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ARTICLE VII.

THE PRESENT ATTITUDE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY TOWARDS THE PROMINENT FORMS OF ASSAULT.¹

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THE book we call the Bible occupies, materially, a narrow space. Its life of Christ is among the shortest of biographies. Compared with Kant or Mill, its utterances of truth make a very humble show. We do not learn that a written word ever emanated from its chief personage, except as we read, in a disputed passage, that he once wrote with his finger on the ground.

But that volume has been the seed-grain of libraries and literatures, the spark of intellectual life and strife, the battle-field of the world's intellect. That system has stood like a huge lodestone among all other systems, as in their attractions or repulsions they have pointed towards it or away. And from his early tomb that personage has perpetually raised himself up through the wreck of empires and the oblivion of ages, and he calmly faces the world to-day with those memorable words: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Eighteen hundred years of assault, culminating now, have spent their strength upon Christ and his gospel. Every joint and rivet of the celestial armor have been struck. If there are accumulations of force or of reasoning, of science, wit, or scoffing, of philosophy, history, or criticism; if there is keenness of intellect or breadth of learning which have not yet shot their shaft, who will tell us in what shape or from what quarter they can come? At this stage of the conflict, therefore, I propose to take a brief survey of the field, that we may

¹ An Address delivered before the Porter Rhetorical Society of Andover Theological Seminary, July 31, 1867.

make some estimate of the present attitude of evangelical Christianity towards the prominent forms of assault.

By evangelical Christianity, I mean the system which asserts the supernatural interposition of God through Jesus Christ, as recorded in the sacred scriptures, and of which those scriptures are a part, for the recovery and forgiveness of sinful man.

The scheme of redemption includes alike the mission of the Word and the mission of the Spirit. A series of grand historic facts became the germ of a mighty living power. The visible fruit in the present tells of the unseen root in the past. But for the fact of redemption, our assurance of forgiveness is a dream; but for the outstanding promise of a divine help, our hope of perfect union to God, but a mocking mirage. The work of the living Christ rests evermore on the work of the dying Christ. For a generation past it has been quite fashionable to disparage the "evidences" and apologetics of Christianity. But it is well to remember that from Coleridge to Baden Powell, the men who are "weary of the word 'evidences'" invariably at some point show themselves weary of the thing "doctrine." And for the apologetics, it will be full soon to abandon our defences when the enemy abandons his attack.

If we exclude from our consideration those systems which would supplant Christianity by a flank-movement of incompatible principles, we find the course of assault to have been somewhat in this order: to suppress its working power; to disown its chief personage; to dispute its peculiar facts; and finally to disavow its records. I commence, then, with the topic which lies nearest to our times.

I. Christianity has vindicated to the world the integrity and originality of its essential documents.

We have our sacred writings. Have they come down uncorrupted; and do they extend back to the persons and the events?

The first of these inquiries was once a far more anxious question than ever the second has been. But the hopes and

the fears that in the days of Anthony Collins hung tremulous over the text of our scriptures have been laid finally to rest. It is difficult for us now to comprehend the trepidation once awakened by the simple collation of manuscripts. When Brian Walton, in his Polyglott, gave a summary of various readings, he was assailed by John Owen for undermining the faith of the churches; and Mill's thirty years' labor upon the text met the same welcome from Whitby. Bengel declared himself to have been "horribly tormented" by these investigations. Wetstein was not suffered to publish his critical results in any part of Switzerland.

In the earlier stages of the textual controversy Romanism was for once upon the right side, and Protestantism the wrong. The former, in the interest of the Vulgate, denied, and the latter long maintained, the complete verbal integrity of the Jewish scriptures. For ten years the Reformed churches suppressed the *Critica Sacra* of Louis Cappell. The Swiss churches even enacted that no man should be licensed to preach the gospel who should not publicly declare the Hebrew text, as then printed, in its letters and points, to be divine and entire; and, in far-off echo to the European uproar, Cotton Mather, in his Master's oration at Cambridge, maintained "the divine origin of the Hebrew points."

The hopes of Collins and the torments of Bengel have passed away. A line of illustrious scholars have bestowed a hundred and fifty years, at least, of continuous toil upon the text of the New Testament alone. The Fathers of five centuries have been hunted through; ancient versions accumulated; every nook and corner of Europe ransacked for manuscripts; while Scholz and Tischendorf have pushed their search to the Lybian desert, the mountains of Arabia, the shores of the Dead Sea, and all between.

The results I need not detail: variations seemingly numerous, such as they are, though scarcely more in those thousand (972) manuscripts than are sometimes found in three or four manuscripts of a classic author; fewer far than could be found in King James's version, similarly treated; seriously

affecting the sense of fewer passages of the entire New Testament, so it is said, than the important and disputed readings of any one of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays. "Nineteen of every twenty are to be dismissed at once," says Professor Norton, "as palpable oversights"; and "of the remainder the great majority are entirely unimportant," rising perhaps no higher than a question of spelling, of collocation, or of grammar; often too slight to be indicated in translation. In the total result Orthodoxy loses nothing,—scarcely even the famous text of the "three heavenly witnesses"; for that did not appear in the first two editions of Erasmus. We part, perhaps, with one and it may be two of the texts in which Christ is called God (Acts xx. 28; 1 Tim. iii. 16), and possibly receive another in their place (John i. 18);¹ while all the passages that ascribe to him the works, attributes, glory, and worship of supreme God remain unmodified. We gain for our controversy with the annihilationist a declaration of the eternal sin of the lost (Mark iii. 29). We are relieved of one diffi-

¹ In 1 Tim. iii. 16, the reading *θε* is quite generally adopted by modern critics. So Tischendorf, Tregelles, Lachmann, Wordsworth, Alford, Ellicott, Meyer, supported by manuscripts *κ*, A, C, F, G. See Ellicott's important note on A. In Acts xx. 28 the case is different. The reading *θεου*, though not received by Tischendorf and Tregelles, is supported by *κ*, B, G, H, the Vulgate, and many Fathers. Alford, after once rejecting, restored it before seeing the Sinaitic text, and still defends it. In John i. 18, *μονογενης θεος* is found in *κ*, B, C, L, the Peshito, Coptic, and Ethiopic (Rom.) versions, Theodotus, Clement (Alex.), Epiphanius, Didymus, and, as we judge, others of the Fathers. Three of the four oldest manuscripts, one of the two oldest versions, two (if not all) of the three earliest Fathers cited favor the reading; while the mass of the later manuscripts and Fathers favor the reading *υιου*. See Alford (last ed.) and a full statement by Ezra Abbot in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1861. While the last-named Article gives the facts quite fully, we do not in all cases accept its decisions, nor its final summing up as conveying a correct impression of the full force of the evidence. It is fallacious (e.g.) to argue that because Irenaeus twice uses the expression "only begotten Son," and once "only begotten God," therefore his testimony is against the latter phrase. The former occurs elsewhere in the scriptures (John iii. 16, 18; 1 John i. 9), and its origin can be explained without this text; but the use of the phrase "Unigenitus Deus, qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit," is hardly to be accounted for in its boldness, unless sustained by the scripture itself which the writer appears to quote. But the subject is too broad for a note. Tregelles reads *θεος*. But the case is very doubtful.

