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THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY.

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It is surely incredible that divine Providence, intending to consign facts on the knowledge of which the salvation of man depended to particular writings, should not have placed the authorship and date of those writings beyond a doubt.

Not one of the four Evangelists claims inspiration. The author of the third Gospel seems distinctly to renounce it, putting his narrative on a level with a number of others, over which he asserts his superiority, if at all, only in carefulness of investigation. The Church, however, has treated all four Gospels as equally inspired. Papias, on the other hand, in the middle of the second century, seems to recognize no Gospel as inspired, holding that nothing derived from books was so profitable as the living voice of tradition.

There would be a natural and almost overwhelming temptation to scribe an anonymous and popular history of Christ to one of the apostles: and this would be done in an uncritical age without any thought of fraud. It is true that we accept without question the works of Tacitus and other ancient historians, though anonymous, as those of their reputed authors. But in these cases there was no temptation to false ascription, nor does it greatly signify who wrote the history, the facts neither requiring an extraordinary amount of evidence, nor being vital to the salvation of mankind.

Of some of the miraculous parts of the Gospel, such, for instance, as the Temptation in the Wilderness, and the Agony in the Garden, with the descent of the angel, there could be no eye-witnesses. Of the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception the only possible witness tells us nothing. It is hard indeed to see how we could have eye-witnesses to anything which happened before the calling of the apostles. Who can have reported to the Evangelist the canticles of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon? Here surely we are dealing with legend and poetry, not with historic fact.

Between the narratives of the different Gospels there are discrepancies which baffle the harmonists. Between the narratives of the Resurrection and the events which follow there are discrepancies which drive the harmonists to despair. There are contradictions as to the names of the apostles, the behaviour of the two thieves at the Crucifixion, the attend-