

Present Day Tracts

ON SUBJECTS OF

Christian Evidence, Doctrine, and Morals

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CONTENTS.



I.

CHRISTIANITY AND MIRACLES AT THE PRESENT DAY.

By THE REV. PRINCIPAL CAIRNS, D.D.

II.

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD.

By THE REV. PREBENDARY ROW, M.A.

III.

CHRIST THE CENTRAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

By THE REV. PRINCIPAL CAIRNS, D.D.

IV.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE LIFE THAT NOW IS.

By THE REV. W. G. BLAIKIE, D.D., LL.D.

V.

THE EXISTENCE AND CHARACTER OF GOD.

By THE REV. PREBENDARY ROW, M.A.

VI.

THE SUCCESS OF CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN EXPLANATIONS OF IT.

By THE REV. PRINCIPAL CAIRNS, D.D.



THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE
OF THE
RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST
FROM THE DEAD

BY THE REV. C. A. ROW, M.A.

Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral

Basis of the Argument.

FOUR Epistles of the Apostle Paul—Galatians, Romans, Corinthians I. and II.—are universally admitted by learned unbelievers to be genuine, and to have been written within thirty years after the Crucifixion.

Taking these Epistles alone, the writer shows the impossibility of a belief in the Resurrection having arisen, spread widely, been accepted without doubt, and becoming the foundation of the Christian Church, on any other hypothesis than the reality of the fact.

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

OF THE

Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead.



THE writers of the New Testament have staked the truth of Christianity on the actual performance of a single miracle—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection the sufficient proof of the truth of Christianity.

If, therefore, this cannot be proved to be an historical fact, it is a mere waste of time and trouble either to attack any other of the miracles of the Bible, or to attempt to prove their truth. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, all the other miracles, which are recorded in the New Testament, would not avail to prove that Christianity is a divine revelation. If He did, this one alone proves it; and is capable of supporting the weight of all the rest. As therefore this miracle constitutes the key of the Christian position, I challenge unbelievers to join issue on its truth; and invite believers not to allow their attention to be distracted to points of controversy, where the evidence is weaker, and which after all do not involve the real point at issue.

The proof of it carries with it all other miracles.

Challenge to unbelievers.

The treatment of the subject purely historical.

I shall treat this subject precisely as I would any point of secular history. I shall not ask the reader to believe that the New Testament is inspired. I shall use the Gospels, as I would any other memoirs. I shall claim no other authority for the letters of St. Paul than I would for the letters of Cicero. The reader, on his part, must not object that miracles are impossible; for whether they are so or not is a philosophical question which lies *outside the regions of historical inquiry*: and to assume that they are so is simply to beg the question which we are professing to discuss. In this tract I can only deal with historical evidence, not with *a priori* theories.

A priori theories ignored.

The resurrection rests on the highest form of historical evidence.

My purpose is, to prove that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact which rests on the highest form of historical evidence. In doing so, I shall assume that no one who reads this tract will deny the truth of certain facts, which are admitted by all the learned unbelievers of Europe; for to attempt to prove the truth of what they allow, would be a simple waste of time. I shall therefore take it for granted, that what such men as Strauss, Renan, Baur, and the whole Tübingen school of critics admit, those with whom I am reasoning will not deny. I shall assume then:

The facts assumed.

1. That Jesus Christ existed; that He collected around Him a body of followers, who believed in Him as the Messiah of popular expectation; and

that He was crucified by the authority of the Roman government.

2. That the three first Gospels were published in the form in which we now read them, not later than some time during the first twenty years of the second century; and one of them not later than the last ten years of the first century.

The three first Gospels.

3. That the four most important letters of St. Paul, viz., that to the Romans, the two to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians, were unquestionably written by St. Paul himself; and that the latest of them cannot have been written at a later date than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion.

The four undisputed Epistles of St. Paul.

4. That before the end of the first century, *i.e.* within seventy years after the crucifixion, Christian churches were to be found in all the great cities of the Roman empire.

Christian Churches in the Roman Empire.

If any of my readers should refuse to concede these points, I appeal from their judgment to that of all the eminent critical unbelievers of modern Europe, and say, "Do not ignorantly deny to be historical facts what all your own great men affirm to have been so."

The facts conceded by all eminent critical unbelievers.

The first point of my proof is that the Christian Church has existed as a visible institution, without a single break in its continuity, for a period of more than eighteen centuries; and that it can be traced up to the date which Christians assign for

The Church eighteen centuries old.

The date assigned by Christians the true one.

Its life after Christ's death due to the resurrection.

The resurrection a sufficient account of its origin.

its origin by the most unquestionable historical evidence. Its existence therefore is a fact, and must be accounted for. What account, then, does this great society give of its own origin? It asserts, and ever has asserted, that the cause of *its renewed life after the death of its Founder, was the belief not in any dogmas or doctrines, but in a fact—that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead.*

Now observe the importance of the fact that the Christian Church is, and ever has been, a visible community. All communities must have had an origin of some kind. The supposed designs of its Founder were cut short by His execution by the authority of the Roman government. Yet it is certain that the institution which He founded was set agoing again after His death. Its present existence proves this. The Christian Church asserts in all its documents that the sole cause of its renewed life was not that *its followers found a new leader, but that they believed that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.* This therefore formed the foundation on which the society was reconstituted.

But observe further, if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, this forms a rational account of the origin of this great institution. If the fact be denied, those who deny it are bound to propound some other rational account of its origin. We affirm that no other theory can account for it.

Let me illustrate the importance of the calling

into existence of a great historical institution, and of its continuous life up to the present time, as a proof of an historical fact. Let us take Mahometanism as an example. The church of Mahomet has existed as a visible institution since the seventh century. It affirms that it owes its origin to the preaching of Mahomet at Mecca, followed by his being acknowledged as prophet and king at Medina. The facts, as reported by his followers, are adequate accounts of its origin, and the continuous existence of the Mahometan church from the seventh century to the present day, forms the strongest possible corroboration of the fact, as it has been handed down by its historians, that its institution was due to Mahomet, and that certain occurrences, which his followers believed to have been real events in his life, were the causes of its existence. These events afford a rational and philosophical account of its origin.

Mahomet-
anism.

Its origin.

The facts
adequate to
account for
it.

The origin
of the Gos-
pels accord-
ing to unte-
liers.

But unbelievers have adopted a summary way of disposing of the question of the historical character of Christianity. In place of the account which has been accepted by the Church of its renewed life, they tell us that the three first Gospels consist of a bundle of myths and legends, interspersed with a few grains of historic truth, which were gradually elaborated in the bosom of the Christian society between A.D. 30 and A.D. 100. About the latter date, or shortly afterwards, three unknown persons

The date
assigned by
them.

