in part by William, Abbot of St Thierry; Ernald, Abbot of Bonevaux; and Geoffrey, Abbot of Igny, "all eye-witnesses of the saint's actions." Another life was written by Alanus, Bishop of Auxerre, and still another by John the Hermit, not long after the death of Bernard, both his contemporaries. Besides, there are three books on his miracles, one by Philip of Clairvaux, another by the monks of that place, and a third by the above-mentioned Geoffrey. He cures the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the blind, men possessed with devils, in many cases before multitudes of people. He wrought thirty-six miracles in a single day, says one of these historians; converted men and women that could not understand the language he spoke in. His wonders are set down by the eye-witnesses themselves, men known to us by the testimony of others. I do not hesitate in saying that there is far more evidence to support the miracles of St Bernard than those mentioned in the New Testament.

But we are to accept such testimony with great caution. The tendency of men to believe that the thing happens which they expect to happen; the tendency of rumour to exaggerate a real occurrence into a surprising or miraculous affair, is well known. A century and a half have not gone by since witches were tried by a special court in Massachusetts, convicted by a jury of twelve good men and true, preached against by the clergy, and executed by the common hangman. Any one who looks carefully and without prejudice into the matter, will see, I think, more evidence for the reality of those "wonders of the invisible world," than for the Christian miracles. Here is the testimony of scholars, clergymen, witnesses examined under oath, jurymen, and judges; the confession of honest men—of persons whose character is well known at the present day, to prove the reality of witchcraft and the actual occurrence of miraculous facts—of the interference of powers more than human in the affairs of the world. The appearance of the Devil as a "little black man;" of spectres and ghosts; the power of witches to ride through the air, overturn a ship, raise storms, and torture men at a distance; is attested by a cloud of witnesses, perfectly overshadowing to a man of easy faith. In the celebrated case of Richard Dugdale, the "Surey Demoniack," or "Surey Impostor," which occurred in the latter part of the seventeenth century in England, and was a most notorious affair, we have the testimony of *nine dissenting clergymen*, all of them familiar with the "Demoniack," to prove his diabolical miracles; and also the *depositions of many "credible persons,"* sworn to before two magistrates, to confirm the wonder. Yet it turned out at last that there was no miracle in the case. It is needless to mention the "miracles" wrought at the tomb of the Abbe de Paris during the last century, or those of Father Mathew in Ireland, and the Mormonites in New England. A miracle is never looked for but it comes. No man can say there was not *something* at the bottom of the Christian "miracles," and of witchcraft and possessions—perhaps something not yet fully understood; but to suppose, on such evidence, that God departed from the usual law of the world in these cases, is not very rational;—to say the least, to insist that a belief in such miracles is essential to Christianity, is a poor evidence of a man's knowledge of God!

But now, admitting in argument that Jesus wrought all the miracles alleged, that his birth and resurrection were both miraculous, that he was the only person endowed with such miraculous power,—it does not follow that he shall teach true doctrine. Must a revealer of transient miracles to the sense, necessarily be a revealer of eternal truth to the soul? It follows no more than the reverse. But admit it in argument;—then he must never be mistaken in the smallest particular. But this is contrary to fact; for, if we may trust the record, he taught that he should appear again after his ascension, and that the world would end in that age.

Practically speaking, a miracle is a most dubious thing; in this case its proof the most uncertain. But on the supposition that our conviction of the truth of Christianity rests on the fact that Christ wrought the alleged miracles, then is Christianity itself a most uncertain thing; we in this age can never be so sure of Religion, though our soul testify to its truth, as the old Jews, who rejected Christianity, and yet had their senses to testify to the miracles. If the proof of Christianity be the sensation of the Evangelists, we can no more be certain of its truth than of the fact that Jesus had no human father!

But this question of miracles, whether true or false, is of no religious significance. When Mr Locke said the doctrine proved the miracles, not the miracles the doctrine, he admitted their worthlessness. They can be useful only to such as deny our internal power of discerning truth. Now the doctrine of Christianity is eternally true; it requires only to be understood to be accepted. It is a matter of direct and positive knowledge, dependent on no outside authority; while the Christian miracles are, at best, but a matter of testimony, and therefore of secondary and indirect knowledge. The thing to be proved is notoriously true; the alleged means of proof notoriously uncertain. Is it not

better, then, to proceed to Christianity at once? for when this is admitted to be as true as the demonstrations and axioms of science—as much a matter of certainty as the consciousness of our existence, then miracles are of no value; they may be interesting to the historian, the antiquary, or the physiologist, not to us as Christians. They may now hang as a millstone about the neck of many a pious man, who can believe in Christianity; but not in the transformation of water to wine, or the resurrection of a dead body.

Jesus, then, is not the author of Christianity, but its revealer—not its sanction and authority, but the messenger through whom God spoke it to mankind. We verily its eternal truth in our soul. The pure water of life must come from the well of God; if it be this, it matters not through what channel it comes. Let it be shown, if it can be, that the Gospels are false, and Jesus mistaken—still Christianity is eternally true, if it be the Absolute Religion; if not this we need none of it.

