

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE IRREDUCIBLE MINIMUM.

A STUDY OF GOSPEL STUDY.

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"NATURE," reports the genial Tristram Shandy, "had been prodigal in her gifts to my father beyond measure, and had sown the seeds of verbal criticism as deep within him as she had done the seeds of all other knowledge, so that he had got out his penknife, and was trying experiments upon the sentence, to see if he could not scratch some better sense into it. 'I've got within a single letter, Brother Toby,' cried my father, 'of Erasmus his mystic meaning.' 'You are near enough,' replied my uncle, 'in all conscience.' 'Pshaw!' cried my father, scratching on, 'I might as well be seven miles off.' 'I've done it,' said my father, snapping his finger. 'See, my dear brother Toby, how I have mended the sense.' 'But you have marred a word,' replied my uncle Toby. My father put on his spectacles—bit his lip—and tore out the leaf in a passion."

One suspects that Tristram, with his subtle sense of humor, is poking fun at something larger than his father's naïve erudition. A hint more serious than mockery lurks beneath the fun. The story reads, in fact, like a clever parable, in which

not the whimsical Tristram Shandy but his creator, the Rev. Laurence Sterne, whose genius for insight we know, touches with keen yet kindly satire upon a thin spot in scholastic research. There is no call here to draw its moral. Its appeal, like that of all parables, is to those who have ears to hear; and like all humorous exposition it is a caricature. But it lays bare all the more clearly for that the core of the thing it travesties. It clears the air. It deals a subtle jolt to the desperate solemnity which besets some pursuits, and gives play to the more genial human sense. And as soon as the tolerant sluiceways of humor are thus opened, one can see for oneself, without being told, that interpretative methods whose essence is erasure, like Father Shandy's penknife, and whose net proceed is not a creation but a residuum, may still leave "Erasmus his mystic meaning" as untouched, as free to make its intrinsic way, as ever.

Erasmus his mystic meaning is no longer a burning question, if it ever was; but there still remain questions just as weighty and meanings just as mystic. To each generation come new needs, new problems, new outlooks; and the solvent, the interpretative method, prevailing in each era is adapted to the mood and temper of the time. To praise the method in vogue is superfluous. Its dominance, and its indispensable service to its age, is its own praise. But as soon as one service is fully rendered, forthwith another falls due; another quest which if not heeded will leave this one barren. For no method of research, in history or literature or science, is a finality; rather, its function is to mark a new foothold, a point of departure. This is as true of a good method as of that sterile one whose failure caused Father Shandy to tear out the leaf in a passion.

I.

Of the critical method dominant in our time I have named, by a phrase much in use, the controlling object of search. For several decades now, and with increasing intensity since the scientific temper has so ruled men's inquiries, the age has been veritably obsessed by the craving to reduce things as it were to lowest terms: to detach from the welter of matter and history and tradition the irreducible minimum of fact. The field is boundless; and in this sweeping reduction one comes upon many such minima, primordial elements beyond which it is hazardous to go, and from which the implication is only upward. These minima are imaged as indestructible germs of the vast and varied organism of things; units, so to say, of growth and evolution, whose end lies prophesied in their beginning. Of their prophecy, however, the vision is not so clear. To coordinate these units by inner principle, finding as it were their common denominator, is to less degree the effort or desire. Perhaps the time for that is not yet. Prevailing sentiment would be apt to view it as a visionary endeavor, like seeking "the key to all mythologies," better left to the cloudy brain of some Mr. Casaubon. Scientific research, in fact, especially in the field of history, is not yet free from the purely observational and accumulative; is reluctant to launch out beyond sight and sense into the open secret. In other words, historic verification is perversely distrustful of historic intuition. Imagination is an unwelcome guest. There may be more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy; but men are strangely indisposed to dream of them at all. Dreaming is not the order of the day. Meanwhile the felt presupposition is that if we can get at the nucleus of fact — naked, uncolored, unfertilized fact — and see this in dry light,

we have the key to all the rest. To this end scholars are engaged, as in a court of law, in gathering evidence, examining and cross-examining witnesses, employing experts and detectives, and thus through the laboriously unearthed fact,

“Trying to taste again the truth of things,—
 . . . their very superficial truth.”

No phenomenon, no record, no personality, is deemed exempt from the austere arbitrament of this test.