The fourth
Gospel.

The histor-
ical reality of
miracles
denied by
unbelievers.

made a selection out of a large mass of these stories, and published them in the form in which we now read them in the Synoptics. These gradually superseded all the other accounts, and were at length accepted by the Church, as the authentic account of the actions and teaching of Jesus. The fourth Gospel they affirm to have been a forgery, which first saw the light about the year A.D. 170. I need hardly add that they also affirm that every miracle which is recorded in the Gospels is devoid of all historical reality, and owes its origin to the imaginations of these credulous primitive believers.

The early
belief in the
resurrection.

The Church
founded on
this belief.

My answer raises a distinct issue. Let it be fairly met. There is one of the miraculous narratives in the Gospels, which certainly could not have originated in this manner. This is the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: which, whether it occurred as a fact, or the belief in it was due to the hallucinations of His followers, or was invented as a fiction, was believed in by the Church as a reality within an extremely brief interval after its Founder's death. This belief was the foundation on which the Christian Church was erected, and the cause of its renewed vitality. Now I ask the reader to observe that if it is no fiction, but an historical fact, all the theories that have been propounded by unbelievers as affording an adequate account of the origin of Christianity fall to the ground, and the account

of that origin which has been uniformly handed down by the Church is the only one which will endure the test of rational investigation. In other words, Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

No other theory than the truth of the fact will endure the test.

As it is allowed to be an historical fact by all the distinguished unbelievers of Europe, that an eminent Jew, named Jesus, collected a number of followers, who believed in Him as the Messiah of Jewish expectations, I shall not waste time in proving that which no one possessed of competent information will dispute.

Now it is evident that His public execution must have utterly extinguished their hopes, that He could ever fulfil the expectations which they had formed of Him. Such being the case, the community which He had attempted to found, must have gone to pieces, unless a new leader could be discovered, who was capable of occupying His place. But as its existence at the present moment proves that it did not perish, it is certain that it must have made a fresh start of some kind,—something must have happened, which was not only capable of holding it together, but which imparted to it a new vitality. It is no less certain that this was not due to a new leader, who stepped into the place of the original Founder; but to a new use which was made of the old one. Our histories tell us that this new impulse was imparted to the society by the belief that He had risen again from the dead. Whether

The effect of the Crucifixion on the disciples.

The source of the new impulse they received.

The belief
must have
sprung up
soon.

this belief was founded on a fact, or was the result of a delusion, it is evident that it could not have occupied many years in growing; for while this was taking place, the original community founded by Jesus must have perished from want of a bond of cohesion adequate to maintain it in existence.

Evidence for
belief in the
resurrection.

This being clear, I now ask attention to the fact that we have the most unimpeachable historical evidence that this renewed life of the Church rested on the belief that its Founder, after He had been crucified, rose again from the dead. The proof of this must be derived from the four letters of the Apostle Paul, which all the eminent unbelievers of modern Europe admit to have been his genuine productions. As these letters form historical evidence of the highest order, I must draw attention to their importance.

Contempo-
rary evi-
dence inde-
pendent of
the Gospels.

It has been often objected by unbelievers, that we have no contemporaneous historical evidence. The first three Gospels, it is said, cannot be proved to have been written until seventy or eighty years after the events recorded in them, and the fourth is a forgery. I reply, that even if we allow this, *for the sake of argument*, to be a correct statement of the facts, which it is not, yet we are in possession of letters written by one who was both a contemporary and also the most active agent in founding the Christian Church. Now, contemporary letters of this kind are admitted by all

modern historians to be the most valuable of all historical documents. Of such we have an example in the letters of the great Roman orator and statesman, Cicero, which were collected and published after his death, about a century before St. Paul wrote his. They still exist, and it is not too much to say, that they form the most important documents which we possess, for giving us an insight into the history of Rome between B. c. 100 and B. c. 50. They contain a continuous reference to current events, in which the great statesman bore a part ; and they enable us to estimate the secret springs of the events of the time, and the agencies which brought them about, in a manner which we should utterly fail to do, if we had nothing to trust to but the ordinary histories of the period. It is true that we could not compose a perfect history from them alone. Their allusions to current events are for the most part incidental ; but the general facts of the history being known from other sources, they not only form the strongest attestation to them, but they enable us to form a correct estimate of their true character in a manner which it would have been impossible for us to do, if we had nothing but the histories to guide our judgment. In truth, Cicero's letters form the most important historical documents which have been handed down to us from the ancient world.

The value
of contempo-
rary letters.
Cicero's
letters.

Their allu-
sions to cur-
rent events.

A similar historical value attaches to all col-

Contemporary letters sought after by historians

lections of contemporaneous letters. Modern historians are continually hunting them up in every direction, as the best means of throwing a clear light on the history of the past. They are far more valuable as a means of discriminating truth from falsehood, than formal histories, even when composed by historians who were contemporaneous with the events. Such are frequently written under a strong bias, as, for example, Lord Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*. But the incidental allusions in letters frequently put us in possession of facts and motives, which have been carefully concealed from the world. This is especially the case in confidential communications between friends.

Histories often written under strong bias.

The importance of the admission of modern critical unbelievers.

It is therefore impossible to over-estimate the importance of the concession made to us by the learned critical unbelievers of modern Europe, that beyond all question we are in possession of four documents of this description, carrying us up to the earliest days of Christianity. The latest date which can be assigned to them is *twenty-eight years after the crucifixion*. These letters put us into direct communication with the thoughts of the most active missionary of the infant Church, and of those to whom the letters are addressed. Their character is such that they present us with a living picture of the entire man who wrote them—what he did, what he thought, and what he believed, with a fresh-

The latest date that can be assigned to the four undisputed letters.

ness, and a vigour, which is scarcely to be found in any other letters in existence. By their means we can hold direct communication with their author, and almost put him into the witness-box. They depict him as he lived, thought, and moved; and they render it indisputable that he was a man of the most unimpeachable veracity. It is of no little consequence then, that these letters thus admitted to be genuine, form the most important of those which have been attributed to the Apostle.

Our knowledge of the writer from them.

I rest my argument on these four letters alone. At the same time I must not omit to draw attention to the fact that no small number of eminent critical unbelievers admit the genuineness of four more; but the first four are amply sufficient for my present purpose, and I shall therefore rest no portion of my proof upon the disputed ones.

