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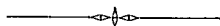
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would never fade away. The future before his prophetic eye was the very same which cheered and purified the latest prophet who wrote these final words about The City: "There shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face: and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and *they shall reign for ever and ever.*"

D. D. STEWART.

COULSDON RECTORY, SURREY,
November, 1890.



ART. III.—THE NECESSARY POSTULATES OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF.

I HAVE often thought that the method pursued by Euclid in writing his elements of geometry might be followed with advantage in the treatment of other matters. He began with definitions, and postulates, and axioms. Certainly, there can be nothing more necessary in every discussion than that both parties should be agreed and consistent in their use of the terms which they employ in common. Not a few controversies in our own and other times would have been cut short if the disputants had not confused themselves and one another in their use of terms, and by a preliminary disregard of definitions. It is always desirable that when two persons are talking or arguing together they should be quite sure that they are speaking of the same thing, and unless this is the case no profitable result can ensue from the discussion.

In like manner it is to be remembered that as there are certain necessary axioms which the human mind does not desire to question because they need no proof, so there are certain points which we must postulate our authority for holding or affirming if we would proceed any way in our treatment of the work in hand, or in the construction of our intellectual fabric. Unless it be granted that we are at liberty and able to add brick to brick and beam to beam we shall make but small progress in the construction of our house or our vessel. Unless it be granted that we can cut stone from the quarry, or hew timber out of the forest, we may as well fold our hands in idleness; and unless in the absence of straw we can wander about the fields in search of stubble which may serve as a substitute, albeit a poor one, it is useless to attempt to make bricks, or to demand that they shall be made by us.

Similarly it must not be forgotten that in dealing with such a

matter as our common religion and the Christian faith there is need, not only for continual watchfulness in our use of language, not only for remembering that there are certain facts which fall under the cognizance of an experience so wide that they may be regarded as of the nature of axioms, but also that if we are to retain our hold of the creed at all, there are certain points which we must be allowed to treat as postulates.

It is always very desirable to apprehend the limits of knowledge, to distinguish between those things to which discussion may bring some light, or which may be discovered by more patient investigation, or may reveal themselves to more earnest and accurate inquiry, and those which from the nature of the case are, and must be for ever, hidden from our perception. It is equally important to recognise clearly the distinction between theory and proof. There are minds so synthetical in their constitution that a theory has irresistible charms for them, and they are apt to think that the symmetry and completeness of a theory may be accepted as, or possibly instead of, the evidence for its correctness. Because to them it is beautiful, they are predisposed to accept it as true. The theory of more Homers than one, of more Isaiahs than one, of more Shakespeares than one, has so much that is fascinating in the novelty and boldness of it that those who are under its influence are apt to forget that after all and at its best the theory must be still a theory, that from the nature of the case it is not susceptible of proof, and therefore is not to be treated as proven, but only as a point more or less open to debate. People are very apt to overlook the distinction, certainly a very wide one, between a theory and a theorem, and the more so, perhaps, in those matters which are naturally beyond the reach of demonstration. It is no small part of knowledge to recognise clearly and persistently the difference between what can and cannot be known. It seems to me that many persons are so flushed with our scientific success in the present day that they mentally refuse to set any bounds whatever to the progress of human knowledge. On the contrary, I believe there are things that cannot be known, and that our truest wisdom consists in humbly and honestly accepting this as a fact, instead of flattering ourselves with the delusive hope that eventually we shall be as wise as God. This seems to me but the echo of the promise which was of old heard under the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge, and which, in the fatal alacrity with which it was listened to, for ever barred man's access to the Tree of Life. And in accepting the familiar position of the Christian creed, of which the Apostolic symbol is the most convenient exponent, we are shut up to the acceptance of certain points which we have already postulated and must take for granted.