culty connected with the appearances of the risen Saviour (Mark xxviii. 9); we solve one or two questions of geography; we clear the miracle at Siloam of a seeming excrescence. We reach some uncertainty, to whom we shall refer the last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel and the first eleven verses in the eighth chapter of John; and we miss the doxology of the Lord's prayer; we dispense with some repetitions, explanations, and superfluities, while we often gain a nicer perception of the connections and shadings of apostolic thought.¹

These are the most considerable changes wrought hitherto by the criticism of the text, and little more can be looked for. The field is confessedly explored. The rationalist Eichhorn long ago admitted that the results did not pay for the toil. "The text," says Davidson, in 1865, "is substantially in the same condition in which it was found seventeen hundred years ago." And while the caviller turns away in disgust, the Christian scholar clings with fresh gratitude and wonder to the volume that has passed the ordeal of ages so nearly intact. For he knows that he reads not alone the same precious truths that cheered the early saints in the Roman catacombs, among the hills of France and of Palestine, in the ports of Asia Minor and the great cities of Africa, but in the very words that met the eye of Justin and Clement and Irenaeus and Tertullian. So wholly satisfactory has been the result in the Greek scriptures, that we only wish we might go back of the Masorites and do the same thorough work for the Hebrew; assured that many of its present difficulties, — obscurities, supposed anachronisms, and numerical puzzles — must melt away.

But behind the integrity of the text lies another grave question — the originality or genuineness of the writings. Did they emanate from their accredited sources, — contemporaries; the actors and the witnesses? Here recent scepticism has marshalled all its forces, and as we humbly conceive has found both its Gettysburg and its Richmond too. It is indeed

¹ The above statement, of course, was not intended for a complete enumeration (which the occasion did not permit), but for a fair, general account of the case.

a peculiarity of logic-warfare that a dismembered warrior can swing his sword and shout "victory," and one who is himself shot through the heart can still fire away from behind a bush. Nevertheless it can be shown that the attack which began upon Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, and the Pentateuch, and at last came down upon the citadel — the Gospels and the Acts — now lies before the judgment of reason and truth, in its last onset, routed and scattered to the winds.

And first, scepticism approached the whole question of our Gospels with an open pre-judgment of the case. Strauss frankly declares in his *New Life of Jesus* (i. 33), in explanation of his position, that "the contradiction between the supernatural accounts and the natural element which alone is historically available, could not be reconciled so long as the Gospels, or even a single one of them, was taken as truly and fully historical." With equal frankness Mr. F. W. Newman, in the "Radical" for April, declares: "It is evident that we must either quite disown the Gospels, or admit that Jesus regarded men as impious who did not bow before him as an authoritative teacher." Such a man argues as Paul Jones was said to fight, — with a halter round his neck. There is a dire necessity. It is not the shout of loyalty to the truth we hear, but the gunpowder-and-whiskey shriek of the rebel.

Scepticism, again, opened its argument with a postulate that begged the whole question, and ruled out all the distinctive testimony in the case. Thus in the sentence next following the one we have quoted, Strauss proceeds: "This they could not be" [i.e. received as truly historical], "for the simple reason that they contain supernaturalism." Here we have the simple and celebrated weapon — the genuine Samsonian bone — with which so much fact and so many witnesses have been slaughtered. It wrought valiantly upon the Old Testament, chasing every miraculous event into a legend or a myth, and hewing every prophecy down to a foreboding. The key-note of De Wette's introduction is that an account of miracles cannot be contemporary with the events; and Davidson echoes that these elements in the Pentateuch suffi-

ciently prove a "post-Mosaic age." The secondary reasons for dismembering Isaiah can all be fairly answered but for the fundamental assumption that a distinct prediction of the distant future is inadmissible; and the arguments for the later date of Daniel have very little force aside from the radical position of Hitzig, that the contents of the book are irrational and impossible.

Such is the proposition, the postulate — not implied but avowed — from which modern assaults on the genuineness of the Gospels set out. Said Parker, in his day, — forgetting that he was a deist, and not an atheist or a pantheist: "I do not believe there ever was a miracle, or ever will be. Everywhere," says this man, or this god, who had travelled immensity and eternity, "everywhere I find law." Renan finds it evident that the Gospels are "in part legendary," "since they are full of miracles and the supernatural." The great leader of this modern warfare lays down, as the very basis of his discussion, the maxim that "when a narrative is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events" it cannot be "historical," nor consequently contemporary. And this grand maxim he swings with so wide a sweep as to mow down not alone all superhuman, but all troublesome human events at his pleasure. Everything falls flat before these magic words, "impossible," "inconceivable," "improbable." This is certainly the chief burden of his whole destructive argument. Proof thus against all proof, he proceeds to the mockery of weighing evidence, after the style of that practical joker who once tested the heat of boiling water by the insertion of his cork leg. Now, to come to the so-called investigation of events whose very claim and point lies in their supernatural character, with the coolly assumed test that the supernatural itself is not merely improbable, but impossible, — and that, too, in presence of the marks of a personal God inscribed on the human soul, and of abrupt and mighty interpositions written deep among the rocks, — this is to abjure the very functions of judge and jury, and to own one's self an outlaw from the broad domain of

reason and truth. And thus all testimony to the authorship of the Gospels is to be set aside by an inference from an arbitrary assumption. Superhuman occurrences cannot be true; therefore the men who relate them cannot be the men they are declared and declare themselves to be. This is the argument in its shortest form.

But again, the positive testimony to the authorship is set aside in a manner most arbitrary and iniquitous. The father of myths despatches the express declaration of Papias concerning Matthew by a mistranslation or more than doubtful translation of one word (*λόγια*), though his own rendering does not carry his conclusion; and that concerning Mark by the wholly arbitrary interpretation of another (*ἐν τάξει*). The concurrent testimony of Irenaeus, Clement, and Eusebius to Mark's authorship is rejected because, while they agree on the fact, they seem to differ on the circumstances. Luke is assailed with a bold denial that the writer claims to trace his narrative from "any exclusive source like the teaching of an apostle"; although Luke distinctly asserts that the facts came directly ("to us") from "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." And here again the statement of Papias is overborne by a "supposition." Quotations from the Gospels in 1 Cor. xi. 21, 23, Heb. v. 7, are asserted to come reversely from the Epistles into the Gospels; and the citation in 2 Pet. i. 17, is remanded to the end of the second century. The apostolic Fathers, some of whose writings are and must be accepted by scholars,¹ are approached with the indiscriminate remark about their "doubtful authenticity." But as they will not down at this bidding, their numerous citations and

¹ Among them Clement's first Epistle to the Corinthians, three (and probably seven) of Ignatius's Epistles in the shorter recension, Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians. The main objection to the Epistle of Barnabas was found in its mystical interpretation, but was pronounced untenable by Gieseler long ago. The discovery of the Greek text in connection with the Sinaitic Bible has strongly aided its general reception, and Tischendorf unhesitatingly refers it to the last decade of the first century. The Shepherd of Hermas has received a similar support, but probably falls into the early part of the second century. The Epistle to Diognetus is also assigned to a period from A.D. 117 to A.D. 133.

