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A

REVIEW OF A PAPER

(Written by the ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY in 'Good Words,' May, 1875)

CALLED

“THE FALLACIES OF UNBELIEF.”

BY

WALTER LACY ROGERS.



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## A REVIEW OF A PAPER

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### “THE FALLACIES OF UNBELIEF.”

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THE Archbishop of Canterbury is well-known as a man of ability and attainments, and still more so as one of a liberal understanding, which early training and professional associations have failed to obscure, though they may occasionally bias. Any arguments, therefore, of his in defence of the Church over which he so judiciously presides must be full, not only of interest, but of influence. It is, indeed, only to be wished that a few more of those whom the Church has a right to look upon as her champions would, in an equally courageous manner, enter the lists of a public magazine in defence of doctrines which they affect to consider of more than vital importance, and not confine themselves to empty and unanswerable denunciations in coterie or church.

The Archbishop begins by giving a list of fallacies by which, as he affirms, sceptics have ended in unbelief. These he puts into the syllogistic form, and attempts to show where each fails, either through what is called “begging the question,” or the use of an equivocal term, *e.g.*,

“Nothing is to be believed which is contrary to experience.

Miracles are contrary to experience.

Therefore miracles are not to be believed.”

Of this the Archbishop says, “Whether or no they be contrary to the large experience of the history of all times is the very question at issue, and is denied by all who believe in them.”

Well, but it is *not* denied, except as to the miracles of our own Church. On the contrary, the premiss is admitted by the votaries of every religion, but in each case with an exception. The Archbishop would not condescend to discuss the subject of winking Virgins or St. Januarius's blood. He would say such things are contrary to all experience. Our Church discountenances relics of all kinds; but why? Might not the bones of a mediæval saint have as much power as the bones of Elisha? Our Church declares that miracles ended with the Apostolic Fathers, and have not occurred since; but why? Cardinal Manning would say, "that is the very question at issue, and is denied by all true believers."

Again. "Miracles are so unlikely that it is far more likely that those who report them have made some mistake than that the evidence for them should be sound. This is the very point in dispute. The evidence may be so strong that we can have no ground for denying its accuracy."

Of course it *may* be so strong as to overbear the conflicting argument of inherent improbability, but is this the case as to the miracles related in the Old or New Testament? The Archbishop does not say it is, and shows his wisdom by refraining from doing so. No evidence has yet been considered sufficiently strong to establish a miracle. The stories of the blind man cured by Vespasian, of the hundreds of our countrymen cured by the King's touch, are far better authenticated than any miracles said to have been worked by Jesus; and yet in such stories we believe the narrators to have been wholly mistaken.

"Nothing is to be believed which is incapable of scientific proof.

Christianity is not capable of scientific proof.  
Therefore Christianity is not to be believed."

Here the Archbishop points out the equivocal term is "scientific proof," and goes on to say that if by

scientific proof is meant mathematical proof, nothing but pure mathematics is capable of it, and that, unless we acted every hour of our life upon probabilities, the whole business of the world must stand still. Of course this is perfectly true, but then he adds that, as compared with the certainty attained by experiments relating to physical science,

"The proof offered for the truth of the Christian religion, when examined in all its details, produces in like manner the highest moral certainty which the subject admits, and therefore there is no real difference in kind between the arguments on which the conclusions of physical science are based and that result of all our examination of Christian evidence which pronounces the religion to be divine."

This is a bold, straightforward challenge. It will be observed that it does not put the claims of Christianity so high as some of its professors would like. It does not rely on inspiration, it attributes no merit to a childlike faith, it implies no denunciation of the iniquity of doubt—but says fairly and openly, "Feel, touch, and examine for yourself without prejudice, make fair allowances and look at the question from a broad point of view, and then I believe you will come to the conclusion that Christianity is a religion that a man of intellect may be proud to belong to." To this we shall reply later on.