THE ESSENTIAL PECULIARITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Christianity agrees generically with all other forms in this, that it is a Religion. Its peculiarity is not in its doctrine of one Infinite God, or of the immortality of man, nor of future retribution. It is not in particular rules of morality; for precepts as true and beautiful may be found in Heathen writers, who give us the same view of man's nature, duty, and destination. The great doctrines of Christianity were known long before Christ; for God did not leave man four thousand years unable to find out his plainest duty. There is no precept of Jesus, no real duty commanded, no promise offered, no sanction held out, which cannot be paralleled by similar precepts in heathen writers before him;—the pure in heart saw God before as well as after him. Every imperfect form of Religion was, more or less, an anticipation of Christianity. So far as a man has real Religion, so far he has Christianity. This is as old as the human race. By its light Zoroaster, Confucius, Socrates, with many millions of holy souls, walked in the early times of the world; by this they were cheered when their souls were bowed down, and they knew not which way to turn. They and their kindred, like Moses, were school-masters to prepare the world for Christianity—shadows of good things to come, the day-spring from on high, the Bethlehem star announcing the Perfect Religion which was to follow. Modern Christians love to deny that there are points of agreement between Christianity and its predecessors;—the early apologists took just the opposite course.

Now Christianity really differs specifically from all other forms of Religion in this respect: It is ABSOLUTE RELIGION and ABSOLUTE MORALITY. As Science neglects the transient things of nature, and builds up her system of Truths on what is permanent therein; so Christianity, neglecting what varies from age to age and person to person, is based on what is Universal and Permanent in Man. From this capital distinction there proceed several subordinate differences.

1. It differs *in regard to the point whence it sets out*. They start from something bounded and definite. Judaism and Mahometanism, each sets out from the alleged words of one man, which are made the only measure of Truth for the whole human race. There can be no progress; the devotee of Judaism or Mahometanism must logically believe his form of Religion perpetual;—so if a man teach what is hostile to it, he must be put to death, though his doctrine be true.

Christianity sets out from nothing external and limited, but from the Spirit of God in the soul of man, speaking through Reason, Conscience, and the religious Sentiment; its SOURCE, therefore, is the Absolute. Other forms of Religion depend on a transient and finite person; this on the infinite God. Whatever is consistent with Reason, Conscience, and the religious Sentiment, is consistent with Christianity; all else is hostile. Whoever obeys these three oracles is *essentially* a Christian, though he lived ten thousand years before Christ, or living now, does not own his name. Let men improve in Reason, Conscience, Religion—in what most becomes a man—they outgrow each other form of worship: they pass by all that rests on historical things, signs, wonders, miracles—all that does not rest on the eternal God, ever acting in man; yet they are not the farther from Christianity, but all the nearer, by this change. These things are left behind, as the traveller leaves the mire and stones of the road he travels, and shakes off the dust of his garments as he approaches some queenly city throned amid the hills, and looks back with sorrow on the crooked way he has traversed, where others drag still their slow and lingering length along. Men must come to Christianity when they come to real manly excellence. Is not this the meaning of the words, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me;” and of the many kindred passages in the most spiritual of the Gospels? No friend of Religion and of man can be hostile to the Christianity of Christ. This proposes no partial end, but an absolute ОБЪЕКТ—the perfection

of man, or oneness with God. Therefore it leaves man perfect freedom; the liberty that comes of obedience to the Law of the Spirit of Life. All other forms of worship, ancient and modern, confine men in a dungeon; make them think the same thought, and speak the same word, and worship in the same way: Christianity gives them the range of the world, scope and verge enough. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is LIBERTY; the liberty of perfect obedience; the largest liberty of the sons of God. Reason and Love are hostile to a limited religion, which says, "Believe, Believe;" they welcome the Religion of Jesus, which says, "Be perfect as God."

2. A second peculiarity is this: *It is not a System of theological or moral doctrines, but a Method of Religion and Life.* It lays down no positive creed to be believed in, commands no positive action to be done; it would make the man perfectly obedient to God, leaving his thoughts and actions for Reason and Conscience to govern. It widens the sphere of thought and life; it re-affirms the great religious truths implied in man's nature, shows their practical application and its result. A religious system, with its forms, ritual, creeds, lops off the sacred peculiarities of individual character; chains Reason, and fetters the will; seeks to unite men in arbitrary creeds and forms—where the union can be but superficial and worthless—and it lays stress on externals. Christianity insists on rightness before God; ties no man down to worship in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem; on the first day of the week, or the last day; in the church, or the fields; socially, or in private; with a creed, ritual, priest, symbol, spoken prayer, or without these. It breaks every yoke, seen or invisible; bids man worship in spirit and in truth. It does not ask a man to call himself a Christian, or his Religion Christianity; it bids him be perfect;—never says to Reason "Thus far and no further;" forbids no freedom of inquiry, nor wide reach of thought; fears nothing from the Truth, or for it. It never encourages that cowardice of soul which dares not think nor look facts in the face, but sneaks behind altars, texts, tradition, because they are of the fathers; that cowardice which counts a mistake of the apostles better than truth in you and me, and which reads both Piety and common Sense out of its church, because they will not bow the knee nor say the creed. Christianity asks no man to believe the Old Testament or the New Testament, the divine infallibility of Moses or Jesus; but to prove all things; hold fast what is good; do the will of the Father; love man and God.

