

coincidence, fitness, purity, consciousness, all furnish testimony of the Divinity of the Bible.

I have lately comforted myself by gathering proof from the character of Jesus as the Evangelists have portrayed it—nay, I venture on a brief argument—a thing always dangerous before a popular assembly, but I will try to make it as *unargumentative* as I can. Here are four witnesses professing to write the same life. Every one admits that whether true or false the world never knew so touching and wonderful a story. But a higher question arises. *Is it Fact?* Some say to-day, the whole thing is *Forgery*. Some, less base—more harmful, affirm the ground to be of truth, but on which devotion, fanaticism, fancy, have piled their *wood, hay and stubble*; while others, historical critics as they call themselves, have discovered a subtle influence, by application of which they can at once sever false from true. These doctrines you will see are all distinctive of Christianity—Christianity founded on facts in the history of Christ. If the Evangelists *imagined*, or if they *deceived*, or if they *were* deceived; if Christ did not exist and act as they say he did, then Christianity is a fable—cunningly devised—but still a fable, a magnificent imposture, which has cheated a world.

The form in which the narratives are written are the simplest possible. There is no eulogy, no effort, no elaborate word-painting. The incidents speak, and the character glows from the real events of the life. It is not drawn. It draws itself. We are not told, or rarely, that he possessed certain virtues. The virtues are embodied and flash forth upon us from everyday-deeds in pure and beauteous light. It is not a life—a history, so much as a life-drama. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” The mind is said to have moral tact, like the antennæ of the insect, by whose fine discrimination it distinguishes the false and true. By universal verdict, readers, while they read the Gospels, feel they are true. If doubts come, they come afterwards, amidst the cool shadows of mistrust and reasoning. The bare outside facts are no mean arguments for historical truth. It is inconceivable that such story-tellers should have invented such circumstances, and such a career.

The Evangelists were Jews—with Jewish education, ideas, interests, habits, traditions. They expected a Messiah who should be a Prince—known to be a Prince. But Jesus was human and despised—obscure for thirty years, and public only for three—and then cut down by a death of cruelty and shame. Do you think that *impostors*, who had to make a hero, would have selected such a one? Would they have trampled on the prejudice of *Caste*, by making him a *mechanic*; on the prejudice of *Intellect*, by excluding him from the companionship of the schools; on the prejudice of *National Honour*, by making him die like a felon, leaving his work, to their eye, not even begun. Do you think that, each writing with a purpose, the one thing they would all most minutely record would be his shameful death? They do not all speak of his birth, not all of his transfiguration, nor of his ascension—things that would fall gratefully on Jewish ears—but they all speak of that death from which Jewish minds revolted in horror. No other death is so spoken of. In the Old Testament as in the New the deaths of men are given in briefest chronicle. We don’t know from the Bible that any of the Apostles died, save James, and his death is told in a word. Why this deviation? We, to whom the death of Christ is life, understand it; but on infidel suppositions it is a marvel not to be explained.

Infidels have often gathered to celebrate the downfall of the Bible, and in their premature triumph we have had the mimic lightning and the imitation thunder. But the Christ of the Gospel remaineth, and, as one has eloquently said, we shall never have to stand by an empty Gospel as Mary by the empty Sepulchre, and cry with aching hearts as she did—“They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.”

I have been led into this argument by the recent revival of some of the last century slanders; and I must say that in one aspect of it, I am glad that