But before he enters upon the task of proving the position he has taken up, the Archbishop, with less than his accustomed honesty and candour, goes out of his way to attack arguments, which lead to a total disbelief in the existence of a God, or the human soul. These may or may not be fallacies, but they are not arguments against Christianity—any more than they are against Mohammedanism—and we presume the Archbishop is not prepared to defend all religions against the "fallacies of Unbelief." It is, therefore, unworthy of him to say that "it is as easy

to conceive that the words of the Homeric poems jumped together accidentally and formed the tale of Troy, as that the plan of all this spacious universe, with its millions of adaptations for great and beneficent ends, has never had a planner."

It is the appreciation of "the plan of all this spacious universe" which travelling, and history, and science have given to this generation, that has made it so incredulous as to the story of its Great Creator, degrading Himself to play in an obscure corner of His dominions, and for an insignificant portion of His subjects, an unrecognised and unsuccessful part.

Reverting to the subject of miracles and dealing with the so-called fallacy that "God acts by fixed laws, and therefore miracles are out of the question," the Archbishop takes the opportunity of defining the miracle of inspiration:—

"When He wishes to produce some great results in the education and history of the human race, He does so by raising up from time to time great men of high intellectual or moral power, of commanding will or deep spiritual insight. Such men, of course, do not grow at random; neither are they the product of any fixed physical laws which we can unfold. . . . It seems that to send forth His messengers at intervals is an observed part of God's regular working, and it is maintained that there is the strictest analogy or even resemblance between such common commissions from God as bear about them the marks merely of a superior secular intelligence, and those other commissions of a spiritual nature, which characterise the inspired preachers of Revelation. Inspiration then may be a miracle, but it is such a miracle as is perfectly consistent with the higher laws by which the Great Moral Author of nature may be expected to act, and by which all experience proves that He is constantly acting."

By thus propounding a theory of Inspiration which will include Pythagoras and Plato, Faraday and Darwin, the Archbishop endeavours to disarm opposition. But if we admit the truth of all this, we must not forget that it is totally irrelevant. The fallacy lies in the meaning of the word "Inspiration,"—and what the Archbishop means by it, is quite different from what the Church means by it. The former means nothing more than "genius," which certainly does "not grow at random," neither is it "the product of any fixed physical laws which we can unfold." The latter means that God for the purposes of His Gospel did *not* "raise up men of high intellectual or moral power, of commanding will or deep spiritual insight," but men especially wanting in these characteristics, with which, however, they were subsequently and miraculously inspired, in complete antagonism to their natural character. Jesus especially thanked his Father that he had not revealed his great truths to the wise, but to the simple; and surely no description could be more unsuitable to those whom Jesus selected as his immediate followers, than calling them "great men of high intellectual or moral power, of commanding will, or deep spiritual insight." They are acknowledged in all accounts to have been simple peasants, not only unlearned, but incapable of being taught by the ordinary operations of the senses what they had to learn. They lived on terms of the closest intimacy with the Incarnate God, they witnessed the most prodigious miracles occurring over and over again, they listened while Jesus spake in public as never man spake, triumphed over all opposition, and put his adversaries to silence,—they had the "mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven" explained to them in private by God Himself—and yet at the end of three years they had no idea of the real character of their Master, no confidence in the Power which they had seen

so often and so easily exerted. No human impostor, no unsuccessful pretender in history, was ever so absolutely abandoned by his followers as Jesus was by the cowardly dullards with whom he had associated during his ministry. That these men should afterwards learn truths which the evidence of their senses had failed to teach them—that they should become martyrs for a Sentiment, long after they had despaired of the Reality,—that some of them should be able to relate with unerring precision occurrences which years before had made little or no impression upon them,—*that* is the miracle of inspiration, as defined by every party of the Christian Church. Believe it or not, but we defy any one to say that it is overstated,—and we hardly think it is one “perfectly consistent with the higher laws by which the Great Moral Author of nature may be expected to act, and by which all experience proves that he is continually acting.”

So far from being the theory of inspiration held by the Church, that propounded by the Archbishop is directly antagonistic to it. For, if the writer of the book of Joshua was inspired (as the Church says he was), so also was Galileo (according to the Archbishop), and then we have the absurd spectacle of one inspired preacher flatly contradicting another inspired preacher. It is necessary to reject the Archbishop's theory, for upon this comprehensive and charitable basis he proceeds to rear a fallacy grosser than any he has attempted to refute.