This is as it must be, as it ought to be. The tyranny of the fact is a fated régime; and a worthier name for fate is Providence. It is bound to have its day until the irreducible minimum is reached, and deeply grounded good is bound to come of it. But also this, like every critical method, is bound some day to encounter its critic, and the measure it metes will be measured to it again. And already two traits of it stand out plain, without any Laurence Sterne to insinuate them: first, that this restriction to fact is essentially erasure, its very object a minimum, its animus rather destructive than creative; and secondly, that in banishing the alleged fictions and glammers of history, it excludes idealism from functioning as a revealer of fact. Here then is the self-imposed limitation of the historico-critical method now prevailing; a limitation by which, whether for good or ill, it cuts the record of time in two. History, as it has come down to us, is a creation, a *ποίησις*, in which fact and the idealizing sense of fact have had twin shares. By confining itself to the naked fact the critical method has not been slow to mar the word, whether it has mended the sense or not; but one thing it has done, which is perhaps all that it sought: it has discarded the developed meditations of history, — or in other words, what the fervid historical imagination has hitherto wrought, — and left the

sense to be discovered anew. Whether, building on the irreducible minimum of fact, we in turn shall create as our forebears have created, or on some entirely new plan, remains to be seen.

II.

Sooner or later, as I have said, this historico-critical method, this single-eyed search for factual historicity, must itself meet its critic. I do not say it will pass, but it will reveal what it can and what it cannot determine. And when the critic arrives, it will be natural for him to measure it by a test-case. The test-case, in fact, is already here, forced as it were upon us. In its intrepid course of research, as seems to me, the historico-critical method is encountering its fated touchstone; the stone which does not mar the method's worthy motives, but on which whosoever falls shall be broken. I refer to the work which the present generation of Biblical scholars, in the purest and strictest spirit of science, are laying out on the recorded life of Jesus Christ. Here the factual gauge is confronting no ordinary issue. It is face to face with what is either the greatest fact or the greatest glamour of human annals; either a truth beyond the audacity of invention, or an invention beyond the verisimilitude of fact. Between these two it must decide, and in so doing judge itself. It will not change the record one whit; but it may reveal the need of a change of venue. Its very sense of fact may be lame for lack of adequate criteria.

The specific minimum in question I would introduce by reference to Professor George Holley Gilbert's recently published volume, "Jesus."¹ Of the numerous works now ap-

¹ Jesus. By George Holley Gilbert. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1912.

pearing I select this as at once eminently radical and eminently judicial. This scholarly work, in a way which impresses one as very nearly conclusive, does what the solemn penknife of historical criticism has been trying to do for many years. Ignoring the preliminary question (a minus term below the lowest) whether Jesus ever lived at all, the writer, in a painstaking and thorough analysis of the Gospel sources, arrives at what he deems the irreducible minimum of the actual and factual in the recorded life of Jesus of Nazareth. The method by which he reaches this result is essentially Father Shandy's on a somewhat enlarged scale and a more reasonable warrant. Carried out so honestly and unflinchingly, it may be taken as a landmark of its historico-critical school.

Whether his process does or can penetrate to the fact as it really is, I am not here concerned to discuss. Its quest, indeed, is rather for documentary evidence of the fact, with the implicit assumption that such is the only evidence that counts. Here an important distinction must be noted, which many ignore. The fact itself, as distinguished from the report, he has done as little to annul as to confirm. He has not proved, no one can prove, that the record is false, that Jesus did *not* say such a word or do such a deed. He has only noted the speech or silence of the various documentary sources early and late, which the consensus of criticism has in the main agreed upon, and left the implication there.

The question how far a subjective bias may have invaded Professor Gilbert's findings may in the personal sense be dismissed. There is an evident effort, indeed, to suppress the subjective. The book is not sourly skeptical. It is not cold-blooded. It professes to cherish all the saving and spiritual content of the Christian faith; while it is concerned, not

without sadness, to bring out into dry light what a scientifically poised age craves to know. And yet of the most tenderly treasured records, both of word and work, it deems itself compelled to say, "Whatever else this is, we cannot call it history." It is the things of sacrest import, indeed, that fare hardest, and whose tenure is most precarious. The historic sense shys at these; they do not answer to its conventional criteria. What then is the verdict? To put the matter in a sentence: the book reduces the Gospel records, as analyzed into their various deposits of source, to two constituent elements — facts and frills. The former it keeps. Of the latter it leaves the reader uninformed whether they are to be cast into outer darkness or raised to a light to which this treatment cannot aspire. Discredited they at least are, by the unit and scale of judgment here employed. That is to say, they are put into the category of credulity and pious fantasy to which presumably no credit is due.

Here it is that the question of the subjective will not let itself be ignored. For by a noteworthy coincidence, the parts which are rejected as unhistoric are almost precisely identical with those which record some manifestation of the supernatural. Exceptional divinity, miracles, and specific prophecy are suspected elements. The points where the book reads most like question-begging or special pleading are for the most part just where the supernatural impinges. It is there that the authenticity of the alleged Logia or Q-source, in which is the least of this, is quite sure to have the casting-vote. One is tempted to query sometimes if a little unconscious reasoning in a circle may not have had something to do in determining just what this Logia-source is. Around the supernatural it is, too, that corrupt readings and bungling editorial glosses are most apt to cluster. It is rather remark-

able, indeed, how turbid an account otherwise limpid and clear may become as soon as a divine tincture colors it. This looks suspiciously like an animus against the supernatural. And we know that such an animus exists in the age. It has taken large possession of the common spirit and temper of men. It has led to shifts and apologies, and to atrophy of zeal, in the Christian church itself. It is not personal to Professor Gilbert; rather, it is the inevitable mood of that historico-critical method, that insistence on material fact, of which he is representative. It has evolved a subjective bias of its own, or if not a bias a certain color-blindness, which must in fairness be reckoned with.