I start, then, with the assumption that if we are Christians there are certain things which we may not and cannot regard as open questions. They have been decided for us, whether we will or no. As an intellectual exercise we may reopen them to debate, but whatever our decision of them, we are virtually bound by one that is antecedent to our enquiry. This may seem like an unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the mind, but it is assuredly not more than is implied in some form or other by our discipleship of Christ and our allegiance to Him. The discipleship of Christ forecloses the question, in the abstract perfectly fair and legitimate and even necessary, of the validity of His claims, and the reverence due to His person, work, and teaching. It is absolutely certain that we cannot be at one and the same time both for and against Christ. And if there are any, as there doubtless are, abstruse questions of philosophy bound up in this position, then it is equally certain that we cannot reply to these questions at one and the same time in a negative and affirmative way, nor is it possible to find any middle position which shall consistently with the truth be neither the one nor the other. "What think ye of Christ?" is His own demand now as much as it ever was, and there is not room for two contradictory answers in reply to it.

What, then, are the necessary postulates, or some of them, which we have to make if we are in any real sense Christians. Manifestly the first of all is the being and existence of a God. Age after age the greatest minds have endeavoured to demonstrate the being of a God, but as yet without success, and all attempts at demonstration have been paralyzed by the mere assertion of the Psalmist, "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." Assertion is not demonstration, nor did the Psalmist intend his assertion to pass for it, but he showed that there was a witness to the existence of God prior even to the logical power of demonstration, and more imperious still, and that was the actual constitution of man, for no man, who was not deficient in the essential characteristics of humanity, could give the lie to the witness of his own heart that was so strong within him. It were waste of time to endeavour to prove that which is known to be incapable of proof, but which, notwithstanding, rests on a basis that is independent of it. The existence of God, then, is a postulate; but how great is that postulate! We cannot wholly divest ourselves of the thought of God, it has stamped itself indelibly on all the languages of man, and yet how often we leave God out of all our calculations and schemes, as if His existence not only were incapable of proof, but as if also He did not exist and were not a practical factor in our own existence and conduct. Clearly, then, the existence of a God is one of those necessary postulates which we

must simply ask permission to assume, and otherwise leave alone, before we can be in any sense Christians, or can place one stone upon another in the edifice of the Christian faith.

But the existence of God is a bare fact, which leaves us very bare. We want more than that, and must postulate more. For instance, I think we can scarcely get on unless we assume, in the notorious language of Mr. Arnold, that "God is a Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." We must make some assumptions with regard to the nature as well as the existence of God. God is either a blind fate, indifferent alike to the conduct and sufferings of man, or He takes some note of them and has some concern in them. It is, indeed, one of the greatest problems of faith to believe in the absolute goodness of God, or to reconcile this belief with some of the manifest perplexities and inequalities of life. When Darwin came home from his five years' voyage in the *Beagle*, he declared that the result of his wider experience of nature had taught him to question the benevolence of God. But only conceive the ruin and disaster that at once overwhelms all creation if God is a malevolent and not a benevolent Being; and He must surely be one if he is not the other, unless He is that intermediate and indifferent Being whose character is not more easy to contemplate with equanimity, even if it is more consistent with the felt problems of nature. We must, therefore, make some assumptions, ask for some postulates, with regard to the character of God before we can hold the simplest truths of the Christian creed in any shape or form.

And they are such as these. God cannot be a blind fate, or a brute force, or a pervading *anima mundi*, which is what it is, and whose only exponent is nature in its varied and ever-varying forms, if we are to give any heed to the message of the Church about Him. We must mentally and by implication have dismissed one and all of these theories about God before we can in any way lend a willing ear to the witness of Christ. But then, just as we make these negative postulates with regard to God, so also we cannot make this further postulate, which in some sense seems to baffle, if not to contradict, all our inquiries and conclusions about the nature of God, and that is, that we cannot have, and it is useless to hope to have, any intellectual knowledge of God. We cannot know God in any intellectual sense as we know any fact or truth which is within the sphere of our cognizance. This is where science and God must ever be at variance, whenever the one, that is science, attempts to investigate or scrutinize the other. And this is why the things of God, if indeed we can have any knowledge of such things, must ever be distasteful to science, as science, for they are essentially beyond its sphere.