The argument rested on these four letters alone.

Having pointed out the value of contemporaneous letters, I now ask the attention of the reader to the fact that these four letters of St. Paul, were written within that interval of time after the date of the crucifixion, which the more rigid canons of criticism lay down as within the period of the most perfect historical recollection. There is no possibility of dating them eighty or ninety years after the events, as unbelievers for their own convenience endeavour to date the first three Gospels, in order that they may get time during which it might have been possible for a number of fictions

They were written within the period of the most perfect historical recollection.

The Apostles' memory good for fifteen years earlier.

to have grown up in the Christian Church, and superseded the genuine events of its Founder's life. Not only were they written *within twenty-eight years of the crucifixion, by one whose activity as a missionary of Christianity had extended over the preceding twenty years, but who was then of such an age, that his historical recollections were good for at least fifteen years earlier.* Although he had not seen Jesus Christ before His crucifixion, he must have conversed with multitudes who had done so, and had heard Him teach. In these letters, therefore, we are in possession of a contemporaneous record of the highest order, amply satisfying the strictest rules laid down by the late Sir G. C. Lewis in his great work on the credibility of early Roman history, in which he has rigidly analyzed the value of historical evidence. As the subject on which he treats is one purely secular, and he is usually considered to be very rigid in his demands for historical evidence, I refer the reader to this work with confidence.

Sir G. O. Lewis' rule of historic credibility.

A practical test.

Let us test, by our own practical experience, the value of historical recollections that are only twenty-eight years old. This period of time is three years less than the interval which separates us at the present year 1882 from the *coup-d'état*, which made Napoleon the Third emperor of the French. Our recollections of that event are so lively, that it is simply impossible that we could become the prey of a number of legendary stories respecting it.

The *coup-d'état*.
Our recollection of it.

Such stories can only grow up after considerable intervals of time, when the recollection of events has lost its freshness, and the generation which has witnessed them has died out. Let the reader observe then, that St. Paul, when he wrote these epistles, was separated from the crucifixion by an interval of time not so great as that which separates us from the event in question. Add three years more, and it will include the whole of our Lord's ministry.

The growth of legendary stories.

The latest possible date which can be assigned for the conversion of the apostle is A.D. 40, or ten years after the crucifixion. But this is far too late; and several concurrent probabilities fix it at five or six years earlier. St. Paul therefore had the amplest means of information as to what were the beliefs of the Christians at this early period; and must not only have had the most positive certainty respecting what it was, on which the renewed vitality of the Church rested, but he could not have failed to have known that his primitive followers also ascribed a number of superhuman actions to our Lord. Nor was this all. For some time previous to his conversion he had acted the part of the fierce persecutor of the Church. This fact we learn from his own pen. In acting this part, common sense would have suggested to him the necessity of minutely scrutinizing the tenets of the new society; and, above all, of investigating with the utmost care

The date of St. Paul's conversion.

His means of information as to the beliefs of Christians at the time.

His career as a persecutor.

He must have known the tenets of the Church.

the foundation on which it rested, viz., the alleged resurrection of its Founder. He must therefore have been fully cognisant of the beliefs of the Church in connection with this event; and as a vehement opponent, he must have done his utmost to expose any delusion respecting it.

What St.
Paul's Epis-
tles prove.

Having thus pointed out the value of St. Paul's Epistles as historical evidence, I will now state the chief facts which can be distinctly proved by them, and the nature of the evidence which they furnish of the historical truth of the Resurrection.

1. They make it certain that not only did St. Paul believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical fact, but that he considered it as the foundation on which the life of the revived Christian community was based. Whatever may have been urged respecting his references to miraculous powers possessed by himself, his references to the miracle of the Resurrection are of the most unimpeachable character. They are too numerous for quotation here; I will therefore only refer to one. In the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he expressly asserts that if the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a fact, Christianity is a delusion.

Christianity
a delusion if
Christ be not
raised.

2. His mode of reference to this event proves that he not only himself believed in it as a fact, but that he did not entertain the smallest doubt that those to whom he wrote believed it as firmly

as himself. He refers to it in the most direct terms; he also refers to it in the most incidental manner, as the foundation of the common faith both of himself, and of those to whom he wrote. He evidently calculates that they would receive his statements respecting it without the smallest hesitation. Now, nothing is more valuable than incidental references such as these to an event. They prove that the writer, and those to whom he writes, know all about it, and have a common belief respecting it. I ask the reader to observe how this is exemplified in the ordinary letters which we write. When we are of opinion that our correspondent is fully acquainted with an occurrence, we simply allude to it; without entering into a formal description of it; and we feel sure that our view of the fact is accepted by him. Such is the manner in which St. Paul refers to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ throughout these letters, with the exception of 1 Cor. xv. and Gal. i. and ii., where his reference is for purposes directly historical and controversial.

St. Paul's direct and incidental references to the resurrection.

The value of incidental references to events in ordinary correspondence.

3. But observe further: there are circumstances connected with these allusions which render this testimony stronger than any other in history. Party spirit raged fiercely in two of these churches. In the Corinthian church there were several parties, who were more or less adverse to St. Paul. He names three of them, viz., an Apollos party;

Circumstances that enhance this testimony in St. Paul's case.

Parties in the Corinthian church.

The party
who denied
St. Paul's
apostleship.

another, which professed to be the followers of St. Peter; and a third, which claimed in a special sense to be the followers of Christ. Besides these, he specifies a fourth party, which was especially attached to himself. One of these parties went to the extreme length of *denying his right to the apostolical office, on the ground that he had not been one of the original companions of Jesus*. No small portion of the second epistle is occupied with dealing with this party, and defending his own position against them.

The fact of
the resurrec-
tion admit-
ted by this
party.

Such being the state of affairs in this church, it is obvious that if the party in opposition to the apostle had held different views respecting the reality of the resurrection from himself, the demolition of his entire defence would have been certain. He puts the question, "*Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?*" I do not quote these words as evidence that he had really seen Him; but as a proof, that if his opponents had not been firmly persuaded that the resurrection was a fact, it would have been an unanswerable reason for affirming that his claim to apostolical authority, based on his having seen the risen Jesus, was worthless, because He had not risen. This reference also proves that the Petrine and the Christ party in this church, which latter doubtless claimed to represent the most primitive form of Christianity, must have been firmly persuaded that the original

apostles had seen their risen Master. It is evident, therefore, that as far as the fact of the resurrection is concerned, St. Paul and his bitterest opponents in the church must have been agreed as to its truth.