III.

This subjectivism of the age — for so it must submit to be named — is not a thing to be railed at or even stigmatized as a source of fallacy. It had to come with the method, marking a stage of legitimate investigation; and the method itself, as I have intimated, is providential, necessary to the interests of the Bible truth itself. We shall note an honorable motive in it later. Still, as we detach ourselves a moment from the tyranny of it, we can see that it is essentially a temporary wave of mood, the result of a self-imposed limitation. It belongs to the process of appropriating a certain set of values. There are different ways of approaching that universe of truth which we call the Bible, and the historico-critical is only one of them. Others — the allegorical, the homiletical, the metaphysical, the dogmatic, the exegetical — have had their day; and none of them have been useless or superfluous, none have ever ceased to be. One method may go into temporary eclipse while another is dominant, or be more congenial to one cast of mind than another; that is all. The

temper of the present age exacts a scientific study of the Bible to parallel the scientific study of nature and man. And the temper of the age will not brook denial. Disaster sweeping and speedy would have overtaken the Bible cause if men had flouted it and not allowed this historic method full and free right of way. To use its avails is essential not only to the amendment but to the perpetuity of the older methods of approach. It is as much a need of the idealist as of the realist; of the soaring mind as of the pedestrian. Men's sense for the actual in ancient history must submit to their sense for the actual to-day.

Of the spiritual situation thus created, Browning has drawn a picture, putting his words as a seer-prediction into the mouth of the dying St. John:—

“Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth
I see, reduced to plain historic fact, -
Diminished into clearness, proved a point
And far away; ye would withdraw your sense
From out eternity, strain it upon time,
Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,
Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
As though a star should open out, all sides,
Grow the world on you, as it is my world.”¹

That is what St. John himself claimed to have done: is what through the centuries fishermen and publicans, students and scholars, poets and preachers, have done. They have stood at gaze before that fact, and interpreted it according to the sense which they and their age had of fact. They could not otherwise. Their fervid interpreting enthusiasm may sometimes have been liberated to excess, and so may have brought partial discredit or obsolescence on their verdict. But sooner or later such excess rights itself. It ill becomes us as their self-complacent successors to condemn them as if we alone

¹ A Death in the Desert, ll. 235-243.

had reached the absolute. In the time to come we too, in our certitude of the irreducible minimum, may prove to have been in like case. For we are after all but the children of our time, with the light and the dimness of the time alike upon us.

So in this long procession of observers and interpreters we are taking our turn, doing just what they have done. It is as if we were again at the beginning of days. The present generation of Biblical critics, their sense withdrawn from eternity to time, are still at gaze, their eyes fixed on the naked fact, and not yet ready to let it dispart and dispread. Their aim is to reduce their case first to lowest terms, terms of sight and sense, and of the broadly intelligible movements of human nature. In other words, recognizing Jesus as a man, and undeniably a man of majestic type, their first concern is to find how small a man he is, before going on to estimate how large he is. And their standard is their own unit of measure, which for the time being takes account merely of phenomena, and of the conventional bounds of the human species.

If now the history of the human mind furnishes any analogy, this point of approach — what we are calling the irreducible minimum — cannot remain fixed and static. From a point of approach it must forthwith become a point of departure. It is not final. It is pivotal. The fact must open out, revealing its bearings and values, from its littleness expanding to its largeness. The discovery of the fact is the discovery not of an ultimate but of a thing initial and germinal. For this irreducible minimum is after all the core of the supreme fact of history; the years have proved it so.

While the critics are still at this pivotal point, however, still at gaze before the uncolored fact, let us pause a moment

to note the limits of the situation. Theirs is of course the rigorous method of scientific analysis: it is to recorded history what the test-tube and microscope are to chemistry, and what dissection is to biology. And science, after all, is only able to deal with facts at second hand: not the fact but the phenomenon, — the *lock* of the fact. It is the phenomena of Jesus' life that for the time being concern them. The way these looked to Strauss and Baur and Renan is already antiquated and discredited; it has revealed their limits instead of its own. Criticism is on a new tack now; busied with the written sources; which latter are ingeniously disentangled and sorted out, with the view to arriving at the report most nearly contemporary with the phenomena themselves. All this we cannot but honor for its stern and sad committal to the truth, and for its patient thoroughness. Still, when in Shandean mood one allows the naughty sense of humor to jolt a little the abysmal solemnity of the quest, one cannot but feel that there is something petty and puttering about it. It is in fact the penknife process writ large; its result a residuum, not a creation. One is half inclined to wonder if they do not feel a bit ashamed of themselves, when in more genial and flexible mood they are released from the tyranny of their erudition and contemplate the Man in his majestic and transcendent manhood.