I remember, many years ago, being present at a lecture in Jermyn Street, on some scientific subject, when the lecturer drew a circle on a black board and said, "That represents nature; whatever is within that circle is the subject-matter of science, with everything outside it, science has nothing to do." Very true, I thought, but is there nothing outside it; does not the very fact of your drawing the circle show that you cannot draw it large enough to contain even the whole of the black board, much less the entirety of the universe, which lies far beyond our ken; and is it in the nature of things impossible that there should be any intercourse or communication between the known area within the circle and the vast unknown and unknowable abyss beyond it? That is the question. And the answer to this question must depend in great degree upon the nature of man himself, which in many important aspects is so far beyond the limits of the black board, or the circle upon it, as to be unfathomable by science. The nature of the mind itself is undeniably not to be adequately explored or searched out by science. Science may investigate its operations; it cannot detect its composition or define its nature. That is too subtle for science, because man cannot comprehend himself any more than he can comprehend God.

But yet, again, the very fact that the human mind revolts against the thought of no God surely may be taken as indicating that there are certain natural avenues between God and man which we can only wilfully foreclose, and which may conceivably form the basis of further and actual communication. Man is a unique phenomenon in nature. In no other of the objects of nature can we discern his counterpart. The mountains, poetically at all events, hold converse and commune with the skies; the fields and the trees rejoice in the sunshine and the showers; the birds and beasts and fishes take their measure of enjoyment as it has been meted out to them. But in no one of these cases can we trace the faintest resemblance to the apparent faculty of apprehension of, or of sympathy and communion with God that man undoubtedly possesses. Who ever saw a horse or a dog that manifested the capacity for the very faintest and most rudimentary conception or consciousness of God? Does the elephant itself, with all its marvellous endowments of intelligence, show any capacity for taking in so much of this thought as we can discover in the child of three years old? Of course the barrier of speechlessness presents a fatal obstacle to our gauging this degree of intelligence with accuracy; but still we can well nigh conclusively see that the animal creation is susceptible to the objects about which it moves and to no others whatever. We may take it for granted that, after all, man has the utmost difficulty in shutting God out of His

own world; and in some way or other the indestructibility of the thought is continually revealing itself. Now why is this? No two persons probably have exactly the same conceptions of God; for as Goethe says, and truly says, "Wie einer ist so ist sein Gott;" but the point of it is, and the blessing of it is, that God is independent of our conceptions of Him, and that behind all our conceptions of God, vague and formless and indefinite as they must be, there remains the thought of God Himself. It is witnessed to alike by the oath of the profligate and by the prayer of the saint, as well as by the nameless and inexplicable fears of the indifferent and the fool who has tried to persuade himself, but unsuccessfully, that there is no God.

Again I repeat, why is this? Is it because mankind have agreed together to invent a God, or is it because this professed consciousness of God is virtually a revelation of God Himself to man, because it is God's own image and superscription which he has stamped on the nature of man, and which man, in spite of his utmost efforts, cannot wholly obliterate?

And here let me pause for a moment to observe that these deep instincts of humanity have oftentimes taken another form, that, namely, of Gods many and Lords many, but that for many centuries and in many lands the belief in the essential unity of God, has been predominant. Now, if we try to measure the immeasurable gulf between the belief in a plurality of Gods and in the unity of God, we shall find that we are baffled and defeated. It is vast, enormous, measureless; but we know that historically it must have been traversed, and traversed for the first time by a solitary explorer, because the gods of Egypt, Greece, and Rome were many, but all civilised men have now agreed to acknowledge but one God, and so great must this transition have been that Professor Max Müller, a very independent witness, has not hesitated to speak of it as a veritable revelation. He admits, that is, that man cannot have attained to it by his own unaided efforts; but that before he attained to it he still was fain to bow down before many gods, may be truly taken as confirming the universality of the instinct in man's nature which recognises the necessity of the existence of God. If, then, we postulate the being of God and the existence of something in the nature of man which apprehends His being, and admits that the very faintest conception of God is a witness to God's self-revelation to man, we must also, on the evidence of experience and history, admit that the acknowledged superiority of the belief in the unity of God to that in the plurality of gods is a further mark of this self-revelation. On the strength of this evidence we must conclude that it is not without reason if we assume that the character of God is such as to lead Him to bestow upon man a certain elemental knowledge of Himself, and so far that He