“Further, if inspiration thus holds its ground, being we grant a miracle in as far as though analogous to God's ordinary manner of working, it pre-supposes His direct interference for the spiritual edification of His people, what shall we say of other miracles—are they, *à priori*, probable or improbable?”

So that if we acknowledge the inventions of Watt



and Arkwright, we are bound to admit the miracles of Cana and of Bethany! To do the Archbishop justice his own reasoning does not impose upon himself, for, directly he begins to apply it, the weakness becomes too apparent and he changes his ground with awkward rapidity :—

"Or, again, we would take the one particular miracle on which all Christianity rests—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the hypothesis that God, acting in his usual way, desired above and beyond all former precedent to instruct and elevate mankind by the mission of the Incarnate Son, thus giving a revelation of Himself similar in kind but far higher in degree than any He had hitherto communicated through mere human agents—such a messenger with a miraculous commission must have been in His whole history unlike the common sons of men; for the reason of the case, quite independently of experience, would, we maintain, have led us to expect that death could not triumph over Him, therefore the consequent resurrection of Christ and the miracles of His life were to be expected."

Yes,—but if all Christianity (as the Archbishop says) rests upon this miracle, it will hardly do to rest the miracle upon a hypothetical Christianity. This is arguing in a circle with a vengeance! As this concludes the defence of the miracles, let us see again what it amounts to. The Archbishop first dilutes the theory of Inspiration so as to make it applicable to matters of common experience. He then dilutes the theory of Miracles till he brings it down to the level of Inspiration, and thereby proves that there is a sort of miracle which is not contrary to experience. This may do for a certain class of marvels which are not only superfluous to Christianity but even obstacles to belief; but obviously it will not do for those great miracles "upon which all Christianity rests," because, if the foundation be explained

away, what becomes of the superstructure? So the Archbishop gives up his former method of explanation, which, if true, should be universally true (for there can be no grade in miracles), and by presupposing Christianity, argues that such miracles are its natural effect. And concludes :

“Thus we approach the positive historical evidences for the truth of the Christian revelation and other miracles from a vantage ground, assured that whereas the fallacy we have been treating of takes for granted that they are impossible, all reason and all experience of God’s mode of dealing with mankind leads us to believe that they are on the hypothesis *à priori* probable.”

Next the Archbishop deals with the direct internal evidences of Christianity, and states fairly enough the objections of his opponents.

“Many human systems abound in maxims of pure morality,  
Christianity abounds in these maxims,  
Therefore Christianity may be human.”

But, says the Archbishop, Christianity not only abounds in these maxims, but Christianity acts up to them, and other religions do not. The writings of Seneca abound in such maxims. Buddhism and other Oriental Creeds vaunt the purity of their precepts. But compare the civilisation of the present day with that of Rome in the days of Nero the pupil of Seneca, Europe with Asia, Christianity with Mohammedanism, and see the difference! This is a very specious argument, and up to a certain age in a man a conclusive one. Its strength lies in its appeal to our self-conceit. Our blood, our climate, our harbours, our coal, or other circumstances to which natural philosophers attribute the superiority of Christendom are advantages which confer no merit upon ourselves. But if we have achieved our pre-eminence by the deliberate adoption, and shall main-

tain it by the preservation, of certain religious opinions, we have every motive that self-complacency and patriotism can supply for adhering to the faith of our fathers. But the day comes when the argument is seen to be an illusion. Immorality has flourished in high places at Rome and elsewhere, as rampantly in Christian as in Pagan times. Even of the third century, Mosheim, on the authority of Cyprian, Origen, and Eusebius, says of the Christian Ecclesiastics that "though several continued to exhibit to the world illustrious examples of primitive piety and Christian virtue" (as did several Roman Emperors), "yet many were sunk in luxury and voluptuousness, puffed up with vanity, arrogance, and ambition, possessed with a spirit of contention and discord, and addicted to many other vices that cast an undeserved reproach upon the holy religion of which they were the unworthy professors and ministers." *Eccl. Hist. cent. iii. Part II., chap. ii.*