allusions, a hundred or more from the four Gospels alone,¹ are summarily dismissed as oral traditions. When in two instances "scripture" is cited, we are told that the passage, "Many are called but few chosen," came not from Matthew, but, there is no doubt, from the apocryphal book of Esdras, which unfortunately reads in quite another mode;² and that the word "scripture" applied to the statement, "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners," only proves the late origin of the epistle that so cited it [2d Clement]. When Justin Martyr abundantly and literally quotes our present documents, calls them the "Gospels," "memorabilia of the apostles," and declares them to have been written by the apostles and their companions, and to be habitually read in Christian assemblies with the writings of the prophets, Strauss still quibbles that Justin "does not say that these were our Gospels or any of them"; and the highest conclusion he can reach is, that in view of certain amplifications of statement found in Justin, but never cited by him from the "memorabilia," the Gospels of Matthew and Luke then existed among a kind of chaos of "different versions" of "evangelical legendary poetry." When Irenaeus, a little later, with his wide acquaintance throughout the churches, bears testimony to the existence of the four, and only four, Gospels in his day, and when he compares them in this fourfoldness to the four quarters of the earth, the four winds, and the fourfold form of the cherubim, this remarkable testimony to the solitary pre-eminence of our Gospels is wholly passed by to expatiate on the unintelligent and uncritical spirit of the comparison and the argument. After this manner it is that all testimony in what is a simple matter of testimony, is broken down by an arbitrary force.³

Again, the sceptical investigation of the contents of the

¹ The entire number from the four Gospels, as given in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1866, p. 599, is one hundred and eighteen. The entire number from the whole New Testament, four hundred and two. But this list cites from the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Diognetus, and the whole seven of Ignatius.

² "Many are born, but few shall be saved" (2 Esd. viii. 3).

³ Strauss' *New Life of Jesus*, Introduction, Sections 10 and 11.

Gospels is equally opposed to all the principles of judicial dealing. I cannot here give you the counter arguments that fill a score of volumes. It has been most abundantly shown that those very varieties in unity which in every legal investigation best prove the independent truthfulness of the several witnesses, are here reversed to establish a general falsity; and that the methods adopted for this purpose would not only overthrow all history and testimony, but would hoist the inventor with his own petard, making Strauss himself to be but a myth.

That this class of writers have brought a marvellous patience of labor, an immense mass of materials, and a singular skill in the "art of putting things," and that they have placed some real difficulties in a very strong light, is not to be questioned. But in them all — Strauss, Baur, Schenkel, Renan, and the like — there meets you at every turn the constant sense of perversion. The thing they give is like your gospel, as like as a monkey is to a man. You weary with interminable quibbles; with endless contradictions found where all is palpably clear; with confusions of things different, and separations of things identical; with artful turns and designs found in the most artless narratives. You grow restive at hearing a writer's silence continually cited as counter evidence. You find it a little tedious to be constantly having three writers pitted against one on some side issue, to break him down on the main fact, or two against two in like manner to destroy the testimony of the four, or one against three to override the three, or the whole four summarily ruled out as "unhistorical." There is a dreariness of sophistry in being so constantly reminded by Strauss of a "suspicious element," an "air of mystery," "the evangelist's favorite manner," that a circumstance is "mentioned by one author alone," "this evangelist is ignorant of it," it is "scarcely conceivable," or it "could not have been uttered by Jesus." Renan's bold fabrications of history, and Schenkel's flat and dogged contradictions of any statement whatever in the narratives at his sovereign pleasure, cease at length to seem.

amusing. You are treading your way through a thicket, a jungle, of presumption and prevarication.

It is still further to be mentioned that the writings that are necessarily accepted are fatal to the theories by which others are denied. The Pauline Epistles which Strauss admits, involve all essential elements of the Gospels he rejects. The fundamental position on which Baur would break down the Book of Acts—a smothered antagonism of doctrine and principle between Peter and Paul—is positively contradicted by the letters to the Corinthians, and especially to the Galatians, which he receives.

And further still, as in other conspiracies often, so here the accomplices themselves turn state's-evidence or confess. In truth, the Christian community greatly over-estimate the magnitude and the cohesion of the party that deny the genuineness of our sacred books. The Tübingen school and their abettors are but a clique. They occupy much the same relation to the whole world of scholarship, as do those worthies to the world of English literature, who maintain that Shakespeare's plays were written by Lord Bacon. But they do not stand firm nor stand together. The effect of their several arguments, judged in turn by men of the loosest views, is futile. Baur himself made the sharp criticism on the first "Life of Jesus," that there must certainly be some historic platform to work from, whereas Strauss had used John to invalidate the synoptics and the synoptics to put down John; a process of mutual annihilation not to be paralleled out of Germany, or Ireland. Renan, a scholar of high order, boldly accepts the four Gospels as veritable productions of the first century and of the men whose names they bear; of whom "Matthew," he says, "as regards the discourses, clearly deserves unlimited confidence."¹ In reference to John's Gospel—the chief point of attack—as Bretschneider formerly denied and then retracted, so Strauss himself denied and recanted and then fiercely denied. Schenkel freely declares that "it must be admitted that the exter-

¹ Renan's *Life of Jesus*, p. 34 (Am. ed.).

nal evidences are not so unsatisfactory as they who dispute John's authorship represent them."¹ Ewald, that venerable anatomist of scripture, in 1857 declared it "wholly certain" that John was the author of the fourth Gospel.² De Wette, whom even Ewald names "the universal doubter," before his death fell back strongly to its defence; while Meyer openly asserts that "all attempts which the critical perversity and blindness of the age, with its worn-out arguments, may still make to wrest from the apostle his Gospel, and from the church its most original evangelic jewel, will and must end in utter defeat."¹ Let us add that Strauss' own recent "change of base," after the lapse of a generation, from the unconscious myth to the conscious theologic tendency and imposition, which, as he more than implies, may extend to Christ in person, is as much an acknowledgment of defeat as ever was the transfer from the Pamunkey river to the James. The first effort at construction involved his old edifice in destruction.

In addition to all this superfluous amount of refutation, it has well been shown how alien was that age from the fabrication of mythic histories in spurious books — the age of Tacitus and Livy; and how the interval from Christ's death to Paul's admitted epistles, rendered a mythic history as impracticable as a legendary life of Walter Scott in England to-day. Of the "great multitude" (*multitudo ingens*) who in Nero's time went at Rome unflinchingly to death for Christ, every one who had passed the age of thirty-five was a contemporary of the Lord. The style of criticism employed against the Gospels, has been by various reductions *ad absurdum* — Wurm on Luther's life, Norton on Caesar's death, and even Theodore Parker on the Declaration of Independence — proved to involve the destruction of all history and biography.

Meanwhile, in every part of the scattered church we trace our consentient records coming down entwined and incorpo-

¹ Schenkel's Character of Jesus portrayed (Furness' Transl.) Vol. i. p. 37.

² Ewald's Geschichte von Israel, Vol. v. p.127.

