



VOL. XXXII.

JANUARY 16th, 1905.

No. 6

## THE INCARNATION.

SEVERAL years ago it was said of an address on miracles which I gave here, that it was a beautiful way of taking more than half an hour to say nothing about the subject. The only exception I take to this criticism is to its suggestion that I had something to conceal. Now in connection with theological or with philosophical questions the only right aim is not to hide one's ideas, but to get an idea which is sufficient. An idea is like a picture with foreground, middle-ground and background, and just as we destroy the picture by transposing foreground and background, so we destroy the idea, if we put subordinate parts or fragments of it in the seat which ought to be reserved exclusively for the whole truth.

With regard to the Incarnation and every similar subject, it is well to notice and mark a distinction between interpretation of a fact, the bare fact and the whole fact, because there is always a danger of substituting either the interpretation on the one side or the mere fact on the other for the whole truth. In the case of Jesus e.g., trinitarians have made the mistake of substituting the interpretation for the whole reality; and unitarians have fallen into the opposite error of substituting the mere fact for the whole reality. An illustration or two will help to make my meaning clear.

An examination of the anatomy and habits of a dog proves that it is descended from the wolf, and this connection might be scientifically explained by the statement that the dog is the wolf's offspring. Now suppose we mistake such an interpretation for a literal fact, we would then maintain that a dog was actually a wolf's cub. That would be substituting the interpretation for the whole reality. On the other hand supposing that we find on investigation that the cub of a wolf is always a wolf and not a dog, and then foolishly imagine that such a bare fact is the whole reality we fall into the opposite error and maintain that the sentence, The dog is the wolf's offspring, is an untruth. Those who take the sentence, The dog is the wolf's offspring, and from that proceed to argue that the dog is in fact the wolf's cub, are, as we may call them, literalists or verbalists, while on the other hand those who maintain that the conception involved in the sentence, The dog is the wolf's offspring, is untrue to fact, may be called "actualists," or, if we coin a word, "factualists." "Verbalists" and "actualists," one of them seeing nothing but interpretation and the other nothing but the bare or naked event, both fail to discern the wide essential truth involved in the sentence that the dog is the wolf's offspring.