The method of Christianity is a very plain one: Obedience, not to that old teacher, or this new one; but to God, who filleth all in all; to his Law written on the tablets of the heart. Its METHOD, therefore, like its SOURCE, and its OBJECT, and its AIM, is absolute—the method of God revealed in the law of the Soul. It exhorts men to a divine life, not as something foreign, but as something native and welcome to man. It is the LIFE of many Systems of Religion, Theology, and practical Morality, as the ocean has many waves and bubbles: but these are not Christianity more than a wreath of foam is the Atlantic.

3. It differs from others in its *eminently practical character.* Since Christianity is the absolute Religion, starts from the absolute source, proposes an absolute object, pursues the absolute method, it must lay most stress on things most valuable. Hence it counts a DIVINE LIFE better than saying "Lord, Lord;" puts mercy before sacrifice, and pronounces a gift to man better than a gift to God. It dwells much on the brotherhood of men; annihilates national and family distinctions: all are sons of God, and brothers; man is to love his brother as himself, and bless him, and thus serve God. It values man above all things. Is he poor, weak, ignorant, sinful? it does not scorn him, but labours all the more to relieve the fallen; it sees the "archangel ruined" in the sickly servant of Sin. It looks on the immortal nature of man, and all little distinctions vanish. It bids each man labour for his brother, and never give over till Ignorance, Want, and Sin are banished from the earth; to count a brother's suffering, sorrows, wrongs, as our sufferings, sorrows, and wrongs, and redress them. It says, "Carry the Truth to all." Before Jesus, the Greek, the Roman, and the Jew went to other lands to learn their arts, customs, laws, and study their religion. Who ever went to teach religion, not for his own, but for his brother's sake? History is silent.

Christianity allows no man to sever himself from the race, making this world an Inn for him to take his ease. It does nothing for God's sake, each for its own sake; sends the devotee from his prayers to make peace with his brother; does not rob a man's father to enrich God, nor fancy that He needs anything—sacrifice, creeds, fasts, or prayers. It makes worship consist in being good, and doing good; faith within and works without; the test of greatness, the amount of good done. Thus it is not a Religion of temples, days, ceremonies, but of the street, the fire-side, the field-side. Its temple is all space; its worship in spirit and truth; its ceremony a good life, blameless and beautiful; its priest the Spirit of God in the soul; its altar a heart undefiled. It places duty above cant. It

promises as the result of obedience—oneness with God, and inspiration from Him. It offers no substitute for this, for nothing can do the work of Goodness and Piety, but Goodness and Piety. It offers no magic to wipe sin out of the soul, and insure the rewards of Religion without sharing its fatigues; knows nothing of vicarious goodness. Its Heaven is doing God's will now and forever; thus it makes no antithesis between this and the next life. It puts nothing between man and God; makes Jesus our friend, not our master—a teacher who blesses, not a tyrant who commands us—a brother who pleads with us, not an Attorney who pleads with God—still less a sacrifice for sins he never committed, and therefore could not expiate.

These are not the peculiarities oftenest insisted on and taught as Christianity; it is not the mystery, the miraculous birth, the incarnation, the God-man, the miracles, the fulfilment of prophecy, the transfiguration, the atonement, the resurrection, the angels, the ascension, the "five points;" other religions have enough of such things—but it is the ABSOLUTE RELIGION in Christianity that is peculiar. Notwithstanding the anticipation of the doctrines of Jesus centuries before him, Christianity was a new thing: new in its spirit; proved new by the LIFE it awakened in the world. Alas! such is not the Christianity of the Church at this day, nor at any day since the crucifixion;—but is it not the Christianity of Christ, the one only Religion, everlasting, ever blessed?

THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF JESUS OF NAZARETH.

Reverence and Tradition have woven about Jesus such a shining veil, that with the imperfect and doubtful materials in our hands it is not easy to determine, in detail and with minuteness, the character that moved and lived among his fellow-men, and commenced what may be called the Christian movement. The difficulty is two-fold: to get rid of traditional prejudice, and to get at the facts. Perhaps it is impossible to separate the pure fact from the legendary and mythological drapery that surrounds it. Besides, the Gospels pretend to cover but a few months of his active life. Still some conclusion may be reached. From Christianity we have separated the life and character of Jesus, that we might try the doctrine by absolute Religion: it now remains to examine the life of the man by the standard himself has given.

I. THE NEGATIVE SIDE, OR THE LIMITATIONS OF JESUS.

It is apparent that Jesus shared the erroneous notions of the times respecting devils, possessions, and demonology in general. If we may credit the Evangelists, he was in error on these points. But he never set up for a teacher of physiology. The acceptance of this popular error is no impeachment of his moral and religious excellence, no more than ignorance of the steam engine. The errors of great men are the glory of dunces; but of dunces alone.

He was mistaken in his interpretation of the old Testament, if we may take the word of the Gospels. But if he supposed that the writers of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Prophecies, spoke of him—if he applied their poetic figures to himself, it is yet but a trifling mistake, affecting a man's head, not his heart. It is no more necessary for Jesus than for Luther to understand all ancient literature, and be familiar with criticism and antiquities, though with men who think Religion rests on his infallibility, it must be indeed a very hard case for their belief in Christianity.

Sometimes he is said to be an enthusiast, who hoped to found a visible kingdom in Judea by miraculous aid, as the prophets had distinctly foretold their "Messiah" should do; that he should be a King on earth, and that his disciples also, not forgetting Judas, should sit on twelve thrones and judge the restored tribes; that he should return in the clouds. Certainly a strong case, very strong, may be made out from the Synoptics to favour this charge. But what then? Even if the fact were admitted, and the dull Evangelists have not thrust their own fancies into his mouth, it does not militate against his morality and religion. How many a saint has been mistaken in such matters! His honesty, zeal, self-sacrifice, heavenly purity, still shine out in every word and work of his life.