Later on, we may add, the maxims of Christ had as much effect upon his infallible Vicar, Alexander VI., as those of Seneca had had upon Nero. And as for the comparison between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Mohammedanism, if it proves anything, it proves too much. If the divine origin of the religion has made Europe strong, why did it not make Asia strong? The religion is Asiatic by birth, it had at one time far more votaries there than in Europe, and yet it yielded to the human institutions of Mahomet. And why? Because to other causes,

"We may add the bitter dissensions and cruel animosities that reigned among the Christian Sects, particularly the Greeks, Nestorians, Eutychians, and Monophysites, dissensions that filled a great part of the East with carnage, assassinations, and such detestable enormities as rendered the very name of Christianity odious to many." (*Mosheim's Eccl. His. cent. vii. Part I., chap. ii.*)

So that if Mohammedanism makes Asiatics weak, Christianity must have made them weaker still, or they could not have been conquered by Mahomet.

If any result is to come from such comparisons, it must be by comparing contemporaneous events and persons. Compare Constantine the Convert with Julian the Apostate, and see which was the finer and purer and nobler character of two men, each of whom, in the early days of Christianity, made religion a motive cause of their acts and conduct? The Christians complained of being persecuted by the Pagans. As soon as the Pagans ceased to be strong enough to do so, did not the Christians persecute one another with ten times the cruelty and virulence which Paganism ever exerted against Christianity? Has any religion shed so much blood as Christianity? Was there in any Mahommedan or Pagan country in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries so cruel and wicked an institution as the Holy Inquisition? And, lastly, are the converts to Christianity (when the missionaries make one) in India, or elsewhere, better or only more hypocritical than the unconverted natives?

But, not content with refuting the fallacies of his opponents, the Archbishop goes on to establish the positive evidences upon which Christianity rests, and these he affects to divide into two parts:—

I. The History of the Religion.

II. The History of the Books of the New Testament.

[There is no valid reason for this division, because the history of the religion is written in the books of the New Testament, and nowhere else.]

“All the fundamental facts and doctrines which constitute Christianity are to be found embodied in the Apostles’ Creed, and this was the religion whose professors Nero tortured in the Amphitheatre, and about whom Pliny consulted Trajan.”

Surely this is a most unwarrantable assumption.

The only real authority for the torturing of the Christians at Rome by Nero is the disputed passage in Tacitus—and if this be admitted as genuine it will be clear that the Apostles' Creed had nothing to do with the persecution.\* Pliny's letter is still more questionable; and the passage in Josephus (which would really be most valuable) is not even claimed as evidence by the Archbishop. Where, then, do we get any trace of the “facts and fundamental doctrines of the Apostles' Creed” at this time? And it must not be forgotten that the Romans did not in the days of the early Emperors (if ever) persecute for religious opinions. On the contrary, every form of religion was represented and practised without molestation at Rome. By the time of Decius, Christianity had become the badge of a political party.

“No one nowadays, I suppose, will doubt that Christ lived and died, and that his followers immediately afterwards spread throughout the Roman Empire that Christianity of which the basis is the doctrine, life, and influence of one Jesus who was dead, but whom they affirmed to be alive. So that in the lifetime of those who had been companions of Christ you have Christianity fully equipped in all its simplicity and its fullness just as we have it now, and we defy all adverse critics to give any other satisfactory account of its origin than that which assumes its truth. This is what we mean by the historical evidence for the truth of Christianity independently of any critical examination of its books.”

But with all deference to the Archbishop, this is not “historical evidence for the truth of Christianity.” It is simply the witness which Christianity bears of itself, and that we know, on authority older than the

\* It may be said that this passage in Tacitus is confirmed by one in Suetonius (*Nero* 16.) But this latter is of still more doubtful character, and only says of the doctrine of Christianity that it was a “mischievous superstition.” What is there to prove that this meant the Apostles' Creed?

Archbishop's, is not to be trusted. So far we have not advanced a step on this branch of the subject, which, as we said before, cannot be divided. Nor has it been really divided, for all now depends upon the authenticity of the books of the New Testament; if this can be proved by internal testimony, the battle may still be won. How does the Archbishop do it?

“There are twenty-seven books in the New Testament; there is not one of them that does not teach distinctly or by direct implication the Christianity of the Apostles' Creed. If any one of them, therefore, can be proved to be genuine and authentic, we have the historical basis which we desire. Christ rose from the dead and is now living in heaven according to every one of them.”