St. Paul's bitterest opponents admitted the truth of the resurrection

4. The evidence which is furnished by the Epistle to the Galatians is still more conclusive. Here there was a powerful party, who not only denied St. Paul's apostleship, but who had so far departed from his teaching that he designates their doctrines by the name of *a different gospel*. This party had been so successful, that they had drawn away a large number of his own converts. No one can read this letter without seeing that the state of things in this church touched him to the quick. It is full of the deepest bursts of feeling.

The Epistle to the Galatians.

Yet the whole epistle is written with the most absolute confidence that however great were the differences between his opponents and himself, there was no diversity of opinion between them that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus was the foundation stone of their common Christianity. Hear his words at the beginning of the letter: "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, *who raised Him from the dead*), and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia. I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from Him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel, which is not another

No difference of opinion about the resurrection in that church.

gospel ; only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."¹

St. Paul's challenge vain if he and his opponents were not agreed about the resurrection.

If St. Paul's belief and that of his opponents, on the subject of the resurrection, had not been at complete accord, no man in his senses would have thrown down such a challenge as that which is contained in these words, and also in terms equally strong throughout the entire epistle.

The testimony of two other churches involved.

5. But the evidence which is furnished in this letter goes far beyond the mere belief of the Galatian churches at the time it was written. It involves the testimony of two other churches, viz., that of the church of Antioch, and of the church at Jerusalem ; the one, the metropolis of Gentile, and the other of Jewish Christianity ; and carries us up to the briefest interval after the crucifixion. St. Paul's opponents were Judaizing Christians, who professed to be the followers of St. Peter and St. James. St. Paul, in the second chapter of this epistle, asserts that his teaching was in substantial harmony with that of these two great chiefs of the Jewish church. It follows, therefore, as their professed adherents concurred with him in believing that the resurrection was a fact, that these two apostles must have

St. Paul's teaching at one with St. James and St. Peter.

¹ Gal. i. (1-8). *Revised Version.*

been persuaded that they themselves had seen their risen Lord; and that the whole Jewish Church must have concurred with them in this belief. This same chapter also makes it certain that the entire church at Antioch did the same at the period when St. Peter and St. Paul jointly visited it, and involves the fact of St. Peter's direct testimony to the truth of the resurrection. This proves for certain that this belief was no late after-growth, but that it was coincident with the renewed life of the Christian Church immediately after the crucifixion.

St. Peter and St. James persuaded that they had seen the risen Lord.

The concurrence of the whole Jewish church in this belief.

6. Let us now consider the evidence furnished by the Epistle to the Romans.

The Epistle to the Romans.

If it be urged that St. Paul had founded the churches of Corinth and Galatia, and that even his opponents may have adopted his views on this point, this at any rate was a church which he had neither founded nor visited. It had evidently been in existence several years before he wrote his letter to them; and it was a church so large and important, that he felt that he was in no danger of being misapprehended when he said, that "*their faith was a subject of conversation throughout the whole world.*" It contained a large Jewish element; and from the number of strangers who visited the imperial city there can be no doubt that among its members must have been representatives of every variety of Christian thought. Yet he addressed

The composition of the Roman church.

The resurrection believed by this church.

the church with the fullest confidence, that its members held the same views respecting the resurrection as himself. This is set forth in the opening words of the epistle: "Declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead*;"¹ and the same truth permeates the entire contents of the epistle.

The concurrent belief of three large and widely separated churches.

We have thus fully proved, that within a period of less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion, three large churches, separated from each other by several hundred miles, were all of the same mind in believing that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead; and that this belief formed the sole ground of the existence of the Christian community. I ask the reader to consider how long it must have taken for such a belief to have grown up among churches *thus widely separated*. It is useless, therefore, to assert that the miraculous stories of the Gospels grew up gradually during the first century, and that they thus became mistaken for history, for our evidence is simply overwhelming, that the greatest of all miracles was implicitly believed in by the entire Church within less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion.

The belief could not have grown up within twenty-eight years if unfounded.

7. But further: this belief was not then one of recent growth. The mode in which allusion is made to it, proves that it must have been contem-

¹ Romans i. 4.

poraneous with their first belief in Christianity on the part of those to whom St. Paul wrote. Many of these, as we have seen, were Jewish Christians, who must have been very early converts, or have derived their faith from those who were. The allusions in the Epistle to the Galatians plainly include the testimony of St. James and St. Peter. We also find by a most incidental allusion in the Epistle to the Romans, that there were two members of that church who had embraced Christianity before St. Paul. The allusion is so incidental that it is worth quoting: "Salute Andronicus, and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also have been in Christ before me." Yet they were all agreed on the subject of the resurrection. St. Paul believed it from the time of his conversion, *i.e.*, within less than ten years after the date of the crucifixion. Andronicus and Junias believed it still earlier. Peter, James, and John also believed it from the first; for St. Paul tells us that he communicated to them the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles, and that they generally approved of it; and he informs us, in the fifteenth of the Corinthians, that both Peter and James had seen Jesus Christ alive after His crucifixion. The reader's attention should be particularly directed to the fact that in the Epistle to the Galatians he informs us, that three years

Many of the Jewish Christians early converts.

Converts before St. Paul.

St. Paul's conversion within ten years after the crucifixion.

His testimony concerning Peter and James.

St. Paul's
visit to Peter
and inter-
view with
James.

after his conversion, he paid Peter a visit of fifteen days, during which he was entertained by him, and that during this visit he had an interview with James. As it is incredible that they did not explain their views to one another respecting this fundamental fact of Christianity, we cannot therefore err in assuming that we have here the direct testimony of these two men, that they believed they had seen their Master risen again from the dead. It follows, therefore, that their belief in the resurrection was the foundation on which the Church was reconstructed immediately after the crucifixion.

St. Paul's
statement as
to the num-
ber of per-
sons who had
seen Jesus
after His
resurrection.

8. In the fifteenth of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul makes a very definite statement as to a number of persons who believed that they had seen Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead. He tells us that on one occasion He was so seen by more than five hundred persons at once, of whom more than half were still alive, when he wrote the epistle. Now, consider how, in making this assertion, he must have put himself in the hands of his opponents, if this fact was not generally admitted to be true. They might have put an end to his reasonings then and there by simply exposing the falsehood of such a statement. The attempt of unbelievers to escape the force of this fact by the allegation that the apostle was careless of inquiry into the truth of such stories is here quite beyond the mark; for they forget

Easily re-
futed if un-
true.

that it was made in the presence of those who would have been only too eager to expose his mis-statements if they had been able. But if these five hundred persons really believed that they had seen Jesus Christ after His crucifixion, how is it possible to account for so singular a fact, otherwise than on the assumption of its truth?