Another charge sometimes brought against him, and the only one at all affecting his moral and religious, is this:—that he denounces his opponents in no measured terms; calls the Pharisees "hypocrites" and "children of the devil." We cannot tell how far the historians have added to the fierceness of this invective, but the general fact must probably remain, that he did not use courteous speech. We must judge a man by his highest moment. His denunciation of sleek, hollow Pharisees, is certainly lower than the prayer, "Father, forgive them!"—some say, not consistent with the highest thought of

humanity. But if such would consider the youth of the man, it would seem a very venial error, to make the worst of it. The case called for vigorous treatment. Shall a man say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace? Sharp remedies are for inveterate and critical disease;—it is not with honied words, neither then nor now, that great sins are to be exposed. It is a pusillanimous and most mean-spirited wisdom that demands a religious man to prophecy smooth things, lest indolence be rudely startled from his sleep, and the delicate nerves of Sin, grown hoary and voluptuous in his hypocrisy, be smartly twitched. It seems unmanly and absurd to say that a man filled with divine ideas should have no indignation at the world's wrong. Rather let it be said, No man's indignation should be like his, so deep, so uncompromising, but so holy and full of love. Let it be indignation—not personal spleen; call sin *sin*, sinners by their right name.

Yet in this general and righteous, though to some it might seem too vehement, indignation against men, when he speaks of them as a class and representatives of an idea, there is no lack of charity, none of love, when he speaks with an individual. He does not denounce timid Nicodemus, who came by night, for fear of the Jews; does not speak harshly to that young man who went away sorrowful, his great possessions on the one hand and the Kingdom of Heaven on the other; does not call Judas a traitor, and Simon Peter a false liar as he was; says only to James and John—ambitious youths—they know not what they ask; never addresses scornful talk to a Pharisee or long-robed doctor of the law; Herodians or Scribes, spite of their wide phylacteries, their love of uppermost seats, their devouring of widow's houses in private, their prayers and alms to be seen of men. He only states the fact, but plainly and strongly, to their very face. Even for these men his soul is full of affection. He could honour an Herodian, pray for a Scribe, love even a Pharisee. It was not hatred, personal indignation, but love of man, which lit that burning zeal, and denounced such as sat in Moses' seat, boasting themselves children of Abraham, when they were children of the Devil, and did his works daily—dittiful children of the father of lies. How he wailed like a child for the mother that bore him,—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee!” How he prayed like a mother for her desperate son—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Are these the words of one that could hate even the wickedest of the deceitful? Who, then, can love his fellow-men? Arrogance, personal animosity, selfishness—of all these not the faintest shadow falls on him.

II. THE POSITIVE SIDE, OR THE EXCELLENCIES OF JESUS.

In estimating the character of Jesus it must be remembered that he died at an age when man has not reached his fullest vigour. The great works of creative intellect, the maturest products of man, all the deep and settled plans of reforming the world, come from a period when experience gives a wider field as the basis of hope. Socrates was but an embryo sage till long after the age of Jesus. Poems and Philosophies that live, come at a later date. Now here we see a young man, but little more than thirty years old, with no advantage of position; the son and companion of rude people; born in a town whose inhabitants were wicked to a proverb; of a nation above all others distinguished for their superstition, for national pride, exaltation of themselves and contempt for all others; in an age of singular corruption, when the substance of religion had faded out from the mind of its anointed ministers, and sin had spread wide among a people turbulent, oppressed, and down-trodden;—a man ridiculed for his lack of knowledge, in this nation of forms, of hypocritical priests and corrupt people, falls back on simple Morality, simple Religion; unites in itself the sublimest precepts and divinest practices, thus more than realizing the dream of prophets and sages; rises free from all prejudice of his age, nation, or sect; gives free range to the spirit of God in his breast; sets aside the law, sacred and time-honoured as it was, its forms, its sacrifices, its temple, and its priests; puts away the doctors of the law, subtle, learned, irrefragable, and pours out a doctrine, beautiful as the light, sublime as Heaven, and true as God. The Philosophers, the Poets, the Prophets, the Rabbis,—he rises above them all. Yet Nazareth was no Athens, where Philosophy breathed in the circumambient air; it had neither Porch nor Lyceum, not even a school of the Prophets. There is God in the heart of this youth. Old teachers, past times, the dead letter of forms a century deceased, enslaved his fellow-men. The great, the wise: what were they to him? Let the dead bury their dead. Men had reverence for institutions so old, so deep-rooted, so venerably bearded with the moss of age. Should not he, at least, with that sweet conservatism of a pious heart, sacrifice a little to human weakness, and put his zeal, faith, piety, into the old religious form, sanctified by his early recollections the tender prayers of his mother, and a long line of saints! New wine must be put into new bottles, says the young man, triumphing over a sentiment,

natural and beautiful in its seeming; triumphant where strife is most perilous, victory rarest and most difficult. The priest said, "Keep the Law, and reverence the Prophets." Jesus sums up the excellence of both—"Love Man and love God," leaving the chaff of Moses, and the husk of Ezekiel, with their "thus-saith-the-Lord," to go to their own place, where the wind might carry them.