³ Kommentar über Johannes, Preface to fourth edition, 1861.

rated with that vast volume of Christian life of which they form artery and nerve and brain and heart, and with that mighty ocean-stream of history, inundating the nations, of which they are the ever-gushing fountain; and so we follow back the vital writings and the living workings, reciprocally and inseparably transfused, to the very point of departure. The multitude of elaborate manuscripts, the wealth of citation by Fathers of world-wide renown, are, after all, as nothing to the now silent multitudinous voices that they represent, of the myriads and the millions who with "life and fortune and sacred honor" bore their concurrent testimony; they are but bubbles floating on the great ocean of Christian life and witness, rolling underneath. And yet how even those superficial testimonies multiply. There are manuscripts older by centuries than those of classic authors, and outnumbering them almost a hundred to one. We trace back the stream of citation to find that within five centuries of the death of John, the whole New Testament, except perhaps a dozen verses, could be replaced from the writings of the Fathers; yea, within one century, in Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian we swim in a very sea of scripture, laving Lyons and Alexandria and Carthage. At this last point of time we learn from the patriarch of Lyons that the four Gospels are as settled a fact as the four points of the compass; and Carthage joins Lyons in asserting their apostolic origin. Back of these, and towards the middle of the century, already lie two great versions, still extant, made in Italy and Syria—the West and the East; and while the canon of the Peshito comprises all our books but the Apocalypse and four short epistles, the fragment of Muratori enumerates apparently every one. At this same point we listen to the Pagan Celsus, quoting the same Gospels as writings of the disciples of Jesus; and Justin Martyr, on the other hand, declaring the same books to be publicly read on Sunday in the various churches. Already had Tatian and Theophilus composed their harmonies of the four Gospels; earlier yet, within twenty or thirty years of the last apostle, had the heretics Heracleon in the West, and Basilides in the

east, written commentaries upon these books of ours. With the quotations, still extant, of the heretics Valentinus and Basilides, from Luke, Paul, and John, we press close upon the death of the last apostle ; the presuppositions of the so-called Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Pilate carry us quite there ; and with the genuine letters of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, to say nothing of Barnabas, we stand fairly looking within the apostolic age, upon our sacred books. Irenaeus closely welds the chain of evidence, as he vividly remembers the very look, manner, and speech of the venerable Polycarp, recounting from the lips of John the words and deeds of Christ "in strict agreement with the scriptures." And, providentially, to meet and resist the more and more desperate strainings of modern scepticism, every fresh discovery only adds new rivets to the chain of evidence. Clement's letter to the Corinthians and the Alexandrian manuscript first came to light in the time of Walton ; the Fragment of Muratori in the time of Bengel ; and now, in these last few years, the original Greek of Barnabas, the Homilies of Clement, the Philosophumena of Hippolytus, the oldest of the Syriac manuscripts (Cureton's), the Sinaitic Bible, and Tischendorf's supposed discernment of a text-history older than all.

And so all antiquity concurs with word and act, with literature and life and perpetual ordinance, with written record and living epistles, by the mouth of representative men and of the great cloud of concurrent witnesses. From that cluster of cities that hug the Mediterranean, spreading forth from central Rome to Corinth, Smyrna, Ephesus, Antioch, thence by Palestine to Alexandria, Carthage, Lyons, bound together not alone by the constant intercourse pulsating round the heart of the empire, but by the closer bonds of Christian charity, correspondence, travel, and missionary labor, there comes down one united voice. Manuscripts, versions, harmonies, commentaries ; Christian Fathers, heretics, heathen, — all, with open mouth, stand shouting that these writings came from the immediate disciples of Christ. And while they who with a dash of the pen would wipe out the writings of eight New

Testament authors and three or four early Fathers have undertaken a work a hundredfold less facile than to obliterate the authorship of Cicero, Caesar, Virgil, Horace, Strabo, Ovid, Livy, Seneca, together with Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius, — who left no followers and no vast historic life to keep their memory perpetually green, — their whole attempt stands to-day thoroughly discredited and repulsed, not alone by the “historic consciousness” of the living church, but by the general judgment of sound scholarship. The conspiracy has been overwhelmingly refuted by fair argument; it has been sadly damaged by the confessions of accomplices; and the chief culprit has virtually confessed judgment.

II. Christianity stands fully sustained in the fundamental facts of its origin. The genuineness of the writings would sufficiently carry the truth of the facts. For the old argument is ever new and forever true: that in the artless testimony of such men, with such opportunities, to such facts — testimony written out in characters of purity through lives of sacrifice, and sealed with martyr-blood, bound up indissolubly with countless other lives and deaths in solemn attestation, and so transmitted along the electric line of kindred hearts and hands in heir-loom love to us — we have the highest testimony, in kind and degree and amount, that man, yea, that humanity transfigured, or rather that God through humanity, can give. Hence the desperate attempts to detach the documents from the men.

But our very foemen are forced to tell our tale. The contemporary Jew, in copies never deviating, and in phrases well accredited after all reasonable deduction, — accredited even by Renan,¹ — tells of the wisdom and the wonderful works of Jesus, of his many followers, Greek and Jew, his accusation by “our first men,” his execution by Pilate, the constancy and continuance of his followers. The most conscientious of all classic historians tells of the time, the residence, the fate of Christ, the self-denying, unpopular cast, and yet the suc-

¹ Life of Jesus, pp. 13, 14. See on the passage Gieseler's Note, Church Hist. Vol. i. pp. 68, 69 (ed. H. B. Smith).

cess of his religion ; and in thirty years from the crucifixion lets us look in upon the great multitude of its votaries at Rome. Vespasian left no tokens of his state and character above ground in the imperial city half so vivid as the rude sculpturings of contemporary Christian faith and love driven to the catacombs below. While John still lives, Trajan sits on the throne, and Pliny rules in Asia Minor ; and before the apostle slept two years in his neighboring grave the favorite confers with the emperor what to do with the crowds of Christians who have made the temples solitary ; and with clear colors and sharp lines he paints their purity and constancy, their set day and solemn assembly, the covenant and the sacrament, the song of praise, and even the great central fact and doctrine of their history — their worship of “ Christ as God.” In calm response to Adrian’s bloody edict, we read to-day the epitaph of Adrian’s martyrs carved on their subterranean crypts. A few years later comes the scoffing Lucian to describe their worship of a “ crucified sophist,” their guileless fraternal love, their discipline, union, benevolence, and their bright hopes of immortality. Celsus the philosopher appeals to the sacred books, repeats well-nigh the whole life of Christ, and recognizes even the miraculous deeds.

Indeed, it is remarkable and beyond dispute that for some centuries even the supernatural facts of Christianity, except the resurrection, were fully admitted by the adversaries. Down to the time of Julian, and including the subtle emperor himself, the heathen called them magic. In perfect demonstration of what Christ’s contemporaries were compelled to do, and in full confirmation of the Gospel statement, the Jewish writers, so late as the Sepher Toldeth Yehsu, admitted his miracles, and ascribed them to his use of the secret ineffable name.

But this admission was seen at length to be fatal. So modern scepticism leaped over a chasm as broad as the lapse of time from Porphyry to Spinoza. Then began the perpetual shifting of positions. The deism of England, with

Herbert, first asserted chiefly the sufficiency of natural light. It soon had to wage war with Christian evidences; found it needful to deny the proof of miracles; but reached no safe shelter till, with Hume, it denied the possibility of proving them. In that "Age of Reason" it was, perhaps more natural than politic for Paine to call the prophets "liars," the Gospels a record of "glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods," and the apostle Paul "a fool." However legitimate the deduction from the premises, the world had not yet reached that plateau of moral light and life which enabled Paine to receive it. French Encyclopaedism, indeed, accepted it, and wrote it out in letters black and red.