The testimony of the five hundred unaccountable if untrue.

9. But further: there were members of the Corinthian church, who affirmed that a resurrection of the body was, if not impossible, yet a most undesirable event; and that all that was intended by the promise of a Resurrection was a great spiritual change. Yet, with singularly defective logic, they admitted that the Resurrection of Christ had been a bodily one.¹ The apostle presses them with the following reasoning, to which I invite the reader's attention: How can you deny a bodily resurrection hereafter, when you admit that Christ actually rose from the dead? If the resurrection of Christ had not been the foundation of the faith of the Church, they might have made short work of the apostle and his logic, by simply denying the truth of the bodily Resurrection of our Lord.

The inconsistency of St. Paul's opponents in the Christian Church.

But further: this allusion proves that there were persons in this church who were far from being disposed to accept with eager credulity the story of a resurrection from the dead.

Many in the Corinthian church unwilling to accept the story of the resurrection.

The miracle of the resurrection neither a myth, nor a legend, nor hallucination.

Undisputed documents appealed to.

The points proved.

I have therefore proved, on the most unimpeachable historical evidence, that there is at least one miracle recorded in the Gospels, which is neither a myth, a legend, nor even a mental hallucination which slowly grew during the latter half of the first century, but that it was fully believed in as a fact by those who gave the new impulse to the Christian Church immediately after the crucifixion of its Founder; and that it formed the one sole ground of its renewed life. Let it be observed that I have foreborne to quote the testimony of the Gospels, because unbelievers affirm that their date is comparatively late. I have, therefore, simply made use of historical documents, the genuineness of which they do not dispute. It remains, therefore, to inquire whether it is possible that this belief could have been the result of some species of mental hallucination on the part of the primitive followers of Jesus, for this is the only possible alternative to its historical reality. But before doing so, let me briefly set before the reader the points which have been proved on historical evidence of the highest order.

1. That within less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion, the entire Christian Church, without distinction of party, believed that the one sole ground of its existence was the fact that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

2. That at that period there were more than

two hundred and fifty persons then living, who believed that they had seen Him alive after His crucifixion.

The points proved.

3. That the belief in the Resurrection was held in common by St. Paul and his most violent opponents.

4. That it is an unquestionable fact that the entire Christian Church believed in the Resurrection of its Founder, as the sole ground of its existence, within six or seven years after the date of His crucifixion.

5. That at least three of the original apostles asserted that they had seen Jesus Christ alive after His death.

6. That within a few months after the crucifixion the Church must have been re-constructed on the foundation of the belief that its crucified Messiah had been raised again from the dead. I say a few months, because if the interval had been longer, while the belief was growing, the Church must have perished in its Founder's grave.

Such being the facts of which the historical evidence is unquestionable, it remains for me to examine whether they are consistent with any other assumption than that the belief in the Resurrection was founded on a reality.

Are they consistent with any other assumption than reality of the resurrection?

Let the reader therefore observe that there are only three possible alternatives before us.

1. Either Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead.

The alternatives.

Alternative
assumptions.

2. Or the belief in His Resurrection was the result of a deliberately concocted fraud.

3. Or the original followers of Jesus were the victims of some species of mental hallucination. Other alternative there is none.

It will be unnecessary to examine the second of these alternatives, because it has been abandoned as untenable by all eminent modern unbelievers.

Two theories
propounded.

Two theories have been propounded as affording a rational account of the origin of the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus, on the assumption that it was due to the mental hallucination of His disciples. Of these the first is—

The theory
of Visions.

That they were so intensely enthusiastic and credulous, that some one or more of them fancied that they saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion, and that they succeeded in persuading the others that it was a fact. This theory is technically called the theory of Visions. It has been propounded in many forms, but that of Renan may be cited as a fair illustration of it, that Mary Magdalene, in the midst of her grief and emotion, mistook the gardener for Jesus, fancied that He was risen from the dead, and communicated her enthusiasm to the rest.

The theory
that Christ
did not die.

The second is, that Jesus did not really die of the effects of crucifixion, but that He was taken down from the cross in a swoon, from which He awoke in the sepulchre; that He succeeded in

creeping out of it in an exhausted state, in getting to a place of retirement, and died shortly afterwards; and that His credulous followers mistook this partial recovery for a resurrection from the dead.

I must ask the reader to observe, that to impart to either of these theories the appearance of plausibility, it is necessary to assume a boundless, I may say an amount of credulity that surpasses belief, on the part of the followers of Jesus. But when we ask that some proof should be adduced of the existence of this extreme credulity, the only one which is forthcoming is, that the Jews of that period were habitual believers in supernatural and demoniacal agency

An incredible amount of credulity needed to receive either theory.

I will deal with the second of these theories first:—

I allow that it was possible for a man who had been suspended for some time on the cross, if taken down, and carefully treated, to recover. This, we are informed by Josephus, happened to one of his friends, though it was the exception: for two out of three died under care. But in the case of Jesus, unbelievers must meet the fact that He was in the hands of His enemies, who, as a matter of course, would have seen to His burial as a criminal who had been publicly executed, and have thus put the possibility of His recovery in His grave out of the question. It is true that our Gospels

The theory that He did not die.

Difficulties
of unbelief.

inform us that Pilate surrendered His body to His friends; our sole knowledge of this fact is derived from their testimony, but unbelievers affirm that they are unhistorical, and they cannot therefore in this particular case claim the benefit of it. If, however, they accept the statements of the Gospels on this point they are bound also to accept their further assertion, that Pilate took care to ascertain that Jesus had actually died before he resigned possession of the body; and that it was afterwards consigned to a sepulchre, the entrance of which was closed with a large stone. But those who propound the above theory cannot help admitting that a sepulchre hewn in a rock, was a most unlikely place for a man who had been crucified to recover from a swoon, which could be mistaken for death; but even if this is conceded to be a possibility, they are met with the insuperable difficulty, of a man in this wounded and exhausted condition being able to get out of a place—the doorway of which was closed by a large stone—and then succeeding in taking refuge in the house of a friend, and there hiding himself from the eyes of his inveterate foes.

Admission of
unbelievers.