The truth is, however, their science has engendered a subjective bias of its own, which for the time seals their eyes from all that is not congruous with it. Nature's laws have oracularly told them that "miracles do not happen." Therefore, forsooth, they never did happen. If any one says so, he must have imagined it. The irruption of the supernatural into our material life of sense — at least as described in the Gospel terms of divine birth, superhuman powers, transfigur-

ation, resurrection — assails their subjective sense as a thing anomalous, unhuman, unreal. As the slangster would say, it “queers the game.” I need not recount here the strenuous devices that in times past have been resorted to to get rid of it. Many of these were sour or scornful; but the time of this mood is past. It is in more dispassionate mood that men attack the sources now; and what they are mainly trying to do is to make the earliest source, which after all is an alleged source derived by analysis, abet them in establishing their verdict. Here they seem to have discovered a very plausible aid to their subjectivism. That source, the Logia or Q-source, is presumed to hew most nearly to the actual fact; the other and later ones, which by a lucky coincidence are found to record the chief supernatural elements, are a mixture of facts and frills. To view them so goes far to “save the face” of their presupposition. They do not deem themselves subjective; no one does so judge himself. It was the other observers, the generations who after Jesus fell progressively into the lure of theological fancies, who were subjective. The gradual invasion of *Aberglaube* among them can be quite plausibly traced: through “Mark” (we must put names in quotations), who was only about a generation twisted; through “Matthew,” whose bent for system and prophetic fulfillment deflected him a little more; through “Luke,” who was swayed by the Pauline and Hellenistic trend; to “John,” who had nearly a century’s subjectivism to strain his sense of fact. So what began with nearly all credible fact ends with an account so nearly all frills that the joints of the whole Gospel structure are loosened and we are left quite uncertain what is authentic and what is not. Thus far within the limits of the Scripture canon. With the rank wilderness, not to say chaos, of interpretative judgments that have accumulated

since the first century we need not at present concern ourselves. It was plainly time, when the modern critics took up the problem, for a thoroughgoing account of stock. So it comes finally to the present inductive mood of the times, whose scientific craving is for naked fact, and whose animus is to make the infusion of the supernatural as weak as the case will bear. If in estimating this mood and method we do not allow for a due proportion of subjective bias and perhaps torsion, we leave it void of the test which it insists on applying to every former method.

The present restrictions of research have a remarkable analogue in the atheism of Lord Bacon's day. "For none deny that there is a God," he remarks, "but those for whom it maketh that there were no God." On the current scale and scope of inquiry, which imprisons the human in the natural law and evolution of the species, "it maketh that there were no" supernatural. That is the penalty of science. But it has its good side; for the object of the present paper is not all stricture.

IV.

To get at a fixed core of fact is indeed a triumph of patience and scholarship to which nothing but hearty honor is due; due alike to object and method. And yet we are bound to look at the matter on both sides; the more so since the fact before us, as alleged, is so unique. We need to consider first its exposure to fallacy; and secondly, a much more agreeable thing, its essential worthiness of motive. Both the negative and the positive aspects of the quest must needs be reckoned with.

As hitherto conducted, the method treads very close to two fallacies. By reason of the unconscious bias which the method

has engendered, men's eyes are holden from realizing how fatally near these fallacies have been suffered to encroach.

The first is the unspoken assumption that in a life which beyond all lives that were ever lived has proved itself dynamic, there may be discovered a substratum of static fact. No fact stands still, a barren and inert thing; much less the undeniably supreme Fact of history. From the very first telling it throbs with spiritual motion, a pulsation as from a higher sphere of personal force and purpose. However near we get to it, we cannot dissociate it from the impression it made upon its observers and reporters, to whom we must accord a personality as real and integral, however inferior, as that of the Originator. The fact which was his forthwith becomes theirs, living anew in their consciousness and working its work. It was not of a nature to leave them cold or indifferent. One is reminded of Puccio's retort to Jacopo, in Browning's "Luria":—

"Jacopo. Friend, you mistake my station; I observe
The game, watch how my betters play, no more.

"Puccio. But mankind are not pieces—there's your fault!
You cannot push them, and, the first move made,
Lean back and study what the next shall be,
In confidence that, when 'tis fixed upon,
You find just where you left them, blacks and whites;
Men go on moving when your hand's away."¹

Now this, just this self-moving initiative in men, if we can predicate anything at all of Jesus' mind, was his avowed and luminously evident purpose with them. He wrote nothing. He did not exploit himself. He simply lived the life which was soon discovered to be the light of men; and this, with a faith in human nature nothing short of divine, he entrusted to the good will of the ages, a living, germinal Fact. There

¹ *Luria, Act iv. ll. 4-11.*

was nothing to hide, nothing to withhold. It was a new faith, and with it was a sublime courage which centuries have not emulated. If Mark Antony, banking on the blind and violent passions of men, could say of his malicious speech,—

“Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt,”—

with a far more intrepid trust in a soul of human goodness not yet apparent, Jesus would set divine words and acts at work, in the confidence that they would not return to him void. Thus his whole appeal was to human subjectivism, if you please; to that healthy subjectivism which comes of candor and native insight.