cannot be of that indifferent and unconcerned character which would leave man to himself and take no interest in his actions.

But if there is this general evidence to the existence of God and to God's interest in man, we may go a step further and ask whether there is not reason to believe that God has not only given proofs of the reality and sincerity of such interest, but has also left sufficiently recognisable traces of His having deliberately exerted Himself to make man acquainted with His will. In other words we must decide what we mean by revelation, and whether or not there is ground for believing that a revelation has been given. To refer once more to the late Charles Darwin : "As far as I am concerned," he said, a few years before his death, "I don't believe that any revelation has ever been made." Very well, I rejoice unfeignedly in a definite and downright statement like this, because there is no mistaking it, and it presents something with which we may fairly join issue. I take it, then, that it is one of the postulates of our Christian faith that an actual revelation has been made, that is to say, we conclude not only that there is a God, and that He, like His own creatures, can speak, but that He has also and in very truth spoken to His creatures. This is a very considerable advance upon the belief in the being of a God to believe in the fact that God has spoken. And we may well ask in what sense and how has He done so. Now, I reply at once, that when I say that God has spoken I do not mean spoken in the sense that He has written His law on my heart and made me conscious of the difference between right and wrong. I mean more than this. I mean spoken in such a way as to convey to man the knowledge of His purpose, and to do this, by what means we cannot discover, but so that at the time it might be known that He had spoken, and might in long ages afterwards become more and more evident that He had done so. For instance, we have seen that the transition through which Abraham must have passed, from the belief in many gods to that in one God, was no slight indication of some definite influence put forth upon him by God. But when in addition to this we have the distinct record that a promise was given to him, of which a slowly accumulating and complex national literature, no less than a national history, is the abiding proof, we are constrained to ask whether the evidence of this promise is not conclusive as to its having been given, and whether, if it was given, the promise itself is not a conclusive proof of revelation? Now it must be remembered that the record of this promise is obvious, it is plain and simple, it could not have been invented by the historian, because no historian could have got a whole nation to believe in it, and if a whole nation believed in it, so that the historian was the mere reflex of the national belief, then, also, the national belief

requires to be accounted for, and more especially the very particular and personal form which the belief took as centring in the person of Abraham. I cannot but think that the national belief was the result of the story of Abraham, and not the story of Abraham the concrete result and experience of the national belief. Then we come to a further question. What are we to understand by God's speaking to Abraham? Was this nothing more than a strong subjective persuasion on his part that God had spoken to him? Did he merely believe himself to have been the recipient of a promise, or was that belief, however produced, the consequence and result of something analogous to a definite promise having been made? Looking merely to the narrative there can be no question as to the answer, but then the narrator leaves us in absolute doubt as to how the promise was given, or how the recipient of it was protected against self-delusion or insured against mistake. And here I think the only test must be the subsequent consequences of the supposed promise, and unless the history of Israel was more of a lie than the most extreme of unbelievers would venture to affirm, there can, I think, be no question that the subsequent course of the national history, as well as the complicated growth of the national literature, are sufficient and ample indications of the reality of the promise. Abraham's known conversion from the worship of many gods to that of one is a proof of some Divine influence and guidance. Abraham's subsequent history and that of his seed is a strong historical proof that such guidance had not only been continued, but that it had assumed a particular form. But if this was so, and as far as it was so, it was a proof, likewise, that a revelation had been made, and that the revelation had taken a definite form, peculiarly susceptible of proof, that, namely, of a promise given. Now it is a matter of notorious fact, attested by Roman historians no less than Jewish prophets, that a very wide-spread belief had obtained throughout the Eastern world in the advent of a Person who might truly answer to the Hebrew conception of the Seed, the object of the promise. I take it as an historic fact that this belief did exist, as it is also a fact that it has now ceased to exist among men. We, none of us in England, France, or Germany, look forward to the coming of a great personage, who shall be the fulfilment of all hopes; and if among the Jews and Mohammedans there are still tokens of any such belief, these are distinctly traceable to, and therefore confirmatory of, this original belief, and not in any way independent of it. As a matter of fact, therefore, there has been this anticipation in humanity, and as a matter of fact there is nothing now answering to it, or that we can point to as another and an independent instance of it. In other words, this anticipation was a unique fact, and it was so for some 2,000 years.