He looked around him, and saw the wicked, men who had served in the tenth legion of sin, pierced with the lances and torn with the shot; men scarred and seamed all over with wounds got dishonourably in that service; men squalid with this hideous disease, their moral sense blinded, their nature perverse, themselves fallen from the estate of Godliness for which they were made, and unable, so they fancied, to lift themselves up; men who called good evil, and evil good;—he bade them rise up and walk, waiting no longer for a fancied Redeemer that would never come. He told them they also were men, children of God, and heirs of Heaven, would they but obey. So corrupt were they, there was no open vision for them;—the voice of God was a forgotten sound in their bosoms. To them he said, "I am the good Shepherd; follow me." At the sight of their penitence he says, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Is not penitence itself the forgiveness of sins, the dawn of reconciliation with God? He showed men their sin, the disease of the soul living false to its law; told them their salvation; bade them obey and be blessed.

He saw the oppressor, with his yoke and heavy burthen for man's neck—the iron that enters the soul; men who were the corruptors, the bane, the ruin of the land; base men with an honourable front; low men, crawling, as worms, their loathsome track in high places; deceitful hucksters of salvation, making God's house of prayer a den of thieves, fair as marble without, but rottenness within. What wonder if Love, though the fairest of God's daughters, at sight of such baseness, pours out the burning indignation of a man, stung with the tyranny of the strong, ashamed at the patience of mankind, the word of a man fearless of all but to be false when Truth and Duty bid him speak? To call the Whelp of Sin a devil's child,—is that a crime? Doubtless it is, in men stirred by passion—not in a soul filled to the brim, and overflowing with love.

He looks on the nation, the children of pious Abraham;—the men for whom Moses made laws, and Samuel held the sceptre, and David prayed, and prophets admonished in vain, pouring out their blood as water; men for whom psalmist and priest and seer and king had prayed and wept in vain;—well might he cry, "Oh Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" Few heard his cries. That mightiest heart that ever beat, stirred by the Spirit of God, how it wrought in his bosom! What words of rebuke, of comfort, counsel, admonition, promise, hope, did he pour out—words that stir the soul as summer dews call up the faint and sickly grass! What profound instruction in his proverbs and discourses! what wisdom in his homely sayings, so rich with Jewish life! what deep divinity of soul in his prayers, his action, sympathy, resignation! Persecution comes—he bears it; contempt—it is nothing to him. Persecuted in one city, he flees into another. Scribes and Pharisees say, "He speaketh against Moses;" he replies, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." They look back to the past, and say, "We have Abraham to our father." He looks to the Comforter, and says, "Call no man your Father on Earth." They say, "He eats bread with unwashed hands, plucks corn and relieves disease on the holy Sabbath-day, when even God rests from his labours;" he says, "Worship the Father in spirit and in truth." They look out to their Law, its Festivals, its Levites, its Chief Priests, the Ancient and Honourable of the earth, the temple and the Tithe; he looks in to the Soul, Purity, Peace, Mercy, Goodness, Love, Religion. The extremes meet often in this world;—Comedy and Tragedy jostle each other in every dirty lane. But here it was the Flesh and the Devil on one side, and the Holy Spirit on the other.

MISTAKES ABOUT JESUS—HIS RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE.

We often err in our estimate of this man. The image comes to us, not of that lowly one, the carpenter of Nazareth, the companion of the rudest men, hard-handed and poorly clad, not having where to lay his head; "who would gladly have stayed his morning appetite on wild figs, between Bethany and Jerusalem;" hunted by his enemies, stoned out of a city, and fleeing for his life. We take the fancy of poets and painters—a man clothed in purple and fine linen, obsequiously attended by polished disciples, who watched every movement of his lips, impatient for the oracle to speak. We conceive of a man who was never in doubt, nor fear; whose course was all marked out before him, so that he could not err. But such it was not, if the writers tell truly. Did he say, "I came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets," and "it is easier for Heaven and Earth to pass, than for one jot or tittle of the Law to fail!" Then he must have doubted, and thought often, and with a throbbing heart, before he could say, "I am not come to bring peace, but a