Germany tried the Rationalist solution: admitted the records, and resolved away the supernatural facts. But the process of abrading and dislocating clear speech, so as, for example, to convert the walking across the Sea of Galilee into a walk along its banks, in the hands of Paulus became ridiculous, and was hooted out of Germany.

Still, how to escape those facts with their tremendous power and pressure? One only chance remains: to sever the cord that binds the narrative to the writer, and so scatter the writings to the winds. Far-off, and by instalments, began the process. It was first tried upon the distant Pentateuch in the form of a disintegration. But in the tediousness of the toil, it has been forgotten that to infer from the use of documents that Moses was not the author, was wholly a non-sequitur. Anachronisms were sought, yet could not certainly be found, save one, perhaps, and that a name naturally explained in its place as a reviser's gloss.¹ History was then pitted against Moses; but Egyptian monuments were weightier than Von Bohlen's assertions. Geology turned against Genesis. But at length we reached the point, where, if we waive the word "day" and concede the narrative to be, as it reads, phenomenal, not a declaration can be proved out of harmony with science. A universal deluge

¹ "Dan," Gen. xiv. 14. Ewald admits the chapter to be of the highest antiquity.

was objected to. But the fact of a deluge lay branded into the memory of the nations; and clear tokens are not wanting in the narrative itself that its demands are satisfied by a catastrophe as wide as the race of man. Bunsen came with his immense antiquity of the race; but, granting the biblical chronology to be in some respects unsettled, his reader—so it seems to us—finds in those wearisome and vaunted demonstrations of Egyptian chronology little more than laminated moonshine.¹ Then came the flints of Devon and Cornwall, the Swiss lake dwellings, and the mingled bones of men and pre-historic animals. But under the analysis of the London Quarterly the Swiss dwellings with the “Stone Age” descend to a “period strictly historical,” with Celts for their occupants, and a range of one or two thousand years before Christ; the “flint-flakes” of Devon and Cornwall are plausibly traced by Mr. Bate to the epoch just anterior to the entrance of the Romans into Britain; and strong probabilities are adduced to show that the time of the cave-bear may come down, and not the age of man go up.² In like manner Babylon and Nineveh and Susa came to the defence of Isaiah and Jonah and Daniel. And after all conceivable efforts to dissipate the prophetic element from the ancient scriptures, two solid fixtures still remained: those scriptures complete, even in the Septuagint version, two centuries before Christ, and a nation roused by their teachings so as to be watching for the Christ when he came.

But the time came at length for the sword which had fleshed itself on the Old Testament facts to try its edge on the New. Behold then the theory of myths: a religious

¹This opinion, formed after a careful examination of “Egypt’s Place in the World’s History,” I am glad to find fully confirmed by Rev. E. Burgess in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for October, and also by a recent critic in the *London Review*.

²See an Article on the Swiss Lake Dwellings in the *London Quarterly*, and another on the Flint Flakes by Spence Bate, F.R.S., in the *Popular Science Review*, republished in the *Eclectic Magazine* during the past year. The German archaeologist Pallmann and the Swedish antiquarian Nilsson also bring down the date of the Swiss lake dwellings, the former nearly to the Christian era, the latter to a period not earlier than 1000 B.C.

idea spontaneously clothed in historic form, and presented, of course, in spurious books. The destructive criticism by which these facts were to be invalidated, though gathering up the cavils of ages, constantly confesses itself unable to bear its own weight. For its denial of common historic facts is continually bracing itself against assumed "impossibilities." Thus, for example, it was necessary to deny the watch at Christ's tomb, and therefore the predictions of the resurrection; and this falls back upon the "impossibility" of such anticipations.¹ In a similar mode the utterances of Simon and John the Baptist become "unhistorical," because predictions of a suffering Messiah could not have been uttered.

And here again, that impossibility of the miraculous—the ultimate resort—not only rests on the assumed non-existence of a personal God, but conveniently forgets or never knows such facts as the fifteen extinctions and new creations of animal life found in one geologic day.² When we add to this the baseless denial of authorship, we find this modern mythology to resemble and yet differ from the old Hindoo cosmogony, in that its earth rests on a lame elephant, standing on a broken-backed tortoise, and that, indeed, on nothing.

But aside from the inner confession of weakness in its criticism of history, and aside from the sophistry and perversity of its interpretations, the whole mythical theory has been positively and effectually demolished. It has been shown that no such religious idea of a Messiah pervaded the Jewish nation, but of one coming with sword and purple; that if a miracle-working Christ was expected, then none who did not work miracles could have been received; that the Gentile converts—soon the great mass—had no clear Messianic expectation at all; that the gathering of these traditions around the person of Jesus—the marvellous fact—is left entirely unexplained; that the actual origin of that wonderful power, the church of Christ, is wholly unaccounted

¹ Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, p. 654 (Am. ed.).

² Prof. J. J. Dana, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan. 1856, p. 120. See also Dana's *Geology*, pp. 397 seq.

for; that the Gospels and the luxuriant growth of Christian literature, soon choking out all other growths, are made a tree without a root; that the admitted faith of all the first disciples in the miracles, and especially the resurrection, becomes the darkest of enigmas; and, above all, that the essential character of the church from the earliest times, in its "consciousness of man reconciled to God," remains unsolved, unattempted. The author of the scheme after thirty years has confessed his defeat, by changing his ground, and slyly substituting for the myth of spontaneous growth the notion of a "tendenz," or conscious design. And the old theory of imposture meets us once more.

But here again there remains, by confession of Strauss and Baur, after all their alchemy, a residuum of facts that breaks the crucible. The chief Pauline Epistles and the Apocalypse, which the worst of them receives, involve all the preternatural claims of Christ; while the unanimous testimony of Christian, heathen, and heretic is, that on those very pretensions, and nothing else, was the system founded and the blood of the martyrs spilt. In his last utterance Strauss affirms that "the church was built upon the foundation of the doctrine of the future advent, and without that expectation not a Christian would have come into existence."¹ Nay, all the objectors are drifting and driven toward the position of Renan, that the source of this persuasion was no other than the overpowering influence of Christ himself.

Chief among those pretensions of his, the pivot of his work, claims, and promises, the central fact too of apostolic testimony and martyr hope, was the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And behold the long line of pitiful and shallow evasions among modern rejectors. The Wolfenbüttel fragmentist, Reimarus, asserts with the sanhedrim, a theft of the body and a fabricated story. Paulus, a reanimation by cool air and spices, to which Schuster adds the benign influences of lightning and earthquake. One writer holds that the linen

¹ New Life of Jesus, Vol. i. p. 322.

clothes were first mistaken for angels, and afterwards, doubtless from the vividness of their expression, for Jesus. Greg thinks that some passing individual was taken by the disciples for their beloved Lord. Schenkel finds it historical that there was an empty grave. His translator is "compelled to admit that a living person was actually there," and is "free to confess that it is out of my power to resist the conclusion that this unknown person was no other than Jesus himself alive"; but he handsomely apologizes for his feeble powers of resistance, by declaring roundly that "as to the manner and purpose of his return to life, we can only make the feeblest of guesses"; and "the fact" must be "profoundly natural." Renan philosophically declares that the "passion of a hallucinated woman gives to the world a risen God." Strauss resolves all the manifold appearances into "an experience of visions" affecting — very naturally of course — whole assemblies of five hundred men at once. Both he and Schenkel, however, admit that the apostles and all these persons were persuaded that they had seen their Saviour; and thus they who had spent some years, day and night, in his company, and had been separated only from Friday night till Sunday morning, lost all knowledge and proof of his identity.

