

are supported cannot be tolerably accounted for by any hypothesis except that of their being true. And if they are once admitted, the antecedent improbability of many miracles less strongly attested is much diminished. Nevertheless nothing is more natural than that exaggerations and even inventions should be mixed in our biographies with genuine facts. Now the miracles of the baptism are not among those which are attested by strong external evidence. There is nothing necessarily miraculous in the appearance of the dove, and a peal of thunder might be shaped into intelligible words by the excited imagination of men accustomed to consider thunder as the voice of God. Of the incidents of the temptation it is to be remarked that they are not described to us by eye-witnesses; they may have been communicated to his followers by Christ himself, the best of witnesses, but we have no positive assurance that they were so communicated.

On the other hand, a retirement of Christ into the desert, and a remarkable mental struggle at the beginning of his career, are incidents extremely probable in themselves; and the account of the temptation, from whatever source derived, has a very striking internal consistency, a certain inimitable probability of improbability, if the expression may be allowed. That popular imagination which gives birth to rumours and then believes them, is not generally capable of great or sublime or well-sustained efforts.

Wunderthätige Bilder sind meist nur schlechte Gemälde.

The popular imagination is fertile and tenacious, but not very powerful or profound. Christ in the wilderness was a subject upon which the imagination would very readily work, but at the same time far too great a subject for it to work upon successfully; we should expect strange stories to be told of his adventures in such a solitude, but we should also expect the stories to be very childish. Now the story of Christ's temptation is as unique as Christ's character. It is such a temptation as was never experienced by anyone else, yet just such a