Perhaps so, but the Apostles' Creed is a good deal more than this; and as to the twenty-seven books, if any one can be proved to be authentic, we shall have the historical basis which we desire of the contents of that book, but of no more. The meaning of the next paragraph we are wholly at a loss to understand:—

“God has indeed given us many books in the Sacred Canon for our greater security and for the more complete enforcement of the truth; but if He had given us only one we should have been in much the same condition as to our faith which we now occupy.”

This would seem to assert that, if all the Canon of the New Testament had either not been written or not come down to us, with the exception of (let us say) the Epistle of Jude or of James, we should have our Christian religion, including the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, as we have it now. Surely the Archbishop cannot mean this; but we can suggest no other explanation.

Finally, with a view to establish the historical basis which we desire, he recommends any person to study the subject for himself, and, “taking Paley or Lardner for his guide” (that is with a foregone con-

clusion in view), commence with the Epistles to the Corinthians and so go on from book to book until he at last finds that the cable of proof consists of twenty-seven separate cords, every one of which is sufficient in itself, and all of which together produce a chain which cannot be broken. If this would be the result it would be entirely owing to the guidance of Paley or Lardner. For if an impartial student undertakes the investigation, beginning with the two Epistles to the Corinthians and that to the Galatians (which all allow to be equally genuine), he will find no recognition of the Gospel histories as we have them, no mention, indeed, of any incident in the life of Jesus before the institution of the Supper. No marvellous birth, no miracles, indeed, of any sort. The Resurrection of the Epistles is quite a different thing from the Return to Life of the Gospels. The former is only the logical conclusion of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (such as most people accept) and was proved by the visionary Appearances, one of which was to Paul himself. Most people say of a beloved friend who has died that "he has gone to Heaven," and occasionally they fancy that he has "appeared" again on earth. So Paul says (1 Cor. xv. 16), "If the dead rise not again, neither has Christ risen." There is no carnal resurrection implied in one case more than the other. It is impossible to believe that Paul knew of the story as told in the Gospels, the whole of which was material to the doctrine he was preaching, when he never alludes to it. And as of the life after the Crucifixion, so also of the life before it: if Paul knew the Gospels, and thought the story immaterial, why should it be material now? Christianity as written to the Corinthians is a simple creed enough, and we defy the most acute theologian to prove the Apostles' Creed from it.

We need not go over the oft-trodden ground of

comparison between the Epistle to the Galatians and the Acts of the Apostles. Not only are the statements of the one as to the conversion of Paul contradictory of those in the other (and Paul in his own account takes a solemn oath of the truth of what he says), but the state of the early Church is quite different in the two accounts. In one, Paul is the humble assistant, whereas, according to the Epistle, he boasts of his own independence. Here, too, if Paul had ever heard of the Gospels or the stories told in the Gospels, how can we account for his impiety and presumption in withstanding to the face the Rock which Christ had selected to build His Church upon, and sneering at the Beloved Disciple and the Lord's Brother (Gal. ii. 6). Surely he never could have known these men's histories, or the grandeur which was in store for them—that they had lived in intimate companionship for three years with the Incarnate God, an experience which must have ever made them infinitely his superiors in their common Master's business—and that in the day of judgment they would sit on thrones judging Paul's countrymen, and perhaps Paul himself.

So far, then, from finding that the admission of the truth of one or two books solves the whole difficulty, we are obliged to confess that it is only then that the difficulty becomes insuperable; and that if we intend to believe the New Testament as a whole, we must not acknowledge any book in particular to be genuine or authentic. And this is the only way in which the belief of thinking, reading people is maintained. They find contradictory accounts in different books of the Canon—if any one were proved to be genuine and authentic, of course the others would be *pro tanto* untrue, and the writers untrustworthy. But until this proof has been effected, the readers are not bound to disbelieve any, and can fancy they believe them all.



As a building cannot safely be erected exceeding in its upper stories the area of its foundation, so it is impossible to build the Gospels upon the narrower area of the Epistles to the Corinthians. Suppose it be proved that Rome was at one time governed by kings, and that Tarquinius Superbus is a historical character, are we, therefore, to believe in Romulus and Remus?