But here is where we come upon the uniqueness of the fact to be reported, the crux of its actuality. It was a human phenomenon with a divine heart. That was what made it the unique thing which ever since has been working its work in history. There was no cogent occasion otherwise for his living such an exceptional life. Prophets and lawgivers and philosophers could already supply such morals and rules of conduct as were needed for the demands of civilization, and men had accommodated these to their own desires and expediencies. In this fact was a new element to be reckoned with. What he said to his cavilers about John's baptism, what spoke eloquently through every line of his own earthly career, was the crucial question of the ages, “Is it from heaven, or of men?” The answer of fact as of interpretation, of objective sight as of subjective feeling, turns vitally upon it. If, like the cavilers, we consult only the possible effect of our answer on our own systems or vested interests, our reply can only be theirs, “We cannot tell.” And his rejoinder, his permanent rebuke of agnosticism, is, “Neither do I tell

you." It is as if he had said, "It is not for me to tell you a thing so evident. It is your business to know. I have begun the game; now go on moving, in your own native insight and skill; only, play fair."

All this will doubtless be readily enough conceded,—at least by men this side of Germany. But perhaps the objection may be urged that it dodges the present issue, which is the static fact, the irreducible minimum. Now that the venturesome penknife has scratched us wellnigh in sight of this, is it fair to "queer the game" by making it dynamic and so opening it to the invasion of those glammers and frills which we are trying to eliminate? To which I answer, I am not urging the claim of glammers and frills. My concern is reflex: it is with the integrity of the fact itself. Is the fact itself all there, when we have reduced it to a scientific phenomenon? May there not be in it an element, equally real, dependent for authentic report on the eyes that see it? And if eyes to see are needed, what shall be the spirit behind the eyes, the spirit of the scientist, intent only on specimens for his museum, or the spirit of the fact itself, as it has engendered a light and warmth in the candid observer? After all, it is a question of subjective recognition, for the scientific temper itself is a subjectivism.

A glance at the history of criticism seems to show that it has made its way toward this irreducible minimum mainly by its implicit subservience to the tyranny of natural law. That has been its constant obsession whenever it confronted a fact which, because it was of spiritual import, looked supernatural. The first thing to go, and still most roundly denied, was demoniacal possession. Modern therapeutics have made that an easy mark, because, forsooth, we can match its frenzies and hallucinations in the insanity of to-day, and we

find no devils in ours. It is interesting to note with what complacency men say, *Nous avons changé tout cela*, without stopping to consider how it loosens the joints of the whole spiritual structure. It makes out that when Jesus spoke to the hapless victim, he either mistakenly supposed he was addressing an actual demon, or else was making believe in order to humor his age's crude notions, — in other words that he was either an ignoramus or a fraud; while in the place of the fact as reported, like the magicians before Moses, it puts a phenomenon that matches the motions without the meaning. Has it thereby reported the fact as it was, — or even a parallel fact? The miracles of healing were at first as roundly denied, until hypnotism and Christian Science came in to alter the case; and now many of them, with reservations, are transferred to the credit side of the account, not however as miracles. Great is the power of suggestion, great the range of neurosis. The nature-miracles are still among the fancies and frills, being supposedly too tough a feat for Jesus' personality to handle; though Professor Bacon seems to think the devil may have occasioned one of them by raising what without profanity we may call a hell of a storm when Jesus was asleep, which of course it would not do not to let Jesus overmatch. Still more deep in the limbo of the frill-class are the virgin birth and the transfiguration; their tenure on objective fact is too slight to come into scientific consideration. The supreme miracle of all, the resurrection, is the hardest to reduce, and the records of it have been whittled unmercifully; but it seems concedable now that the disciples, and perhaps the "five hundred brethren at once," somewhere in Galilee, in a kind of composite *rappor*t, saw an Object which it seems made itself apprehensible to one sense, the sense of sight, — which, you see, is a very reassuring proof of what the sup-

ernatural, as interpreted by psychics, can do. The ghost of the fact is saved; partly because it is so hard to fly in the face of St. Paul's positive assertion, and partly because some dynamic nucleus must still be posited, for the undeniably tremendous effect in the faith of the ages. But it marks nearly the minimum of divergence from the everyday phenomena of our own times, such as an unspiritual mood can apprehend.