sword ; to kindle a fire, and would God it were kindled!"—many times before the fulness of peace dwelt in him, and he could say, "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship in spirit and in truth." We do not conceive of that sickness of soul which must have come at the coldness of the wise men, the heartlessness of the worldly, at the stupidity and selfishness of the disciples. We do not think how that heart—so great, so finely tuned, and delicately touched—must have been pained to feel there was no other heart to give an answering beat. We know not the long and bitter agony that went before the triumph-cry of faith, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me;" we do not heed that faintness of soul which comes of hope deferred, of aspirations all unshared by men—a bitter mockery the only human reply, the oft-repeated echo to his prayer of faith. We find it difficult to keep unstained our decent robe of goodness when we herd only with the good, and shun the kennel where Sin and Misery,—parent and child,—are huddled with their rags ; we do not appreciate that strong and healthy pureness of soul which dwelt daily with iniquity, sat at meat with publicans and sinners, and yet with such cleanness of life as made even sin asbamed of its ugliness, but hopeful to amend. Rarely, almost never, do we see the vast divinity within that soul, which, new though it was in the flesh, at one step goes before the world whole thousands of years ; judges the race, decides for us questions we dare not agitate as yet, and breathes the very breath of heavenly love. The Christian world, aghast at such awful beauty in the flesh, transfixed with wonder as such a spirit rises in his heavenly flight, veils its face and says, "It is a God ;—such thoughts are not for men ; such life betrays the God." And is it not the Divine which the flesh enshrouds?—to speak in figures, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person ; the clear resemblance of the all-beautiful ; the likeness of God in which man is made ! But alas for us ! we read our lesson backward ; make a God of our brother, who should be our model. So the new-fledged eaglets may see the parent bird, slow rising at first with laborious efforts, then cleaving the air with sharp and steady wing, and soaring through the clouds, with eye undazzled, to meet the sun ; they may say, "We can only pray to the strong pinion ;" but anon their wings shall grow, and flutter impatient for congenial skies, and their parent's example guide them on. But men are still so sunk in sloth, so blind and deaf with sensuality and sin, they will not see the greatness of man in him, who, falling back on the inspiration which God imparts, asks no aid of mortal men, but stands alone, serene in awful lowliness, not fearing the roar of the street, the hiss of the temple, the contempt of his townsmen, the coldness of this disciple, the treachery of that ; who still bore up, had freest communion when all alone ; was deserted, never forsaken ; betrayed, but still safe ; crucified, but all the more triumphant. This was the last victory of the soul—the highest type of man. Blessed be God that so much manliness has been lived out, and stands there yet, a lasting monument to mark how high the tides of divine life have risen in the world of man ! It bids us take courage, and be glad, for what man has done, he may do.

Jesus ! there is no dearer name than thine,
Which Time has blazoned on his mighty scroll ;
No wreaths nor garlands ever did entwine
So fair a temple of so vast a soul.

There every Virtue set his triumph seal ;
Wisdom conjoined with Strength and radiant Grace,
In a sweet copy Heaven to reveal,
And stamp Perfection on a mortal face.

Once on the earth wert thou, before men's eyes,
That did not half thy beauteous brightness see ;
E'en as the Emmet does not read the skies,
Nor our weak orbs look through immensity ;—
Once on the earth wert thou, a living shrine,
Wherein conjoining dwelt the Good, the Lovely, the Divine.

The doctrine he taught was the Father's, not his : the personal will did not mingle its notes with the pure religious light of Truth ; it fell through him as through void space, not coloured, not bent aside. Here was the greatest soul of all the sons of men ; one before whom the majestic mind of Grecian sages and of Hebrew seers must veil its face. His perfect obedience made him free. So complete was it, that but a single will dwelt in him and God, and he could say, "I and the Father are one." For this reason his teaching was absolute ;—God's word was in him. Try him as we try other teachers. They deliver their word, find a few waiting for the consolation, who accept the new tidings, follow the new method, and soon go beyond their teacher, though less mighty minds than

he. Such is the case with each founder of a school in Philosophy, each sect in Religion. Though humble men, we see what Socrates and Luther never saw. But eighteen centuries have past since the tide of humanity rose so high in Jesus; what man, what sect, what church, has mastered his thought, comprehended his method, and so fully applied it to life? Let the world answer in its cry of anguish. Men gave parted his raiment among them, cast lots for his seamless coat; but that spirit which toiled so manfully in a world of sin and death, which died and suffered, and overcame the world—is that found, possessed, understood? Nay, is it sought for and recommended by any of our churches?

But no excellence of aim, no sublimity of achievement, could screen him from distress and suffering. The fate of all Saviours was his—despised and rejected of men. His father's children "did not believe in him;" "his townsmen where offended at him," and said, "Whence hath he this wisdom? Is not this the son of Joseph the carpenter?" Those learned scribes who came all the way from Jerusalem to entangle him in this talk, could see only this—"He hath Beelzebub." "Art thou greater than our father Jacob?" asked a conservative. Some said, "He is a good man." "Aye," said others, but "he speaketh against the temple." The sharp-eyed Pharisees saw nothing marvellous in the case. Why not? They were looking for signs and wonders in the heavens, not sermons on the mount, and a "Woe-unto-you, Scribes and Pharisees;" they looked for the son of David; a king to rule over men's bodies—not the son of a peasant-girl, born in a stable, the companion of fishermen, the friend of publicans and sinners, who spoke to the outcast, brought in the lost sheep—and so ruled in the soul, his kingdom not of this world. They said, "He is a Galilean, and of course no prophet." If he called men away from the senses to the soul, they said, "He is beside himself." "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him?" asks some one, who thought that settled the matter. When he said, if a man live by God's law, "he shall never see death;" they exclaimed—those precious shepherds of the people—"Now we know thou hast a devil, and art mad. Abraham is dead, and the prophets: art thou greater than our father ABRAHAM? Who are you, sir?" What a faithful report would Scribes and Pharisees, and Doctors of the Law, have made of the Sermon on the Mount?—what omissions and redundancies would they not have found in it—what blasphemy against Moses and the Law, and the Ark of the Covenant, and the Urim and the Thummim, and the Meat-offering and the New-moons!—what neglect to mention the phylacteries, and the shew-bread and the Levite, and the priests, and the tithes, and the other great essentials of Religion!—what "infidelity" must these pious souls, have detected! How must they have classed him with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the mythological "Tom-Paines" of old time—with the men of Sodom and Gomorrah! The popular praise of the young Nazarene, with his divine life and lip of fire; the popular shout, "Hosannah to the Son of David!" was no doubt "a stench in the nostrils of the righteous." "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Find *Faith*? He comes to bring it. It is only by crucified redeemers that the world is saved. Prophets are doomed to be stoned—Apostles to be sawn asunder. The world knoweth its own, and loveth them. Even so let it be;—the stoned prophet is not without his reward. The balance of God is even.