And here we may return to the argument that because Christianity is incapable of scientific proof, therefore it is not to be believed, and endeavour to show what that argument (if such an argument ever was used) means. We cannot suppose the Archbishop has invented it, but he certainly has misstated it. We believe the meaning to be this. Every theory which claims our belief, must stand examination by the most critical tests that the science of the day can apply to the class of theories to which it belongs. Thus the statement that the two sides of a triangle are greater than the third is an abstract one, and capable of absolute demonstration, and upon such alone it is to be accepted. That the circumference of a circle bears a given proportion to the four sides of the greatest square that can be inscribed in it, is highly probable, and is contrary to no known conclusion, but until it can be proved mathematically it must remain a theory. Mechanical theories are capable of proof up to a certain point, but due allowances must be made for the imperfection of materials, atmospheric influence, &c. Lower down still, the guilt or innocence of a prisoner always depends upon probability. It is not possible to prove to demonstration that the witnesses are not wholly mistaken or perjured. And, therefore, in such cases our sense of justice is satisfied by probability, when that probability amounts to a certain standard, which is said to carry with it moral conviction. In the history of events long past even this moral conviction is always difficult and sometimes impossible to establish, and to properly sift and

arrange his materials so as to get nearest to it, is the duty of an historian, and the value of every history depends upon the way in which this duty is performed.

No one ever supposed the doctrines of Christianity capable of mathematical demonstration; no one ever supposed them capable of the amount of proof attained by mechanical experiments. But the story of Christianity professes to be an historical fact, and before it be accepted it must stand the test of historical criticism. Its inherent probability upon which the Archbishop of Canterbury lays so much stress is the inherent probability of an incarnation of Vishnu and no more. The wonders might have been done in India as well as in Palestine, as they might have been done in Tyre and Sidon, instead of Bethsaida and Chorazin. But the man Jesus, of wonderful birth, of marvellous power, of astounding eloquence, and of miraculous end, claims to be an historical character, and we are not bound to accept about him stories upon less evidence than we should the same stories about Julius Cæsar. Our materials are ample enough. We have four more or less complete biographies, and these profess to be by contemporary writers, who had the very best opportunities of seeing and knowing all that they record.

Now there are certain rudimentary canons of internal evidence by which the credibility of all history is judged, and by which alone it can be fairly judged.

I. The historian should feel and show that he looks upon in a different light:

- ( $\alpha$ ) Events which he had witnessed himself.
- ( $\beta$ ) Events of which he had heard immediately after they had happened from those who had seen them.
- ( $\gamma$ ) Events which he had taken from some other account, or derived from far-fetched tradition.

II. In every series of events there are certain

features more material than the rest, and however often the story be told these would never be omitted.

III. But in all histories of the same events each historian would make a point of relating what passed under his own eyes exclusively, and also what he alone had some exceptional opportunities of knowing from other sources.

Where either or both of the first two canons is or are found to be violated, the critic concludes that the history is not authentic; and, if the last be not observed, that the history is not genuine.

Now to apply these tests to the Gospels:—

I. The stories of the Baptist's nativity, the dream which sent the Magi home, the Temptation in the Wilderness, the speeches of members of the Sanhedrim, the conversation between Jesus and Pilate, the message from Pilate's wife, are told in exactly the same tone as the public discourses or open-air miracles.

II. By far the most striking miracle worked by Jesus was that of raising Lazarus from the dead. It is most material to the story because his career turns upon it. From that time the ecclesiastical authorities made up their minds that he should die. It was looked upon by Jesus himself as the great miracle of his career. Formerly, when his mother had suggested a display of his power, he had rebuked her; but now his hour was come. On this occasion only he prepared the spectators for the result. He began by offering a prayer, simply to create an effect, and then worked the miracle in a purposely theatrical manner. And why not? If his power and nature were to be proved by works of this sort, one can understand their being done in as public and effective a style as possible, so as to reach and convince the greatest numbers. But so little did three of the Evangelists think of the performance or their Master's motives that they never mentioned the miracle! The Incarnation and Godhead of Christ depend upon the circumstances attending the Concep-

tion. How can we account for two of the Evangelists omitting them altogether?