So scepticism, like some rebel army, has often had its transient jubilee, and made its short-lived panic. But step by step it has abandoned stronghold after stronghold, and seems now to be looking more and more diligently for the "last ditch." It stands confessing our main facts, or denying them on principles that are suicidal. The men that push these marauding expeditions stand out but as a fraction and a faction in the world of criticism, whose own sympathizers reciprocally often wash their hands of the folly. Strauss hacks away at Paulus and some better men; Baur makes Strauss wince; Renan strides over both; Schenkel hints at their disparagement of evidence; and Schenkel's admiring translator spends his chief strength in disputing his inferences and denying his statements.

The general complex of events that constitute the origin of Christianity, as a mere historic question, is no more to be doubted than the existence of the old Roman empire. Nay, the marks to-day are broader and deeper beyond comparison. The Lapidarean gallery shows the rude memorials of the persecuted, side by side with the monuments of Roman pride and luxury. The churches of Helena have survived the palaces of Constantine. The New Testament lies embalmed in a thousand ancient manuscripts ; each classic writer in ten or twenty. A Christian literature sprang up at once, and spread onward, vast, ever-growing, and all-absorbing. Under and around it a Christian life, broader and deeper, steadily moved on. The young giant force in three centuries strode over empire and emperor ; mastered the northern hordes ; grew strong while the empire shrivelled and died ; moulded those fierce hordes to clemency and culture, till now in regions, not where Roman fortress, or wall, or road, or theatre no longer can be traced in ruins, but where the Roman helmet never glistened for an hour, thousands of spires are pointing to the risen Christ, and millions of loving hearts, in deathless sacraments, commemorate the grand event of history. Let Trajan, Adrian, Aurelian, Antonine, Augustus, and the long string of names that once sounded through the world, and are now dead names, be proved myths or sagas at our pleasure. But it is idle to contend against the existence or the superhuman potency of the influences that have transformed humanity and revolutionized human history. The business world to-day on every bill and bond and note and check and invoice inscribes the date of Christ's birth ; and scepticism, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, is compelled to write and rewrite octavo lives of Jesus.

Even the minor difficulties of the gospel are steadily diminishing. Thirty years ago, Coleridge, when arguing against plenary inspiration, summarily called them "some half-score discrepancies in the chronicles and memoirs of the Old and New Testaments." And Tholuck more recently was puzzled to support his theory of partial inspiration except by instanc-

ing variations in reported discourses, three so-called misapplications of the Septuagint (Heb. ii. 6, 12, 13 ; x. 5 ; xii. 26) ; three questions of names (Mark ii. 26 ; Matt. xxvii. 9, 10 ; xxiii. 35) ; and one of numbers (1 Cor. x. 8). But while there still remain some points of real difficulty, we are seeing the old perplexities melting one by one away. The proconsulship of Cyprus, which once stumbled Beza and changed his version, has been cleared up by the coins and a better examination of Dio Cassius. Smith's investigation of Paul's voyage and shipwreck has added singular confirmation to the minute correctness of the Acts. The old stumbling-block of Cyrenius and the taxing has disappeared before the inquiries of Zumpt. The Vatican and Sinaitic codices remove a slight inconsistency from the account of the last supper (John xiii. 2 ; *γνωμένου*). The Sinaitic solves one of Tholuck's difficulties, by dropping the name of Barachiah (Matt. xxiii. 35). The inquiries of Thomson and the older manuscripts help us to settle the vexed question of the Gergesenes. Renan records of his travels in Palestine, "the striking accord of the texts and places, the wonderful harmony of the evangelical ideal with the landscape which served as its setting, were to me as a new revelation. I had a fifth gospel before my eyes." And while no discovery for a century, it is believed, has created any new perplexity in the New Testament narrative, a multitude of explanations and confirmations have dawned upon the world, till at no time since the days of Julian have sceptics found their task so desperate, and Strauss was fairly driven from the work of destruction to the fatal one of construction. That task has risen now to the gloomy toil of abrogating the laws of evidence, erasing the literature of centuries, extinguishing the fountain of the mightiest flow of history, and reconstructing the present status of the world.

In view of the records and the facts,

III. Christianity has conspicuously asserted the exalted character of its chief Personage. Things have changed in eighteen centuries. From the contempt of townsmen and

the unbelief of brothers, in an obscure town of a despised race, he has come forth to be the theme of the world's debate.

His claims were the highest. The clear image that lies photographed with sunlight alike upon the tablet of profane and of sacred history, is of one who asserted supreme authority over nature and over man; and who stamped that image with tremendous potency upon the age and the ages. Who and what was he?

To the age in which we live the question comes with an urgency that will not be refused. He who baffled his foes of the first century confounds the enmity of the nineteenth also. The same excitement of the people, the same agitation of learned opponents, the same helpless uncertainty of extrication. Then he was, at first, but the carpenter's son; yet "never man spake like this man." He was a demagogue, the friend of sinners; but the sinners became saints in the contact. He was a deceiver of the people; but chief priest and Sadducee drew back confounded. From a Samaritan that had a devil, he grew to be the ally and superior of the prince of devils. And when baffled bitterness made its last issue, even the heathen soldier saw the Son of God. The "crucified sophist" against whom Lucian sneered, Porphyry wrote, and ten emperors contended, rose over the sneering and the learning and the imperial power.

The later sceptics have been sadly puzzled how to deal with Christ. The older English deists maintained a cautious reserve. Those writers of the last century who asserted gross imposture, now occupy before the world the eminence which in our boyhood we have seen in some honest farmer's corn-field, of a dead crow suspended on a pole.

In our own day the force of the records and the stringency of historic facts furnish a problem before which doubt either wisely stands speechless, or, if it opens its mouth, stammers and breaks down. Goethe could name Christ the "divine man," and "the holy one"; but he could make no clear utterance on his whole career and character. Carlyle names him "the greatest of all heroes"; but though challenged by

his own admirer to show the "incredibilities" with which he "somehow got mixed," he has not yet found leisure for the showing.