And now in these recent times the analysis of the written sources has been ingeniously employed — not to say manipulated — to abet conclusions like these; and in mending the sense it has not always scrupled to mar the word. Meanwhile, the result is simply residuum; and the question whether the shorn fact is whole and integral is still open. It is hard to prove a negative. If this is the penalty of science, then it would seem that to rise from this pivotal point, even in the interests of fact, a change of venue is in order. There is needed a new standard and unit of measure. Mr. Chesterton speaks somewhere of "the great scientific fallacy; I mean," he says, "the habit of beginning not with the human soul, which is the first thing a man learns about, but with some such thing as protoplasm, which is about the last." It is well to find, if we may, the natural facts of Jesus' life derived in the long evolutionary course from protoplasm; but by the power and sequel of the case the derivation was other, from the germ of holy manhood and divine spirit. If these vital forces have shaped the fact, we must needs, to see it as it is, work in their venue.

v.

The second fallacy to which the prevailing method is exposed is the unspoken assumption that the nearest ob-

server is, *ipso facto*, the most authentic reporter. As we recede from the fact in time, it is assumed, the minds of men become twisted by shifting interests, or glamoured by fond imaginings and deductions, so that they no longer tell the fact as it is. The lapse of time, then, does not clarify the fact but distorts it.

Following this assumption, critics reach an interesting gradation of values. The unknown collector of the Logia, being nearest in time, is the most authentic because his report is the baldest. Peter, if according to tradition he was the personal source of the Gospel of Mark, is fairly authentic, except where homiletic interests color his facts. Matthew was too much concerned with topical arrangement and prophetic coincidences to be quite so trustworthy. Luke was a Hellenic historian, whose report was necessarily second-hand. And John — who was John? Are there any facts left in his late account, so avowedly a *Tendenzschrift* of a remote generation? All these, as they are farther removed from the primal fact, are increasingly exposed to the invasion of subjectivism, and their appetite for the supernatural seems to have increased in like proportion, until with St. John the Teacher of Nazareth is positively identified with the Word made flesh. So time and place, with their shifts of philosophy and temperament, are assumed to have created a kind of excrescence which does not belong to matter-of-fact history but to theological and imaginative theory.

To give credit to the sources in the order of nearness takes note of time but not of the personal equation; and so it raises as many and vexing questions as it solves. Is the man who is nearest necessarily the best, the most penetrative observer? Does a man remember facts better, especially strange and bewildering facts, when they are close upon him, or when he

is a little detached from them and can understand their bearings? Is the first overwhelming emotion at seeing a transcendent fact, like for instance the Transfiguration, or the later calm reflection upon it, more favorable to reporting the fact as it is? It will be remembered the disciples were enjoined to say nothing about that event until the Resurrection furnished the key to it. Then, too, there are the varieties of mind to which a dynamic fact appeals, — the sturdy and impulsive temperament of Peter, the scribal and didactic bent of Matthew, the spiritually intuitive mind of John. Is the contribution of facts to which one memory gravitates less valid than the contribution of another? Such are some of the questions which the modern method has not taken pains either to raise or answer. Its eye is for the static without the dynamic, for the immediate phenomenon without its remoter bearings; it impales the butterfly for its museum and leaves it there, its function gone.

Other facts of history have not fared so. It took a whole generation to report the Battle of Gettysburg as it was, though the newspapers gave the immediate details the next day. When the centenary of Lincoln's birth was celebrated, many facts of his career came to light, and from eye-witnesses too, that were not current before, and the large meaning of his personality was immensely better apprehended. Such is the way of constructive history to-day; shall we assume that to-day monopolizes that way? The early Christians, as all admit, were spiritually quickened; but it is hazardous to assume that spiritual quickening so deflects a man's memory that he is more apt to make a story than to tell the truth. Clearly, it requires something more conclusive than nearness in time to authenticate a gospel fact. Or, if the subjective bias is in question, the desire to attenuate the supernatural may do as little to

clarify the vision as the candor to acknowledge it. Truth is proverbially stranger than fiction; and many truths have to be told which are a mystery to the teller. The most momentous truth, the mystery hid from ages, has appeared in the factual forms of space and time, a candidate for historical judgment. It is no ordinary fact with which our method is called upon to deal. It transcends the genius of fiction; it contains elements undreamt of in our pedestrian philosophy, elements that it took generations of insight to resolve. Is it therefore not a fact? and may not its very strangeness be its passport? The query is legitimate.

VI.

From this consideration of the negative side, the exposure to fallacy, we turn now to the positive and more agreeable aspect of the case, the thing which, however unfinal, amply justifies the historico-critical method after all, and indeed makes it inevitable. I mean its essential worthiness of motive. The minimum of fact, whatever it is judged to be, leaves, after all, a workable residuum; and those who have used the penknife most radically have, like Emerson's builders, "wrought in a sad sincerity." We have passed the Omar Khayyám period of our pessimism, which only with gnashing teeth could say,—

" Ah love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits — and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

The subjectivism that now prevails is quite other; it is, however dimly, aware of dealing not with a sorry scheme of things but with a Fact of divine and transcendent bearings.