III. There were Apostles present on certain occasions when there were no other witnesses, for instance, at the grand climax of the visible Ascension. The event taking place either from Bethany or the Mount of Olives, within three miles of the scene of Jesus's degradation and death, was the most complete evidence of his triumph, not only over the grave, but over enmity and misrepresentation of all kinds. All the Apostles were present, and the evidence of their eyes was confirmed by the appearance and address of two supernatural messengers who appeared for the express purpose of assuring them not only of the reality of their loss, but of the eventual triumph of all true believers by the return of Jesus from Heaven. Two of these eye-witnesses wrote Gospels, and neither mentions the Ascension! It is impossible to suppose that Matthew considered the Resurrection conclusive, because he expressly says it was not (Matthew xxviii. 17). Again, there was an inner knot of three select Apostles, who, on three celebrated occasions, viz., the raising of Jairus's daughter, the Transfiguration, and the Agony in the Garden, were allowed to be present to the exclusion of the larger body. One of these select witnesses wrote a Gospel, and *in that Gospel alone* is there no mention of any one of those three scenes! Lastly, there was one Evangelist who had exceptional opportunities of hearing all the history of the nativity and childhood, from the only person competent to give it, and that was the disciple, who, from the hour of the Crucifixion, took Jesus's mother to his own home. How can we account for his silence on these subjects? Is it conceivable, that after the death of him, whose memory formed so close and binding a tie between these two, his wonderful birth and boyhood should not have been the topics of frequent conversation? The

importance of the Mother of Jesus was a plant of post-Evangelistic growth, but it is surprising to find her adopted son knowing and saying nothing of her. It is now universally believed that her name was Mary. Surely John ought to have known what her name was. But he never calls her by any, and implies that her name was something else, for he says that her sister was called Mary (John xix. 25).

We have thus endeavoured to show what is meant by saying that Christianity is incapable of scientific proof. It is apprehended that no evidence could survive such a failure under tests which, in any similar case, would be considered indispensable; but it may be added that, when more closely examined, these four independent biographies turn out to be merely disjointed statements (unsupported by exoteric testimony or any sort of evidence beyond that contained in their own records) written we know not when, by whom, or in what language. In some places these histories agree so exactly that it is impossible not to believe that they have been copied from one another or from some common source. In others they disagree so entirely that it is impossible but that some of them must be false. They contain statements of history that are not true, predictions which have not been fulfilled. The writers of them believed that the course of events was ordered by Providence so that certain old prophecies (many of which they misunderstood) might be fulfilled. They never claim for themselves the credit of eye-witnesses,\* and when they refer to any authority at all, it is merely that of oral tradition. The belief in miracles held by them is not merely in miracles worked by an instrument of God for a limited period and a special purpose, but in thaumaturgical exploits by

\* It is hardly necessary to point out that in John xix. 35 and xxi. 24, the claim is not made by the writer. Indeed the abrupt change of persons proves the passage in each case to be a clumsy interpolation.

casual performers for purposes utterly out of proportion to the power exhibited. They lived and wrote in an age which abounded in what is now called literary forgery; and works on the same subject as their own, written in the same style, and containing much of the same matter, have always been considered spurious, and are not supposed to possess a word of independent authenticity.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the representative of a numerous class of persons who try so hard to believe, because they are persuaded that with Christianity (be it ever so little true) is involved all that is good and noble in the world. They are men of little faith who cannot understand that He who created the Universe may very safely be left to take care of it, and that His ends cannot be forwarded by our little fables, however good may be their moral. The world goes forward—slowly it may be, but surely—getting wiser, and therefore better; while Christianity clings like a fly to its wheel, sometimes at the top, sometimes at the bottom, but always believing itself to be the propelling power of the whole machinery. The reverse of this, however, is true. As the Man is, so is his Religion. Where men are totally uneducated, Christianity is a mere fetish worship of crosses and relics, and, as the intellectual power of its votaries rises, Christianity is found to discard one absurdity after another, until it emerges at last a pure Theism, the love of One Father by all the members of one Family.