I ask, therefore, was this anticipation itself an evidence of the reality of the promise, or was it a mere delusion, the outgrowth of a supposed promise, itself delusive? If it was not, then have we a very strong historical proof of the originally historic character of revelation. It will be observed that I say nothing here about Christ being the promised Seed, because I conceive the proof of the historic character of revelation to be independent of that belief, though, of course, whatever evidence there may be of the reality of Christ's Divine mission tends immeasurably to the confirmation of that antecedent, and in some respects independent proof. If there had been, however, no New Testament, our reasons for still believing in the Old would have been very strong, seeing that such men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel were the products of the belief which produced it, even as Christ Himself, was in some sense the product of it, and when Christ came there were not a few righteous and lovely souls who still looked for redemption in Israel, and by the beauty of their lives confirmed the truth and wisdom of their faith; but, thank God, this is a position we are not required to hold, for we have a New Testament, and as I take it the mere existence of that New Testament is a problem which requires to be accounted for, and I believe on the broadest possible grounds it is simply impossible to account for it if we are not prepared to postulate the fact of revelation. In short, the New Testament is not only an unexplained and inexplicable phenomenon in itself, but it sets the stamp of Divine reality to the supposed and alleged revelation of the Old, and while confirming the reality of that is itself confirmed by the complete realisation which it offers to the longing anticipations of the Old. So that in the Old and New Testament together, and in the historic and undesigned relation which subsists between the two, we have an all but conclusive, or rather demonstrative, for I believe it to be a conclusive proof of the reality and the actuality of Divine revelation. It is not the fact of this revelation, however, for which I am now contending, but much rather the necessity there is for our duly and loyally recognising this fact if we would make any pretensions to the name of Christian. I want to point out that the fact of revelation is a Christian postulate, and that in such a sense that we cannot regard it as the mere residuum of natural consequences arising naturally. If anybody can suppose that Jesus Christ was the natural outgrowth of the Jewish history and the Jewish polity, so that it was antecedently impossible but that under the circumstances such a character should arise, he is welcome to his belief, but I cannot share it with him; and in like manner, if anyone can believe that, given the advent of Jesus Christ, it was under the circumstances impossible but that He should suffer and be

believed to have risen again, he must have read human history to very little purpose, and must be totally deficient in his perception of the nature of evidence. In fact I hold it to be impossible to survey the whole field of Christian and Gospel history, and to treat it fairly, without confessing that it does present conclusive and undeniable evidence of a Divine interference in the affairs of men, so that we are shut up to a reverent and humble acknowledgment of the existence of *mystery* that we cannot explain, and are constrained to confess that the presence of this mystery is but a sufficiently clear indication of the reality of the miraculous and the supernatural.