Nay, it is eager to welcome the supernatural as fast as this appears in motived and apprehensible guise; there is no objection to our humanity's containing all the divine it can bear. Only, its divine must also be human, with the marks of human reason, human motive, human verisimilitude upon it. So in reducing facts to a verifiable basis it is merely letting go to take a new hold, in order to build from its foundations a structure in which the rationally poised human mind can rest. The fact is sought not in cavil, but as an aid to faith and allegiance; and criticism, in its growing constructive temper, is not indisposed to let it "dispart, dispread" as fast as its meanings become cogent and clear.

Why then, with this integrity of motive, have we fallen upon such occultation of vision, making the age, in spite of its keenness of insight in some directions, apparently so color-blind in others?

The answer is suggested by a glance at the history of thought. I ventured a while ago to cite Bacon's remark about atheists, and to apply it by the substitution of a word to the present scientific mood. There is a sense in which it "maketh" that there were no supernatural; and scientific research, for the time being, is working in that sense. It is minded to ignore, or at least to attenuate, the supernatural in human acts; it seems to get along very well without it. And to many timid souls this looks like trying to get along without God, as if Bacon's atheism were resurgent. Has the age which has brought such a temper and tendency, brought also a supporting motive?

What is the supernatural that is thus evaded? In Bacon's time, we may note, there was no question of evasion or doubt. Atheism was downright frowardness. The Being thus repudiated was conceived of as wholly outside of na-

ture; a Person whose impact upon human life was either by way of tyranny or favoritism, and knowledge of whom was derived solely from an errorless Book and a rigidly deduced dogma. In men's faith was no sense of God's immanence, and next to none of Jesus' veritable humanity. The supernatural associated with such a scheme was a supernatural of magic and marvel, whose main appeal was to a diseased or pampered conscience. The more remote and unnatural it was, the more evidently divine. To deny the claim on conduct of a supernatural so extrinsic and arbitrary could be predicated only of a profane and presumptuous motive, of a mind depraved enough to be morally base and brave the risks. The effect in men's consciousness corresponded. While on the one hand such denial was shuddered at as the fury of a lost soul, on the other it made Milton's Satan heroic.

Times have changed since then. The sweet idea of divine immanence has nested in the hearts of men; so that now to deny God is to deny a Power and Love that work within, co-operating with noblest manhood. We cannot separate our cause from God without separating it from our truest self. This growing idea of immanence has had two effects. It has wrought to mix God more intimately with nature and its calculable laws, human nature included. It has wrought also to enhance man's realization of his own intrinsic dignity, so that the sense of original sin and ruin, once a haunting obsession, is wellnigh lost. But what is found in its place is a new feeling of the human personality of Jesus Christ. He is the highest indeed, but the most human too. The feeling of his remoteness disappears. As men have stood at gaze before that historic fact, their sense withdrawn from eternity to time, he too has become immanent, naturalized in the ideals of the race; his out-and-out humanity speaking for itself in

word and act. A welcome discovery this, a link between an old faith and a new—to find a Being so wise and pure and powerful involved, so to say, in the turbid fortunes of our human game. It makes every fact of his career a thing to be treasured and jealously guarded from alien alloy.

As divine immanence and human ideal thus drew together, with equal contribution from the seen and the unseen, the impact of the supernatural, which this involved, could not but be a storm-center of subjectivism. Men must learn, as it were, to breathe freely in the atmosphere of it. Time was needed for this element of immanence to colonize the outlying regions of the mind, driving out the crude aboriginal notions and setting up a homogeneous order of things. Meanwhile, here was this Gospel record alleging that the divine had come into the field of history, a life lived in human terms, a fact to be observed and recorded like all phenomena of sense perception. If the impact of the supernatural is a fact, surely no fact is more in need of sober record, none of more value to human history. What is there, then, in the report of it as such to make it look unreal, so that men are moved to disentangle it from the web of facts no better attested, and suspect it as an aberration or a fond invention? Why are men so reluctant to naturalize it as it stands?

The answer to this reveals both the good faith of the motive and a certain element of misfit to the large and unique conditions of the case.

The truth is, men's sharpened sense of an immanent divinity, and of their consequent share in the supernatural, has made them sensitive to the congruities of things. The subjective feeling of our time is by no means unfriendly to the supernatural. Only this must not come as a catastrophic invader thrusting itself in from without; not as a thing arbi-

trary, magical, thaumaturgic; but, as it were, springing up from the heart of the human and with human reason and powers working in it. The supernatural must not be the unnatural. And herein of course the age is right. It is right to guard the fact from alien alloy. Whatever we discover in that transcendent life of Jesus must be through and through such as we can appropriate and assimilate: the divine rather than the monstrous and magical, the humanly domesticated rather than the remote and withdrawn. It were no help to us that Jesus should cast himself from a pinnacle and exhibit an astonishing feat of levitation. Here, as I apprehend it, is the wholesome motive of this age of strenuous inquiry. With its enhanced sense of affinity with the divine which the feeling of immanence has engendered, coexists a correspondingly vivid sense of what the orderly manifestation of the divine should be. It is to a degree in a position to dictate terms. It insists on a supernatural that it can respect.

