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THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY.

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III. (*Conclusion*).

THE martyrdoms of the apostles, it has been said, are testimony of the miracles, since without the assurance of the miracles the pains of martyrdom would not have been faced. This history contradicts. To say nothing of the persecutions endured under Nero and Diocletian, when belief in miracles still lived, we have instances in abundance at the time of the Reformation of martyrdom undergone for the doctrine of the reformers, though no miracles were even alleged to have taken place. Nor are such cases confined to the Christian pale. The sect of the Babis in Persia has in recent times undergone the most cruel persecution, not only without the support of miracles but for a faith which Christians pronounce false. Servetus died for Socinianism, and Giordano Bruno for scepticism. St. Paul endured a life of martyrdom, but evidently it was for love of Christ and for the faith. That Christ had risen was an essential part of his faith, and it is in this aspect, rather than as a confirmatory miracle, that it presents itself to the mind of Paul.

No man of comprehensive mind, unless it be Renan in his dealing with the raising of Lazarus, has taken the miracles for creations of fraud. They are the offspring of a childlike fancy in a totally uncritical age. They are a halo which naturally grew round the head of the adored Teacher and Founder, as it grew round the head of every mediæval saint. That world teemed with miracle, both divine and diabolical. Jesus himself is represented as recognizing miracles of both kinds. He challenges his opponents to say, if he by Beelzebub casts out devils, by whom do their sons cast them out. Instead of a disposition to criticise, there was a dominant predisposition to accept. If in the country of Descartes highly educated men could believe in the miracles wrought at the tomb of the saintly Deacon Paris, how much more easily could Galilean peasants, or simple-minded disciples of whatever race, believe in the miracles ascribed, perhaps long after his death, to Jesus? Dr. Arnold asked whether it was possible that there should be myths in the age of Tacitus. The age of Tacitus was, but not the country; though even in the country of Tacitus miraculous signs attended the births or deaths of Cæsars, and Tacitus himself records miracles reported to have been performed by Vespasian in which, however, nobody believes. The Jews