

in the light of Roman Law, but if he really found no fault in him on account of these claims, he is doubly guilty in decreeing his death. No doubt his declaration regarding Christ's innocence has relation solely to the requirements of Roman Law. He goes no deeper. We must. It is not competent for us to say he committed no act which English law would make criminal. We have a higher law. It is the law of God written on the heart. By our law if he were not the son of God and yet made himself such he ought to die—that is morally—he must be consigned to the Calvary in which outraged opinion crucifies all such characters. We can have no king who is either a wild enthusiast or a deceiver. Is it not blasphemy to say that God's best gift to man was tainted with madness, or corrupted with hypocrisy?

The controversy about Christ is not essentially changed. The same great question remains to be debated, Was he that which he claimed to be? It is important that we should see this, and that we should not be blindfolded by the assumptions made by the opponents of christianity, as though it were not a question of honesty or imposture. It is on this arena not that of the natural sciences that the main battle of the evidences is to be fought and won.

But here we are met in *limine* by the enquiry about the witnesses. As on the trial before Pilate they were false, so we are told they are not now to be depended upon. They deal in hearsays. We have not the testimony of the eye-witnesses. The gospels, it is said, can no doubt be traced up to near the age in which Jesus lived; but there is a number of years after his death in which the gospel was traditional. This region is inaccessible to the explorer. We cannot tell whether the stream of the gospel history here partakes more of the showers of heaven or the springs of earth; whether it flows from sources of fact or wells of wonder. Which of the Evangelists wrote first? What is the relation of their writings to each other? Have we indeed the records of those who saw and heard Him, or only of those who dealt in second-hand rehearsals? Are our Gospels by the authors

whose names they bear, or only according to the report of their reputed authors? Whence the curious coincidences and strange differences of the Synoptics;—whence, especially, the contrast between them and John? Instead of the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is asserted that we have that of certain persons after their death, using their names and influence to give substance and fixity to the gigantic shadow of Jesus which the imagination of a nation of wonder-lovers had raised and cast athwart the age. The biography of Jesus is thus a fanciful narrative, having a remote analogy to his real life. It is evident it will be only after a great deal of cross-questioning we will get at the real facts of the case. But in this we are greatly assisted by the critical school, Wolfenbuttel, Strauss, and others, who have set themselves to sift the false from the true, the fiction from the substratum of fact. If they had been as successful as pretentious, we should have had to thank them. Their labours, however, have been a failure. It could not be otherwise. The purely scientific faculty will ever fail to comprehend what is above the order of nature. But let us hear them. The problem they would solve is how much and what fact underlies this fiction. As they have decided that the miracle is impossible, every thing miraculous is rejected. The incarnation, the mighty works, the fulfilled prophecies, the resurrection, the ascension, are all to be attributed to the popular imagination; the residuum is a man of striking originality, biologizing influence, and elevated character; carrying captive the imagination by his fresh and charming discourses, curing diseases which specially depend on mental states, and by his vast popularity aiming at universal empire. As to the mode in which he came to be accredited with so many wonders—what more plain? In his own day, as usual in such cases, his doings were exaggerated. In the next age the proportions swell. The narratives, oral at first, when reduced to writing blend fact with fiction, and round off the real with the more charming ideal. The wonderful life must spring from a