The mythical theory was advanced to evade the issue. Pushed at length to an historic basis and a positive deliverance, its author, after thirty years incubation, hatches a moral monstrosity. He presents a "beautiful nature from the first," full of "indiscriminate benevolence," "conscious of harmony with God"; yet a "fanatic" who declares himself "the being that will come in the clouds of heaven to waken the dead and hold judgment"; a compound of the purest love to God and man and of the most unbounded and "unallowable self-exaltation."¹

The learned and lively Frenchman succeeds no better. His Jesus was "great and pure," "an astonishing genius," "with the highest consciousness of God which ever existed in the breast of humanity"; "a revolutionist of the highest stamp," teaching "the most beautiful code of perfect life"; "mighty in word and work, having felt the truth, and at the price of his blood made it triumph." He produced maxims, "which, thanks to him, were to regenerate the world." "In him was condensed all that was lofty and good in our nature"; he "reacted against his age and his race," "produced the principles on which society has reposed for eighteen hundred years," founded a "universal and eternal religion." Yet in the same breath this "sublime" person is checked in his development by John the Baptist, and but for Herod's summary disposal of the latter he would have remained an unknown Jewish "sectary"; he imposed on his followers and himself with the notion that his knowledge of them was "a revelation from on high"; the kingdom he strove to found was a "Utopia," and the early Christian life an "intoxication"; he was "overwhelmed and carried away by the admiration of his disciples," forced "in spite of himself"

¹ Strauss' *New Life of Jesus*, Vol. i. pp. 280, 282, 331. In the following quotations from books well-known, it has not been thought necessary to cumber these pages with references.

into the attitude of a pretended miracle-worker and thaumaturgist, if not into the tricks of a common juggler. His kingdom of God has been realized only by means of the "sublime vagueness" which covered his own illusion; his demands of his followers "lost all bounds," "despised the wholesome limits of human nature," and "shattered life," till he went "totally beyond nature," lost his gentleness, became "rude," intolerant of opposition, irritated by obstacles; and it was time that death should release him from "a way without exit." And while, if left free, Jesus would have exhausted himself in a hopeless struggle for the impossible, the unintelligent hatred of his enemies determined the success of his work, and "put the seal upon his divinity." This absurd picture is hardly so much as the human head joined to the horse's neck; it is rather a lion's head with the body of an ass.

Schenkel, though at his own caprice he asserts and denies so as to make another apocryphal gospel, involves himself in a similar labyrinth. "To a pure will, in which the greatest strength was united with a consummate wisdom," he adds. "a consciousness of God infinitely higher and deeper than that of the prophets"; but upon it "is cast one dark shadow" — his miracles. He is forced to see that the miracles will not away from the living and otherwise consistent picture of the synoptic Gospels, and that therein "the acts of Almighty power confront us." His only solution of "this one great enigma" is the ridiculous hypothesis that the sober and circumstantial narratives of Jairus's daughter, the widow's son, the feeding of five thousand, and others like them, are but circuitous and hyperbolical statements how through Christ "they had been refreshed with living water, fed with the bread of heaven, and awakened to an undying life."¹ If this be solution, then what is defeat?

Parker, and a host of others who disavow his conclusions, are driven to the monstrous inconsistency of declaring Jesus to be the "highest ideal of human excellence," and yet find-

¹ Character of Jesus, Vol. I. pp. 25-27.

ing in his mouth those superhuman voices, "Come unto me all ye that labor"; "I am the light of the world"; "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; "I am the resurrection and the life"; utterances which in the mouth of mere man were a blasphemous stealing of the glory of God. So long as the text of the Gospels stands vindicated, Jesus can be rescued from the attitude of a madman or a blasphemous impostor only by the recognition of his true divinity. No patronizing epithets can gloss over the fact of his startling claims. The sharp Lessing long ago put it well: "If Christ is not truly God, then Mahomet would indisputably have been a far greater man than Christ, as he would have been far more veracious, more circumspect, and more zealous for the honor of God, since Christ by his expressions would have given dangerous occasion for idolatry; while on the other hand not a single expression of the kind can be laid to the charge of Mahomet." And Schlegel well says: "If Christ were not more than Socrates, then a Socrates he was not."¹

Yet Pantheism itself has had to grant at length not alone the historic reality of Christ's person and life, and that life shining out from the early records; but more also, that it was the brightest reality of beauty, truth, and goodness that ever dawned on this world. Here then we stand upon these mountain peaks of solid fact,—a wonderful birth and growth of historic forces; a contemporaneous record; a central personage with unbounded claims;—and we see every theory but one melt away around like a morning mist. No other solution but explodes with its own inconsistencies. Every half-way admission is but a place of unrest. There is a "friendly letter" of Theodore Parker to his brethren that has not been and will not, because it cannot, be answered. The one solution that, like the New Jerusalem, "lieth four-square" upon the Gospels, includes the divine character and the superhuman work of Christ. For I add only and briefly,

IV. Christianity has demonstrated its overmastering power. That illustrious Personage has also crowned his utterance

¹ Schlegel's *Philosophy of History* (Bohn's ed.) p. 279.

with performance. He has made the modern, as well as the ancient, Scribe and Sadducee feel that when he spoke those claims, he spoke with authority. A distinguished advocate of "our liberal Christianity," so-called, has lately declared the "chief glory" of that system to be, "as yet, the barren distinction of a triumphant denial"; while "the deep-seated want of a positive, life-giving faith is not met."¹

That glory we do not claim to share. Our Christ has asserted, is asserting, his supreme ascendancy, his divine potency. Recall the time when Augustus sat on the throne of the world, and Jesus lay in a Jewish stable; and ask where now is the empire, and where is not the church? He who declared "I am the light of the world," and staked his name as Jehovah or a madman, has proved his words the words of truth and soberness, and himself divine. He has been the light of nations and the light of men. What multitudes of renovated souls are clinging to his work and person—to his alone. How he has gathered round his track, at last, all the high art and science and philanthropy, and now marshalls the heavy battalions. How he rose over the empire and conquered its conquerors. How for fifteen centuries at least, the nations collided round the cross, till those that followed the cross closest, now lead the world. How Christ has brought woman up and slavery down. How through ages of conflict he has cheered his friends and agitated his foes. How he has more and more stood forth into the centre of literature and thought, till all the scholarship of Germany starts up to answer that stupendous question: "What think ye of Christ?" and the waves of that commotion dash over the shores of England and France, and spread across this Western Continent. And how, through the very toilings of his opponents, that loud question is now pushing through all the ranks of society, and knocking at every man's door, "What think ye of Christ?" And under the pressure of his presence now on earth, the evil spirits, as of old, are

¹ W. H. Furness, D.D., Introduction to Schenkel's Character of Jesus, pp. 4, 5.

constrained to confess. The father of myths declares that among those who have exalted "the ideal of humanity, Jesus stands in the first class," "making predominant those features of patience, goodness, and charity," which are the germ "of all we now call humanity"; imparting to that ideal "a more lofty consecration," and "the most vital warmth"; and, by "the religious society which he founded, providing for this ideal the widest acceptance among mankind."¹ Schenkel pronounces his life "a phenomenon the most exalted and the richest in consequences in the history of the world."² Schenkel's American translator affirms that "he turned the whole mighty current of human history."³ The English hero-worshipper must term his life and death "the most important transaction that has occurred or can occur in the annals of mankind."⁴ The French scholar and sceptic avers that "he still presides each day over the destinies of the world."⁵ And for the deathless force which radiates through all times and lands from his person, it fell to the world's greatest military genius to bear witness — him whose personal presence on the battle-field was equivalent to fifty thousand men — when he lamented that his own magic influence could never pass beyond his person, and pronounced that undying reign of love that space cannot limit nor time exhaust, which binds the men of all generations to his bosom, till "their soul with all its faculties becomes blended with the existence of Christ," to be the grandest of all his miracles, and the standing and absolute proof of his divinity.

