

speaking biblical scholars on the opposite side to that which for my part I am compelled to take—compelled with some reluctance—Gott helfe mir ich kann nicht anders!—but with a very firm and increasing faith that the cause of Christianity and simplicity can only gain from its general triumph.

Our main object is to reach Jesus himself, as I have said. This however is not easy. Jesus never wrote a word, except that unrecorded one in the dust. We have no first hand reports of him by eye-witnesses. At least if our Gospels contain such, and I think they do, they are embedded in a mass of quite another character. Our material is scanty and for our present purpose, to make sure about Jesus himself, often quite dubious—not to be accepted without careful sifting. This is manifest even to the most cursory examination. Try to do what was once a favourite occupation—ever since the time of Tatian's Diatesseron ; try to construct a Harmony, as it is called, of the four Gospels. Few will ever attempt that task any more. We are all born now-a-days, or if not exactly born so we cannot help drawing in the habit, as it were, with the air we breathe—we are, one may say, born with such a general set and tendency of mind, that at the very outset we should be pulled up sharp, and forced to feel that in such an attempt we were engaged in an impossible business : the harmonizing of things which will no more harmonize than an acid and an alkali.

In the opening chapters of Matthew we have at the very threshold one account of the birth and infancy of Jesus. Mark and John have not one word to say on the subject. Luke takes it up, but gives us an account of his own differing almost in every single detail from Matthew's, and hopelessly irreconcilable with his. These two evangelists, though agreeing that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the son of Mary but not the son of Joseph, and the descendant of David though he could only have been so through Joseph in a way that would count, flatly contradict each other and other things in themselves in every other detail. According to Matthew the family of Jesus was settled in Bethlehem : they after-