But—a supernatural that it can grasp and compass? A transcendence that does not transcend? That is quite another matter. Shall the Divine, deigning to dwell among us, bring his own unit of measure or submit wholly to ours? Who shall set the standard and limit of a life conditioned by such apprehended immanence?

Here is where, if anywhere, the prevailing method and spirit of research is fated to meet its Waterloo. Its worthy motive has brought it far, but not all the way. It does not exempt men from mistake or from a myopic incapacity to see the Fact as it is. It may still coexist with a self-imposed limitation which, in the exceptional case before us, makes results as inconclusive as if the motive itself were perverse. Hence the occultation that is spread like a caul over the modern spirit, the "blindness that in part is happened to Israel."

Here then is disclosed the misfit of which I spoke. It is postulating a residuum, an irreducible minimum, when the real Object before it is a creation, an illimitable maximum. It is taking the things of God in inverse order — toward the natural rather than toward the spiritual. Disguise it as we may, the fact is, this critical generation is caught and held in the undertow of evolutionism. Its undertow, I say; mark this. Until it is clear of this undertow and committed to its majestic over-current, it must needs be inconclusive. A remark of Chesterton's is pertinent here. "Evolutionism," he says, "(the sinister enemy of revolution) does not especially deny the existence of God; what it does deny is the existence of man." In place of man its biology has put an animal nature, and then projected this as a determining factor into the refining reaches of the regnant species. It virtually demands that we live up to the discovery that we are essentially animal until all that this involves has revealed — and exhausted — its potencies. But meanwhile from its biological reference this evolutionary solvent of life has passed on to the more spacious ranges of the human; has entered the field of history and manhood initiative; has set itself to explore "the abysmal deeps of Personality." Here the undertow of determinism is put to it to maintain itself. Evolutionism is slowly discovering that our animal derivation does not, of itself, hold the distinctive germs of manhood; and that no projection of mere species-development can rise to its height. Some new factor must be found which shall account not only for the mystic forces that work in human history but for the logic and prophecy of evolution itself. For the evolutionary tide itself must move on; it cannot belie its prophecy, cannot stop with the death of its highest species. And this factor is not animal nor psychical. It must be spiritual. In other words,

it is a derivative of the divine; free, vitalizing, creative, like the Power and Wisdom of the unseen. A divine germination has supervened upon the animal; and the history of the human species in space and time is its culture-medium; and its goal answers to its vital impregnation. Its course is the evolution not of the species but of the individual to masterful adult personality; its logic and prophecy not death but uprise to a higher grade of being.

So it has been from the dawn of time; registered in many a slip and struggle and bafflement, yet growing in clarity of revelation; until in the fullness of the time appeared an Individual, a Personality, whom the succeeding ages have adopted as the factual incarnation of this idea. Human as he was, and humbly human, they have even dared to call him divine. They have made his life the supreme Fact of history; his spirit the vital dynamic. And it is with this Fact, with its elements unique and general alike, that our critical methods have set themselves to deal. They are daring to subject it to the exactions of the higher evolutionary science; are sifting and retaining, in order to find its laws of selection and survival, as these work together toward its supreme law of motive and purpose.

We are at the point where two great visions meet. The logic of our evolution, on the one hand, baffled by the death and limitation of the species, demands for its continuance uprise to a higher grade of being. The prophetic soul of the wide world, on the other, has crept on in dreams and hopes toward the same goal. And now what do the Gospels report? Simply the consistent words and acts of the Son of Man, on his way from the lowliest station to that same resurrection and uprise. It purports to be the translation of the world's cravings and dreams into fact and reality. It gives all that the

eye can give, the phenomenon, the look of the fact, and leaves the rest to the world's growing recognition. Shall the fact thereby shrink to a thing naked and irreducible, or round out to a thing clothed in majestic meanings and illimitable? A penknife scratching at the records plays a small part in determining the answer; and leaves the possibility that what one generation erases the next will restore. The perennial task of the ages is not to make the fact as little as some myopic method's measure, but to lift themselves inch by inch to its largeness until manhood, molded in its likeness, can see it as it is. And when from that height men turn to look back on that far-away pioneer ministry in Palestine, the Fact in its nascent state and fitted to its place and time, what now look like accretions of glamour and fancy may appear as normal and integral. For it is not a thing dreamt of in a misty philosophy but wrought out in the limitless grace of One who came into the world to bear witness to the truth.