Yet there were men who heard the new word. Truth never yet fell dead in the streets: it has such affinity with the soul of man, that the seed, however broad-cast, will catch somewhere, and produce its hundred-fold. Some kept his sayings, and pondered them in their heart;—others heard them gladly. Did priests and Levites stop their ears? Publicans and harlots went into the kingdom of God before them. Those blessed women, whose hearts God has sown deepest with the orient pearl of faith—they who ministered to him in his wants, washed his feet with tears of penitence, and wiped them with the hairs of their head—was it in vain that he spoke to them? Alas for the anointed priest, the child of Levi, the son of Aaron, men who shut up inspiration in old books, and believed God was asleep! They stumbled in darkness, and fell into the ditch. But doubtless there was many a tear-stained face that brightened like fires new stirred, as Truth now spoke out of Jesus' lips. His word swayed the multitude, as pendant vines swing in the summer wind; as the spirit of God moved on the waters of chaos, and said, "Let there be light," and there was light. No doubt many a rude fisherman of Genesareth heard his words with a heart bounding and scarce able to keep in his bosom—went home a new man, with a legion of angels in his breast, and from that day lived a life divine and beautiful. No doubt, on the other hand, Rabbi Kozeb Ben Shatan, when he heard of this eloquent Nazarene and his Sermon on the Mount, said to his disciples in private at Jerusalem—"This new doctrine will not injure us, prudent and educated men; we know that men may worship as well out of the Temple as in it; a burnt-offering is nothing—the ritual of no value—the Sabbath like any other day—the Law

faulty in many things, offensive in some, and no more from God than other laws equally good. We know that the priesthood is a human affair, originated and managed like other human affairs. We may confess all this to ourselves, but what is the use of telling of it? The people wish to be deceived; let them. The Pharisee will conduct wisely like a Pharisee—for he sees the eternal fitness of things—even if these doctrines should be proclaimed. But this people, who know not the law, what will become of them? Simon Peter, James and John—those poor unlettered fishermen on the lake of Galilee, to whom we gave a farthing and the priestly blessing in our summer excursion—what will become of them when told that every word of the Law did not come straight out of the mouth of Jehovah, and the ritual is nothing? They will go over to the Flesh and the Devil, and be lost. It is true, that the Law and the Prophets are well summed up in one word, Love God and man;—but never let us sanction the saying; it would ruin the seed of Abraham, keep back the kingdom of God, and “destroy our usefulness.” Thus went it at Jerusalem. The new word was “Blasphemy,” the new prophet an “Infidel,” “beside himself, had a devil.” But at Galilee, things took a shape somewhat different—one which blind guides could not foresee. The common people, not knowing the Law, counted him a prophet come up from the dead, and heard him gladly. Yes, thousands of men and women also, with hearts in their bosoms, gathered in the field and pressed about him in the city and the desert place, forgetful of hunger and thirst, and were fed to the full with his words, so deep that a child could understand them: James and John leave all to follow him who had the word of eternal life; and when that young carpenter asks Peter, “Whom sayest thou that I am?” it has been revealed to that poor unlettered fisherman, not by flesh and blood, but by the word of the Lord, and he can say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Pharisee went his way, and preached a doctrine that he knew was false; the fisherman also went his way—but which to the Flesh and the Devil?

We cannot tell—no man can tell—the feelings which the large free doctrines of Absolute Religion awakened when heard for the first time. There must have been many a Simeon waiting for the consolation; many a Mary longing for the better part; many a soul in cabins and cottages and stately dwellings, that caught glimpses of the same truth, as God's light shone through some crevice which Piety made in that wall Prejudice and Superstition had built up betwixt man and God; men who scarce dared to trust that revelation—“too good to be true,”—such was their awe of Moses, their reverence for the priest. To them the word of Jesus must have sounded divine; like the music of their home sung out in the sky, and heard in a distant land, beguiling toil of its weariness, pain of its sting, affliction of despair. There must have been men, sick of forms which had lost their meaning; pained with the open secret of sacerdotal hypocrisy; hungering and thirsting after the truth,—yet whom Error, and Prejudice, and Priestcraft had blinded so that they dared not think as men, nor look on the sun—light God shed upon the mind.

But see what a work it has wrought! Men could not hold the word in their bosoms; it would not be still. No doubt they sought—those rude disciples—after their teacher's death, to quiet the matter and say nothing about it; they had nerves that quivered at the touch of steel; wives and children whom it was hard to leave behind, to the world's uncertain sympathy; respectable friends, it may be, who said “The old Law did very well; let well enough alone. The people must be deceived a little; the world can never be much mended.” No doubt Truth stood on one side, and Ease on the other: it has often been so. Perhaps the disciples went to the old synagogue more sedulous than before; paid tithes, kept the new-moons, were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice; made low bows to the Levite, sought his savoury conversation, and kept the rules which a priest gave George Fox. But it would not do;—there was too much truth to be hid. Even selfish Simon Peter has a cloven tongue of fire in his mouth, and he and the disciples go to their work, the new word swelling in their labouring heart.