It has been recently said that Christianity has nothing to do with the supernatural. We may rest assured, however, that, if we give up the supernatural, we give up our Christianity, for we embrace a Christianity without a Christ, and we accept a Christ Who did not walk on the water, or feed thousands without bread; Who did not turn water into wine, or cleanse the lepers, or raise the dead; a Christ Who did not say that He would be scourged, and spit upon, and crucified; and above all a Christ Who did not rise from the dead, but, like His father David before Him, may God forgive us, was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption. And I ask what sort of Christianity would this be, and what promise is there in it? For be it observed, not only was the first germ of Christianity a promise, but its final message and hope is a promise. "Because I live, ye shall live also;" but Christ did not live if His life was in all respects like our own, and if His life was a delusion and a lie, which it most certainly was if He said He would rise again from the dead and did not rise. What life is there in Christ if there is no resurrection from the dead—if there is no gift of the Spirit and no promise of eternal life? Then not only have we nothing to live for, but we have nothing to live by. We differ in no degree from those who have never known Christ or from those who lived before He came, and were in doubt as to whether there was a God or any future life; indeed, we differ but little from the beasts that perish, and may question whether their lot is not preferable to our own, inasmuch as they cannot look beyond the present, whereas we cannot forbear to do so; and we have that irrepressible instinct which leads us to long for an authoritative voice from heaven, and makes us fain to imagine that God has given us a revelation even if there is not sufficient evidence that the revelation He has given us is the most blessed of all realities. I take it, then, that in some form or other the belief in what, for want of a better name, I cannot but call the "supernatural," is a necessary postulate of our Christian faith. We must not, if we would be Christians, be impatient at the presence of mystery. If Christ walked on the

water, and raised the dead, and brought back His own dead body from the tomb, it is absolutely hopeless to accept these facts in their reality and simplicity, and attempt to account for them or to suppose that they can be any thing but stumbling-blocks to the science of the black board. We must therefore decide, once for all, whether they were realities or illusions; but if they were illusions, then farewell for ever to the Gospel as a record of fact, and to its claim as an authoritative expression of teaching. We have outgrown the Gospel, and become wiser than its authors. If, on the other hand, these things are veritable realities, and in fact mean what they seem to mean, then we must equally bid farewell to all hope of explaining them, and must determine whether or not there is room for them as inexplicable mysteries in our theory of the universe. Only, if we are to continue to repeat the Creed and to read the Gospels and to say the Lord's Prayer as a divinely-given sample of petition, we must deliberately take our choice between him who says that the uniformity of natural law is invariable and inviolate, and him who is bold enough to say, "Here I take my stand, and am content to believe in that which I can neither account for nor deny. It is a mystery, and there I leave it."

Before passing on, I must enter my protest against the supposition that the belief in these things which I call mysterious is an indifferent matter, apart from the essentials of Christianity. It cannot be so if they vitally affect the character of Christ. No man in his senses can presume to say that it is an indifferent matter whether Christ rose from the dead or only seemed to do so. The essential character of Christ turns upon this point: if He did not rise from the dead, all His own claims, and the claims of others on His behalf, are worth nothing. It is equally absurd to call Him Christ or ourselves Christians; but if He did, then His resurrection is and must for ever remain a mystery or miracle. The uniformity of nature has been broken, and there can be no truce with that dogma which says it is invariable and inviolate. God has shown Himself greater than nature. The Lawgiver has asserted Himself as *above* the law, as unquestionably He was *before* it. The Author of nature has used nature as a means whereby to make His own voice heard above the many voices of nature, and to assure us of the fact that He Himself has in very deed and in truth spoken. Only, once more, if I really believe that Christ actually rose from the dead, I can as readily, nay, more readily believe that He raised Lazarus from the dead, and that being Himself mysteriously above nature, He repeatedly asserted that superiority in the presence of credible witnesses. I think this is a necessary postulate of anything that can rightly be called Christian belief.