But as after the crucifixion Jesus disappears from history, except on the supposition that He rose from the dead, unbelievers are obliged to admit that He must have died from exhaustion shortly afterwards. Now it is certain that if He

left the grave alive He must have been kept in the closest concealment; for if those who had succeeded in procuring His crucifixion, had the remotest suspicion that He had done so, they would not have allowed Him to remain undisturbed, and consequently His disciples could not have ventured to have breathed a single word about a resurrection, until they had succeeded in conveying Him to some distant place of safety. This, as all practical men know, would have involved insuperable difficulties; and in this case one or more of the followers of Jesus must have been guilty of a conscious fraud.

Difficulties
of unbelief
insuperable.

But further. It is also evident that if Jesus lived in concealment, His followers either had access to Him or they had not. If the former was the case, it would have been impossible for them to have mistaken a wounded man's gradual recovery, for a resurrection; or one dying from exhaustion, for the Messiah of Jewish expectations. But if they never saw Him, the idea that they should have believed that He was risen from the dead, and on the strength of that belief, should have proceeded to reconstruct the Church on the basis of His resurrection, and that they should have succeeded in accomplishing it, is far more incredible than the belief that all the miracles recorded in the Bible were actual occurrences.

The dilemma
of unbelief.

The explanations of unbelief more incredible than the miracles of the Bible.

But a Messiah, who crept out of His grave,

The expect-
ations of
Christ's fol-
lowers.

The re-com-
mencement
of the Chris-
tian com-
munity.

Nothing but
the resurrec-
tion can ac-
count for it.

took refuge in retirement, and afterwards died from exhaustion, was not one who could satisfy the requirements of the community, which had been crushed by His crucifixion. His followers had fully expected that He was going speedily to reign, and lo, the cross was His only throne, and all expectations of a visible reign must have been crushed. Yet it is the most certain of historical facts, that the Christian community commenced a new life immediately after its original groundwork that Jesus was the Messiah of popular Jewish expectation, had been subverted by His crucifixion. Nothing but a resurrection, or something which could be mistaken for it, could have served the purpose. Something must be done, and that quickly, or the Church must have perished in its Founder's grave. It was necessary, therefore, that the old Messianic idea should be immediately reconstructed, if the instant dissolution of the Church was to be averted. The Church had before it the alternative of finding a Messiah on a new basis, or perishing. If it be urged that Jesus recovered from the effects of crucifixion, and lived in retirement ever afterwards, and that His disciples mistook this for a resurrection, I ask in the name of common sense, even if it is conceivable that there was a single disciple capable of such credulity, how long would such a belief take in growing, so as to be accepted by the entire body, and to be embraced by them with

such ardour as to cause them to proceed to the work of reconstructing the Church on its basis? The truth is, that the requisite time is not to be had for the growth of such a delusion, for while the belief was growing, the Church would have become extinct from want of any bond to keep it united. Is it credible, I ask, that any body of disciples could have been induced to believe that their Master was risen from the dead, without being favoured with an interview with Him, and that He was the Messiah, while He continued to live in retirement, in order that He might keep Himself in safety from His enemies, or that they would have ventured to proceed to the work of reconstructing the Church on the basis of His spiritual Messiahship, knowing well the opposition they were certain to encounter, unless they had been persuaded that they had received their Master's direct instructions to do so, and that He was able to impart to the attempt the probability of success? Credulity, however great, certainly has its limits, and such credulity as has been presupposed, exceeds the limits of the possible. But besides all this, the theory cannot be made to bear the least appearance of plausibility, without assuming either the incredible fact that Jesus must have mistaken His partial recovery for a resurrection, or the alternative that He lent Himself to the perpetration of a conscious fraud, with which

The Master's instructions necessary to account for what the disciples believed and did.

The limits of credulity

The consequences of the theory that He did not die.

not even unbelievers have actually dared, except by insinuation, to charge the Holy One of God.

The theory
of visions.

Let us now proceed to consider the remaining alternative, that the belief in the Resurrection was due to the followers of Jesus having, under the influence of mental hallucinations, mistaken certain visionary appearances, the creations of their overwrought imaginations, for objective realities; and in consequence of this that they became firmly persuaded that they had seen and conversed with Him after He had risen from the dead. Before doing so, however, let me draw the reader's attention to the all-important fact which is so habitually overlooked in this argument, that the historical condition of the case requires *that those who propound this theory, as affording an adequate account of the origin of the belief in the Resurrection, should not only account for the origin of this belief as a mere belief, but for the erection of the Church on its basis.* It is impossible too strongly to press this last part on the attention of unbelievers.

What it must
account for.

Let us however assume, for the sake of argument, that the original followers of Jesus were to the last degree credulous and enthusiastic, only observing that we have not one atom of evidence for the assumption. I am fully ready to concede that a belief in a certain round of supernaturalism is one which is very widely diffused among mankind; and that large numbers of marvellous stories

are readily accepted on little or no evidence. It is comparatively easy to get men to believe that they have seen ghosts, and still easier to believe that others have seen them. But there is one marvel at which the most profound credulity stumbles; viz., that a man who has actually died, has been seen alive, and conversed with in bodily reality. I doubt whether an authentic instance can be found of any one who has positively affirmed that he has seen and conversed with another after he was dead, not as spirit, but in bodily reality. The old pagans who accepted supernaturalism enough, would have scoffed at such a belief, as lying beyond the bounds of the possible; and would have pronounced any one mad who had affirmed that he had done so. I am aware that there are a few old pagan stories about men who had been brought back from the other world; but these were wisely placed by the poets in the remotest ages of the past. But in the present case history refuses to allow of any sufficient time for the story of a resurrection to have grown up in this gradual manner under shelter of the remote past.

What then is the fact with which in the present case those who deny the reality of the resurrection must inevitably grapple? It is none other than this, that several persons must have believed that they saw the risen Jesus within a few days or weeks after His crucifixion, and what is more, conversed with Him separately and in companies.

Credulity confounded by the evidence for the resurrection.

The claim to have conversed with a risen man in the body never made.

Old pagan stories.

The fact to be grappled with by unbelievers.

The amount
of credulity
demanded
by unbelief.

Let the reader imagine for himself the amount of credulity which would be necessary to enable a number of men and women to believe that they had not only seen and conversed with one who had been publicly executed at Newgate, and whose body was still close at hand mouldering in its grave, but who actually proceeded to found a society on the basis of that belief, and that society the greatest, the holiest, and the most mightily influential of all the institutions that have existed on this earth; and what is more, that they could actually succeed in the attempt.

The condi-
tions of men-
tal hallucin-
ations.

