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THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY.

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THE effect produced by the teaching of Jesus and his disciples is, beyond question, the most momentous fact in history. If circumstances, such as the fusion of races under the Roman Empire and the distress attendant on the decline of the Empire, concurred, Christianity was the motive power. The conversion of Saul marks the greatness of the moral change. It is the proclamation of a new ideal of human brotherhood and purity of life. Here, if at any point in history, we may believe that the Spirit of the World, if the world has a spirit, was at work. If evil to a terrible extent as well as good has apparently flowed from the Gospel; if Christianity has given birth to priestcraft, intolerance, persecution, and religious war, as well as to some perversions of morality, it is because the miraculous elements, and the circle of ecclesiastical dogma which under the theosophic influences of the succeeding age formed itself around them, have been allowed to overlay and obscure the character and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

The author of "Supernatural Religion," after demolishing, as he conceives, the authority of the ecclesiastical canon, himself says of the biblical system of Christianity:

"It must be admitted that Christian ethics were not in their details either new or original. The precepts which distinguish the system may be found separately in early religions, in ancient philosophies, and in the utterances of the great poets and seers of Israel. The teaching of Jesus, however, carried morality to the sublimest point attained or even attainable by humanity. The influence of his spiritual religion has been rendered doubly great by the unparalleled purity and elevation of his own character. Surpassing in his sublime simplicity and earnestness the moral grandeur of Çhākya-mouni, and putting to the blush the sometimes sullied, though generally admirable, teaching of Socrates and Plato and the whole round of Greek philosophers, he presented the rare spectacle of a life, so far as we can estimate it, uniformly noble and consistent with his own lofty principles, so that the 'imitation of Christ' has become almost the final word in the preaching of his religion, and must continue to be one of the most powerful elements of its permanence. His system might not be new, but it was in a high sense the perfect development of natural morality; and it was final in this respect among others, that, superseding codes of laws and elaborate details of life, it confined itself to two fundamental principles: love to God and love to