Then came the strangest contest the world ever saw. On the one side is all the strength of the world,—the Jews with their Records from the hand of Moses, David, and Esaias; supernatural records, that go back to the birth of time; their Law derived from Jehovah, attested by miracles, upheld by prophets, defended by priests, children of Levi, sons of Aaron—the law which was to last forever; the Temple, forty and seven years in being built, its splendid ceremonies, its beautiful gate and golden porch; there was the wealth of the powerful; the pride, the self-interest, the prejudice of the priestly class; the indifference of the worldly, the hatred of the wicked, the scorn of the learned, the contempt of the great. On the same side were the GREEKS, with their Chaos of Religion, full of mingled beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice, piety and lust, still more confounded by the deep mysteries of the priests, the cunning speculations of the sophist, the awful

sublimity of the sage, by the sweet music of the philosopher, and moralist, and poet, who spoke and sung of man and God in strains so sweet and touching; there were rites in public—solemn and pompous ceremonies, processions, festivals, temples, games, to captivate that wondrous people; there were secret mysteries, to charm the curious and attract the thoughtful; Greece, with her Arts, her Science, her Heroes and her Gods, her Muse voluptuous and sweet. There, too, was ROME, the Queen of nations, and Conqueror of the world, who sat on her seven-hilled throne, and cast her net eastward and southward, and northward, and westward, over tower and city, and realm and empire, and drew them to herself, a giant's spoil; with a Religion baughty and insolent, that looked down on the divinities of Greece and Egypt, of "Ormus and of Ind," and gave them a shelter in her capacious robe; Rome, with her practised skill; Rome, with her eloquence; Rome, with her pride; Rome, with her arms, hot from the conquest of a thousand kings. On the same side are all the institutions of all the world; its fables, wealth, armies, pride, its folly and its sin. On the other hand are a few Jewish fishermen, untaught, rude and vulgar; not free from gross errors; despised at home, and not known abroad; collected together in the name of a young carpenter, who died on the gallows, and whom they declared to be risen from the dead; men with no ritual, no learning, no books, no brass in their purse, no philosophy in their mind, no eloquence on their tongue. A Roman Sceptic might tell how soon these fanatics would fall out and destroy themselves, after serving as a terror to the maids and sport to the boys of a Jewish hamlet, and so that "detestable superstition" come to an end! A priest of Jerusalem, with his oracular gossip, could tell how long the Sanhedrim would suffer them to go at large, in the name of "that deceiver," whose body "they stole away by night!" Alas for what man calls great—the pride of prejudice, the boast of power! These fishermen of Galilee have a truth the world has not, so they are stronger than the world. Ten weak men may chain down a giant; but no combination of errors can make a truth or put it down; no army of the ignorant equal one man that has the Word of Life. Besides, all the truth in Judea, Greece, Rome, was an auxiliary to favour the new doctrine.

Christianity came to the world in the darkness of the nations;—they had outgrown their old form, and looked for a new; they stood in the shadow of darkness, fearing to look back, not daring to look forward; they groped after God. Christianity came to the Nations as a beam of light shot into chaos; a strain of sweet music—so silvery and soft we know not we are listening—to him who wanders on amid the uncertain gloom, and charms him to the Light, to the River of God, and the Tree of Life. It was the fulfilment of the prophecy of holy hearts. It is human Religion, human Morality, and above all things reveals the greatness of man.

It is sometimes feared that Christianity is in danger; that its days are numbered. Of the Christianity of the Churches, no doubt it is true;—that child of many fathers cannot die too soon;—it cumbers the ground. But the Christianity of Christ, absolute Religion, absolute Morality, cannot perish; never till Love, Goodness, Devotion, Faith, Reason, fail from the heart of man; never till God melts away and vanishes, and nothing takes the place of the All-in-All. Religion can no more be separated from the race, than thought and feeling, nor absolute Religion die out, more than wisdom perish from among men. Man's words, thoughts, churches, fail and pass off like clouds from the sky that leave no track behind. But God's Word can never change. It shines perennial like the stars; its testimony is in man's heart. None can outgrow it; none destroy. For eighteen hundred years, the Christianity of Christ has been in the world, to warn and to encourage. Violence and Cunning, allies of Sin, have opposed it; every weapon Learning could snatch from the arsenal of the past, or Science devise anew, or Pride, and Cruelty, and Wit invent, has been used by mistaken man to destroy this fabric; not a stone has fallen from the heavenly arch of real Religion; not a loop-hole been found where a shot could enter. But, alas! vain doctrines, follies, absurdities without count, have been piled against the temple of God, marring its beauteous shape. That Christianity continues to live, spite of the traditions, fables, doctrines wrapped about it, is proof enough of its truth. Reason never warred against love of God and man, never with the Christianity of Christ, but always with that of the Churches. There is much destructive work still to be done, which scoffers will attempt.

Can man destroy Absolute Religion? He cannot, with all the arts and armies of the world, destroy the pigment that colours an emmet's eye. He may obscure the Truth to his own mind; but it shines for ever unchanged. So boys of a summer's day throw dust above their heads to blind the sun; they only hide it from their blinded eyes.

No. VI.—"Future Prospects of Christianity," by F. W. Newman, will be Published on 1st May.

Published by JOHN ROBERTSON, 21 Maxwell Street, and to be had of the Booksellers.