Three conditions have been laid down by those who have deeply studied the human mind, as necessary for the production of those mental hallucinations, which have resulted in causing subjective impressions to be mistaken for external realities. These are *pre-possession*, *fixed idea*, and *expectancy*. Now, nothing can be more certain than that, in the case of our Lord's disciples, these three principles, supposing them to have been existent in them, would have acted in a direction directly contrary to that which those who propound this theory as an adequate account of the facts above referred to require.

The pre-pos-
sessions of
the disciples.

1. Their pre-possession was all in favour of a Messiah visibly ruling and reigning, and most adverse to the idea of a crucified one. The very idea of a crucifixion dashed in pieces their dearest

hopes. Their pre-possession therefore ran directly counter to what this theory requires that they should have been, to have produced the requisite mental hallucinations.

2. Such fixed ideas as they possessed, instead of producing a visionary set of instructions from their risen Master, to re-construct the Church on the basis of His spiritual Messiahship, would have infallibly led them to see visions in conformity with the old Jewish Messianic conception. If fixed idea ever produces visions in credulous minds, these visions will certainly be on the lines of their old ideas, and will not generate new ones. Nothing can be conceived of as less revolutionary than "fixed ideas;" and therefore they will not aid us one single step towards the generation of the idea of a spiritual Messiahship, or to the reconstruction of the Church on its basis.

Their fixed ideas.

3. Of expectancy of a resurrection, the followers of Jesus certainly had none. The only possible ground for supposing that they had any would be the assumption that our Lord had predicted the event in the most express terms. But this unbelievers do not venture to affirm, for to admit it would be inconsistent with their position. Some mere general utterance, such as that if He was martyred, He would live again in the future success of His cause, is one far too general to produce that enthusiastic state of expectancy which would be

The absence of expectancy on the disciples' part.

necessary to create such visions of Him risen from the dead as could be mistaken for objective realities, it being remembered that all the while His dead body must have been at hand in the grave in the custody of either His friends or His foes:

The failure
of the vision
theory.

Hopeless, therefore, is the attempt to produce the requisite visions by the aid of either of these three principles.

It is easy for a student in his closet to invent the theory that Mary Magdalene, in the midst of her grief and dejection, mistook the gardener for Jesus, thought that He was risen from the dead, and communicated her enthusiasm to the rest; but those who have practical experience of the realities of things will be confident that this is much easier to say than to do. What! are we to be asked to believe that an enthusiastic woman succeeded in persuading a number of others that a person who had been executed only a few days previously, and whose body was close by in the grave, had appeared to her in bodily reality, and that they therefore accepted the fact, that He was risen from the dead, without further inquiry? Did they do so, I ask, without being favoured with a sight of Him themselves; or did they all, in the height of their credulous enthusiasm, take to seeing visions of the risen Jesus, and mistake them for objective realities, and all this while

Insurmountable
difficulties of
the vision
theory.

the body was close at hand in the sepulchre? What next are we to be invited to believe in the name of philosophic history?

Further. Is it to be believed that His disciples without authority from Him ventured to proceed to reconstruct the Church on the basis of a spiritual and invisible Messiah, in the place of a temporal and visible one, to make His person the centre of the life of the new system, and to lay the foundations of an universal Church in place of the old theocracy? This brings us into immediate contact with the whole mass of insuperable difficulties with which the theory of visions is attended.

I must once more draw attention to the fact, that it is necessary that those who affirm that the belief in His resurrection was the result of a mental hallucination on the part of the followers of Jesus, should account not only for that belief, but for the erection of the Church on the new basis of a spiritual instead of a temporal Messiah, and the other all-important changes in the entire movement which resulted from this change of front. I know that it will be urged, that His credulous followers fancied that, although His body still continued in the hands of either His friends or His foes, He had been taken up into heaven, from whence He would come again after a short interval in His visible Messianic glory. But the Church

What is to be accounted for on the theory.

The necessity of a thorough reconstruction of the basis of the original society.

The disciples believed they had instructions from the Master.

The disciples singly or in bodies must have seen several visions.

had in the meantime to be kept together ; and this could only be done by reconstructing the Messianic conception on which it had been based. However, days, months, and years elapsed, and no return of Jesus took place. A thorough reconstruction of the entire basis of the original society became therefore more and more urgently necessary, if utter extinction was to be avoided. But it is an unquestionable historic fact that, instead of dwindling away, it grew and flourished immediately after its Founder's death. The reconstruction in question therefore must have been actually effected immediately afterwards. Are we to be invited to believe that the disciples would have ventured on such a step, unless they had been firmly persuaded that they had received definite instructions from their Master to make the transformation, or that a body of ignorant fanatics, such as is supposed, had wit enough to invent the mighty change which has resulted in the erection of the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ, and in the influences which from thence have issued on the world ?

Let us return to the theory of visions. What then are we to be asked to believe ? In place of the acceptance of the Resurrection as a fact—a fact, be it observed, adequate to explain all the subsequent phenomena of the history of the Church,—we are invited to believe that the belief in it originated in the followers of Jesus seeing visions of their Master,

after His crucifixion, and mistaking them for realities. In that case they must have seen not *one vision, but several, not only singly, and in solitude, but in bodies.* St. Paul's testimony on this point is express, and his means of information must have been ample. Will any one, with his epistles in his hands, venture to affirm that he wrote what he knew to be an invention of his own? He tells us that he had private interviews with Peter and James, and also that both these apostles believed that they had private interviews with the risen Jesus. Is it credible that he did not get this information from them, when he actually abode for a fortnight in Peter's house, and had a personal interview with James? He also tells us that on another occasion he had an interview with at least one more of the original apostolic body, John; and he gives us the further information that the eleven apostles, when assembled together in a body, believed that on two separate occasions they had interviews with their risen Master. He also tells us that, on another occasion, He appeared to no less than five hundred in a body. Were all these visionary appearances? Did all the disciples take to seeing visions together, and to mistaking them for realities? When they thus imagined that they saw their Master singly, and in bodies, did not one of them ask Him a question; and, if so, did he get a visionary answer? Is it credible

St. Paul's
testimony
indisputable

His inter-
views with
Peter,
James, and
John.

Christ's ap-
pearances to
His disciples

Their inter-
course with
Him.

I ask, that circumstanced as they were, they did not ask Him what future course He was going to adopt; or, in event of His removal, what course it was His pleasure that they should pursue with respect to carrying on the work which He had begun? That they should have put to Him no questions such as these is simply incredible. To such questions they either got answers, or they did not. If they got none, the bubble must have burst then and there. If they believed that they got answers, they must have been all visionary ones; and this must have involved a whole set of visionary conversations.

Christ's in-
structions to
His disciples
in His inter-
views with
them.