But, once more, we are frequently told in the present day that, after all, the strength of Christianity lies in its internal evidence; that it is on this that we must dwell, rather than upon miracles and prophecy and the like. I am not sure that it is not invidious to strike the balance between the respective values of the external and the internal evidences, but of this I am quite sure—that the internal evidences must go for nothing if the external evidences are unsound. What is the use of my conviction being never so strong that a thing is true if, after all, it is a lie? What and where is the wisdom of our doggedly remaining in the house if the foundations of it are defective, and the first tempest or disaster may overwhelm us in its ruins? Depend upon it, we cannot afford to neglect the study of the reason for our faith; we must conscientiously inquire into the foundations of our hope, for hope that is based upon falsehood or error or misconception is not hope; and though I yield to no one as to the importance of the truth, “he that believeth hath the witness in himself,” or as to the necessity of maintaining the indispensableness no less than the sufficiency of this witness, as I do maintain that it at once sets the believer on a high vantage-ground of impregnable security, and that as long as he stops short of the attainment of this witness, all other testimony must be to him of no avail, yet I cannot forget that the same writer begins this epistle with the words, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, even that which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled of the Word of Life;” as he also says in his Gospel, “he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true that ye might believe.” God forbid that we should say that because we have ourselves attained to the maturity and full assurance of Christian faith, if we have attained to it, that therefore we can afford to neglect the defence of the foundations upon which it rests, or can regard with indifference the attacks that are made upon them, or can await with unconcern the issue of the conflict. It is perfectly true, and a most blessed truth, that life and light are self-evidencing, and that the possession of either to the possessor of them is alone and of itself conclusive. But how am I to impart light to my fellow man, if he surrounds himself with an atmosphere in which the light cannot live, or maintains that the light is not a true light, but only an *ignis fatuus*, enkindled in the low marsh lands of my own fervent imagination? The question is, whether we can ever safely neglect or disparage means that were deliberately selected by Christ to produce a given end, and that were as manifestly an integral part of the known historic means by which that end was produced. That the use of those means has for long

ages been discontinued may show, indeed, that we personally are to be independent of them; but cannot show that the original impulse, when first given to the world, was independent of them, or that it could have been communicated without them. As Dante says,

If unto Christ without His miracles
The world had turned, then had this been itself
A hundred times a miracle as great.

I regard it, then, as one of the necessary postulates of Christian faith, that the inexplicable must have been, the inexplicable in act, which is miracle, and the inexplicable in word, which is prophecy. As a matter of fact, Christianity was the product of these two, rests, therefore, upon them as on two central columns, and cannot be maintained if they are destroyed. But for every building there must be a third to rest on, and we can hardly be wrong in indicating as the third in this case the person and character of Christ Himself. The personality of Christ is as certain historically as that of Cæsar, Hannibal or Napoleon; and the character of Christ is what we know it to have been; the impress of it is indestructibly engraved on the memory and imagination of the world. The ideal character of Christ is as unique as his traditional features are unique, and that character is the definite result of a living personality essentially distinct from the mighty works He wrought, though they are inextricably interwoven with it. We cannot be wrong in postulating Christ, any more than we are wrong in postulating the Divine origin as we are constrained to do in the Christ-idea, which He claimed to have fulfilled, any more than we are wrong in postulating the framework of miracle, which as we have seen formed in a large degree the actual basis of His life. Thus Christ Himself is our guarantee for both prophecy and miracle, and both are so intimately combined in His character that they cannot be dissociated from it, and to acknowledge either is to acknowledge both, and duly to recognise one is necessarily to recognise all. By a series, then, as it seems, of inevitable postulates, we have arrived at the unique person of Christ, who has no right to that name, unless the office which it implied was the reality it could not have been except for a series of Divine communications vouchsafed to man, and who certainly would not, and could not have done what He did, and produced the result He did, as evidenced primarily and originally, but by no means exclusively, in the creation of the New Testament literature, unless in addition to His teaching he had wrought mighty works, which, if they were truly wrought, must for ever baffle every effort to explain them naturally on natural principles, and which mighty works them-

selves were sealed with the twofold seal of the death and resurrection of Him who wrought them.