And a pleasant thing it is when the voice of cavil turns consciously to confession; when he of the Inquiring Spirit pronounces his glowing eulogy upon the word that "finds him more," and "at greater depths of his being, than all other books together"; when the great anatomist of Roman history

¹ Strauss' *New Life of Jesus*, Vol. ii. p. 437.

² *Character of Jesus*, Vol. i. p. 2.

³ *Character of Jesus*, Introduction, p. x.

⁴ *Carlyle's Miscellanies*, Vol. ii. p. 4.

⁵ *Life of Jesus*, p. 375.



in his advancing years "will have none but the God of the Bible" and "my son shall be taught to believe in the letter of the Old and New Testaments" with a firm "faith in everything which I have doubted";¹ and when the "universal doubter," heart-sick over the woes of his country, in his last commentary uttered that one firm voice: "Only this I know, that in no other is there salvation, except in the name of Jesus Christ the crucified; and that for the human race there is nothing higher than the God-man realized in him, and the kingdom of God planted by him."² Nor are there many sadder things on record than the closing career of brilliant John Sterling, when he had said: "Adieu, O church," "Heaven bless you, O Carlyle." What is more dismal than the picture which his great friend has painted of that meal at Knightsbridge; that, as it were, last supper of the three kindred spirits—Sterling, Carlyle, and Parker: "One of the saddest dinners," writes the great Scotchman; "all was so haggard in one's memory and half-consciously in one's anticipations"; "like dining in the crypt of a mausoleum," "the conversation waste," Sterling's "silent sadness painfully apparent through the bright mask," and "a certain sternness of mood unknown in his better days, as if strange gorgon-hues of earnest destiny were more and more rising round him, and the time for sport were past." Then came that most pathetic letter to the great friend, "for remembrance and farewell," with its confession: "On higher matters there is nothing to say. I tread the common road into the great darkness." "Certainly there is none." "If I can lend a helping hand there that shall not be wanting."³ Next came, one day, the evening shadow, with the groping, and the asking for "the old Bible which I used so often at Herstmencheux among the cottages";⁴ and then the great darkness settled down. Of helping hand from poor John Sterling, we read no record.

Even so from ancient times does our Christ assert his

¹ Niebahr's Letters.

² De Wette, in die Offenbarung, Vorwort, p. vi.

³ Carlyle's Life of Sterling.

⁴ Hare's Life of Sterling.

divine authority over the consciences of his apostates, the fears of his foes, the lives of his regenerate, and the whole sweep of history. To explain the rise and growth of that unearthly influence, without admitting all its heavenly claims, is infidelity's unsolved, insolvable problem — the leaky sieve of the doomed Danaides; to stay its progress through the nations, the endless, hopeless toil — the ever-rebounding stone of straining Sisyphus.

In concluding this outline of the situation, one or two thoughts thrust themselves sharply upon our notice.

- ✓ It is a most important lesson for the young preacher of the gospel to learn that scepticism will not become extinct when it is overthrown by argument. The refuge of lies must indeed be swept away, but the lie still lives when the refuge is gone. As unbelief never had its birth, so it will not have its death, of reason alone. Its conclusion is foregone; the only question is of method. And when all other methods fail, it postulates its conclusion in its premise. Driven from one stronghold, it plants itself in another; driven from them all, it swings the circle and begins anew. The form that was slain in one generation is alive and brisk in another. And though Strauss has warped his theory into wholly a different shape, doubtless the "Parker Fraternity" of Boston will prate of "New Testament myths" as long as the voters of "upper Coos" continue to ballot for the dead Jackson, or the ancient politicians of Massachusetts go for the "constitution as it was." Strauss and Baur virtually return to the place of Voltaire and Diderot. The process is ever old and ever new. And while the "Radical" clamors for a Christianity without Christ, others will not be wanting in all ages to try Mill's suggestion of a "religion without a God." And thus as we look back upon the past to see the same slaughtered errors come up from the battle-field where they fell, and rush again to the onset, so we look down through the long future to see the same Cossack host rising in each age, a spectral army renewed forever from the bottomless pit; the same

banners float on the breeze, the same battle-cries ring out on the air, till the enmity of the human heart to the gospel is all slain by the grace of God. For we remember how he foretold it all; and how he said: "Light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light."

A still more important lesson is that all fears for our gospel are groundless. We sometimes look out on this scene of religious commotion, with its strifes and heresies, its learned infidelities and scientific atheisms, like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, and the enemy's loud shout comes round us like the "boisterous winds." We are tempted to feel, surely never was the church so tossed and threatened, so beleaguered and endangered. But we may spare our sollicitudes. There were worse scandals in the churches that Paul founded. There were stranger heresies in the post-apostolic times. The attack has been sorer when the defences have been weaker. There were times when giants Pope and Pagan wielded the sword as well as the tongue. It has long ceased to be a time of Elijah in the wilderness, or Athanasius against the world. And these predictions of speedy overthrow have a very ancient sound. Fifteen hundred years ago, in Augustine's day, the enemies set the very time for the church to expire.¹ She has been slow of dying. Paine whimpered, "should the Bible and the New Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." He was spared that great grief. Strauss spoke of the life of Jesus as "critically destroyed"; and Parker vowed that "this New England orthodoxy" should "come to the ground." But alas for the days of miracle and prophecy. Strauss drove the sharp wedge that split Hegelianism in twain; and Parker but dropped a rough stone on the clay toes of that Nebuchadnezzar's image called "Liberal Christianity." And when the valorous North American recently announced that "the churches are failing," he doubtless dreamed of the closing of the Music Hall and the ceasing of those prayers to the "infinite mother." And now that in the neighboring capi-

¹ *Civitate Dei*, Lib. xviii. cap. 54.

tal of literature and of liberalism the lance is exchanged for the lancet, the too fervid arguments of departed Doctors of Divinity for the icy sneers of lively Doctors of Medicine disguised as Guardian Angels of hazardous maidens; we remember how the boasts of the rebel capital too were never louder than just before her great leader adorned himself with female attire.

Gentlemen of the Porter Rhetorical Society, as you go forth to your labors in the ministry of the Word, let no solicitude annoy you. Fully recognize the fact of a wide-spread scepticism, bold, clamorous, aggressive, and boastful. But though their shout fills the heavens, be sure that the heavens are not falling. Know that the chief dangers of the church are always from within; and even here she has the promise of his presence. Cling to the Word. Those ancient psalms that have uttered the praises of three thousand years contain some germ of eternity. Those deep sayings that have spoken rest, holiness, and life to myriads of souls unto this present hour, are brimful of blessing still. The Holy Spirit is not yet obsolete; and the living Christ can maintain the cause of the dying Christ. You have but to press home those pungent truths with the patience of hope, the labor of love, and the prayer of faith; and you may even despise every assault from without, as he that sitteth in the heavens for eighteen hundred years has laughed at them, and had them in derision. You may point to him that once hung upon the cross, and say: O Celsus and Julian, O Voltaire, Paine, and Parker, Strauss, Baur, and Schenkel, BEHOLD YOUR MASTER.