The fact that the Church was reconstructed shortly after the crucifixion, renders it absolutely certain that the followers of Jesus must have believed that they had conversations with their risen Master, and that in these conversations He gave them His directions both to reconstruct the Church and as to the mode in which they were to do so; for, as I have said, unless they had believed that they had received such instructions, it is simply incredible that they should have ventured on the attempt, and have dared to refound the Church on the basis of His resurrection and spiritual Messiahship, and that too in the face of all the opposition they were certain to encounter. But if their belief in His resurrection was the result of an hallucination, then the instructions which they

believed that they had received, and on which they successfully acted, must have been mere visions, the creation of their disordered imaginations. What is more, they must have all fancied that they heard similar utterances, or else there would have been a diversity of plans.

To enable us to accept theories like these as accounts of actual facts, requires on our part more than all the credulity which unbelievers ascribe to our Lord's primitive followers.

The credulity of unbelievers.

But observe further: the belief in the resurrection was no idle belief, like that of a common ghost story or an ordinary marvel. Such beliefs begin and end in nothing; but this had an energy and power sufficient to reconstruct the Church in the face of the greatest difficulties and perils. It was therefore no sentimental belief entertained by individuals, who did nothing in consequence of it; but one which sustained the weight of an institution which has endured for eighteen centuries of time, and has acted more powerfully on mankind than any other known to history. This belief went on spreading, until within less than seventy years, it had firmly established itself in all the great cities of the Roman empire, and had shown itself capable of enduring the test of martyrdom. Where in history can be found an instance of a community which has been founded on the belief that a man who had been publicly executed, rose again from

The energy and power of the belief in the resurrection.

The duration of the Church founded on the belief.

The case without parallel in history.

the dead, and who was thus proved to be the King of the kingdom of God? Is it easy to persuade numbers of men and women to accept so astounding a fact? Where can be found an example of a great institution, which has lasted for centuries, which has wielded a greater influence for good, and a mightier power over the human mind than all other institutions put together, which has been erected on the foundation of a number of vulgar marvels?

Ghost stories
and spirit-
ualism have
done nothing
for men.

What, I ask, has the whole mass of ghost stories, marvels, and current spiritualism done to reform the world? We have heard much in these modern days of spiritualism, and its wonders; has there any great institution been erected on its basis, or is there any probability that there ever will? Are mankind, or any portion of them, the better or the wiser for its disclosures? To these questions there can be only one answer. Spiritualism, with all its alleged powers of penetrating into the secrets of the unseen world, and all similar marvels, have achieved nothing; they have made man neither holier nor wiser; nay, they have not effected a discovery which has enlarged the knowledge, or even made the fortune of any of its votaries. But respecting the Gospel of the resurrection, the great Christian missionary could write to those who had actual knowledge of the facts, in the first of his extant letters, dating only twenty-three years from

What the
Gospel of the
resurrection
has done.

the crucifixion: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, . . . for our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power; . . . and ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord; . . . and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus;"¹ and as he wrote to another body of his converts, only four years later, after he had affirmed that before becoming Christians they had been guilty of some of the foulest vices which can disgrace mankind: "And such were some of you; but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."²

The first of our three alternatives is therefore the only possible one. Jesus rose from the dead. If this was an actual event, it satisfies all the facts of history, and affords a rational account of the origin of the Church. No other theory does anything else but make boundless demands on our credulity in the name of an unsound philosophy.

I am now in a position to assign to the Gospels their proper place as historical documents. The above facts having been proved on evidence which is quite independent of their testimony, it is useless for unbelievers to affirm, as far as the Resur-

The only possible alternative.

The resurrection an actual event, and accounts for everything.

¹ 1 Thessalonians i. 3-10.

² 1 Corinthians vi. 11.

The Gospel-
history
established.

rection is concerned, that they were written by nameless authors, long after the events which they profess to record, for the truth of the Resurrection can be proved independently of their testimony. If, therefore, it is a fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the *a priori* presumption against their miraculous narratives, the existence of which is the reason why unbelievers pronounce them unhistorical, is destroyed; nay, it becomes far more probable that Jesus Christ wrought miracles, than that He wrought none. The Gospels, therefore, may be accepted for what they profess to be,—memoirs of the ministry of Jesus Christ, composed by their authors with the design of teaching the fundamental principles of Christianity.¹ Their accounts are fragmentary, but are substantial narratives of facts. They were not written for polemical purposes, but for the edification of believers.² It has been objected that their accounts contain narratives which it is difficult to reconcile with one another in minute details. I admit that such is the fact, and that this results from the peculiar class of writings to which the Gospels belong, viz., not regular histories, but religious memoirs; which class of writings do not profess to furnish us with a complete and continuous narrative.

The Gospels
true
memoirs of
Jesus Christ.

Written for
edification of
believers.

¹ See the preface to St. Luke's Gospel.

² This is a point which ought to be carefully noted by every student.

The last thing which occurred to their authors was to guard against the objections of opponents. In their accounts of the Resurrection, they satisfy all the conditions of the case. The events of Easter Sunday must have thrown the followers of Jesus into the greatest excitement. The accounts of them given in the three first Gospels are exactly such as we should expect from men and women under similar circumstances. They are broken, disjointed, without any attempt being made to weave them into a complete whole, yet, in all the main facts their testimony agrees, and they are fully corroborated by the more definite account of an eye-witness—the author of the fourth Gospel. This is exactly what they should be, if they contain the reports of genuine witnesses; and what they certainly would not have been if they had been written by men acting in mutual concert, and with the design of smoothing over difficulties, or answering objections. Let us hear on this point one of the highest authorities of modern scepticism. “It is useless,” says the *Westminster Review*, “to carp at small minor details. All histories contain variations, or if you like to call them, contradictions on minor points. This has been the case with every history that has been written from Herodotus to Mr. Froude.”

The Gospel accounts of the resurrection satisfy all the conditions of the case.

Exactly what they should be.

The testimony of the highest organ of scepticism.

Let unbelievers therefore join issue on the main facts of the Gospel history, just as they would

The issue for
unbelief to
decide.

with any secular history, and we will meet them. Above all, let them not carp at minor details about miracles; but let them join issue on the truth or falsehood of that great miracle, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the truth of which the writers of the New Testament have staked the existence of Christianity; for if its historical foundation can be proved to be baseless, the Christian Church must become a crumbling ruin. But if Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, Christianity must be a Divine revelation, notwithstanding all the objections which have been urged against it by unbelievers, or any amount of alleged discrepancies with which they charge the narratives of the Gospels.