Thus we are brought naturally and logically to the threshold of another mystery and another postulate, that, namely, of the incarnation. Given the incarnation and the character of Christ is explained; given the incarnation and the resurrection is accounted for; given the incarnation and the miracles are accounted for; given the incarnation and the multifarious, complicated, and long-delayed preparation of prophecy is accounted for; I do not say explained in these cases, because we cannot escape, do what we will, from the essential mystery which envelopes them; but at all events they are accounted for, because consistent and harmonious with the central thought connected with them. If Christ was the Word of God, then is He, first and last in the many parts and divers manners in which His full revelation has been accomplished, the exhibition of the way in which God has spoken; He is what God has said: the incarnate message of God. "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him." But unless we postulate the incarnation we cannot rationally account for the character of Christ. His own testimony is falsified; His death is an unintelligible problem both as to its cause and its purpose; His teaching is incoherent and pointless, more especially in the fourth Gospel; His conduct is inconsistent and blasphemous; He is the greatest anomaly in history. We are shut up to this terrible alternative, from which there is no escape, that He was either, as He was charged with being in His own day, a blasphemer, a madman, and an impostor, or He was the judge of all mankind, the original and archetypal man, the very and essential Son of God.

There is yet one more inference arising out of these considerations, with which I shall conclude, and that also we must accept as a postulate, unless we would be false to Christ. It is the mysterious relation which subsists between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of man's sin. What motive can we discern in the death of Christ? His death was unquestionably the confirmation of His claims. He died because He made Himself the Son of God, and His death must for ever be regarded as setting the seal to the claims and assertions of His life. Had He chosen to retract He might have saved Himself, but because He would save others Himself He could not save. This was doubtless the historic occasion of the death of Christ. These were the attendant links in the chain which led to it. But in the providence of God, why did He die? The answer is indicated by the question, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" He came into the world to die. No jot or tittle of the law could pass till all should have been fulfilled, and the law had spoken of death, and had plainly foreshadowed

bloodshedding. And He Himself said: "This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for" "the remission of sins." In some mysterious way, then, the blood-shedding of Christ was intimately and inseparably connected with the forgiveness of sin. In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

It is not merely St. Paul who speaks so largely of the blood of Christ; it is not merely the beloved Apostle of love who tells us that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin;" it is not merely St. Peter who tells us that we have been "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ," but it is the teaching of Christ Himself, and must be held to be so till we can disprove His words about the New Testament in His blood. In fact, no honest student can fail to confess that the evidence is overwhelming as regards the relation between the bloodshedding of Christ and the forgiveness of sin. It is a profound mystery to explain which many theories have been framed, but, thank God! the Atonement of Christ is a fact, and not a theory. We are mercifully invited to accept it as an inestimable benefit, and not to explain it as a theory. Infinite and irreparable harm has been done by men insisting upon the Atonement being represented as a formal theory instead of being thankfully accepted as a fact; but this is how Scripture proclaims it to us as an accomplished fact, and not as a theory, and this is how the Church is commissioned to proclaim it.

We have no explanation of the unparalleled awfulness of the death of Christ, except in its mysterious relation to sin, and we have no promise of the forgiveness of sin except in clear and indissoluble connection with the death of Christ. It is absolutely certain that no man has any right to regard himself as a true disciple of Christ who looks with indifference, ingratitude or unbelief on the death of Christ, who does not derive solely and exclusively from that death his own hope of salvation; and may we not also say that it is in the highest degree improbable that anyone who has once tasted the full sweetness of that death, and experienced the joy unspeakable and full of glory that follows on from the knowledge of it, will ever be led away by the cunning craftiness of the deceiver to dispense with that network of mystery and miracle which are so closely interwoven with it, and which, if they are beyond the sphere of demonstration, may, nevertheless, be thankfully accepted as the inevitable postulates of the Christian faith?

STANLEY LEATHES, D.D.

