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ART. IV.—THE VALUE OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPELS TO THE MIRACULOUS.

A RECENT number of one of our periodicals which lends itself impartially to the discussion of opposite views regarding the claims of Christianity contained an article by Professor Huxley "On the Value of Testimony to the Miraculous," in which he gives an epitome of a book by Eginhard, the historian of the reign of Charlemagne, entitled "The History of the Translation of the Bodies of the Blessed Martyrs St. Petrus and St. Marcellinus." This "History" is a story of the removal of the relics of these two martyrs by the agents of Eginhard, and records an amount of lying and treachery, dishonesty and robbery, on the part of those who were engaged in getting possession of them, which would utterly shock and confound the moral sense of any who do not remember that the grossest crimes can be, and have been, done by the abuse of the sacred name of religion. Eginhard mentions also in his story that a girl was released from a state of demoniacal possession by lying on the floor of the church where the relics were deposited.

The Professor addresses himself to Protestants. He, of course, assumes that they will not believe the story of Eginhard, and his paper is a kind of *argumentum ad hominem* to them. If, he says, you disbelieve the story of the relics and the wonders related by Eginhard,

> a witness whose character and competency are firmly established, whose sincerity cannot be doubted, and who appeals to his sovereign and other contemporaries as witnesses of the truth of what he says, in a document of which a MS. copy exists, probably dating within a century of the author's death, why do you profess to believe in stories of a like character which are found in documents of the dates and of the authorship of which nothing is certainly determined, and no known copies of which come within two or three centuries of the events they record? . . . . If, therefore, you refuse to believe that Wiggo was cast out of the possessed girl on Eginhard's authority, with what justice can you profess to believe that the legion of devils were cast out of the man among the tombs of the Gadarenes? And if, on the other hand, you accept Eginhard's evidence, why do you laugh at the supposed efficacy of relics and saint-worship of the modern Romanists?

The Professor thus puts a Protestant on the horns of a dilemma. Either, he says, place no trust in the Gospels, or else believe all the fables of the Romish Church of the Middle Ages. If you do not do one of these, you are logically excommunicated.

We trust that we shall be able to show that the cases are not parallel, and that the dilemma does not exist. We will

make a remark first on the second horn of the supposed dilemma.

We are told that Eginhard relates his story with perfect frankness and calmness, as if there were nothing revolting to his moral sense in the deeds of his companions; he merely thinks that he has been rather shabbily treated by them. Evidently, then, Eginhard's belief in the miraculous power of relics did not instil into him any profound respect for the moral law. The possession of the relics was a thing apparently, in his opinion, far more to be desired than a character for honesty and just dealing. The authority of the eighth commandment was as nothing compared with the possession of such treasures. In fact, their possession would, we suppose, absolve him from all guilt, and preserve him from the ill-effects of a breach of any of the Ten Commandments. This seems to be in itself quite sufficient to condemn the belief in the efficacy of relics as immoral; or, if not in itself immoral, as tending to immorality, and erecting no safeguard against it.

And it further, to our mind, discredits the story of Eginhard altogether. For if his belief in the sanctity of relics made him callous and indifferent to roguery and dishonesty in others, may it not equally have rendered him indifferent to his own truthfulness in narrating the events? If the possession of such relics condoned for any amount of knavery in obtaining them, surely it may with equal likelihood have condoned for falsehood in relating evidences of their marvellous power. And the reputation of possessing them would naturally lead him to exaggerate this. If Eginhard's belief did not keep his "hands from picking and stealing," we fail to see why it should have kept his tongue or pen from lying, when the glory of his relics was enhanced by it, especially when those for whom he wrote would not be likely to question his statements.

We do not, therefore, see sufficient reason to believe in the story of Wiggo; nor do we think that the story of Eginhard adds anything in the way of proof to the "supposed efficacy of relics and saint-worship of the modern Romanists."

With regard to the other horn of the supposed dilemma—viz., the untrustworthiness of the Gospels—it is not difficult to show that there is no parallel between the two cases. In fact, the miracles of the Gospels have nothing in common with those of Eginhard, except the fact that both claimed to be supernatural.

In all cases of alleged miraculous events acknowledged to be spurious, which those who disbelieve the Gospel miracles are apt to put in comparison with them, there is usually left out of sight the important fact that these spurious miracles

are subsequent in date to those of the Gospel. A great discovery in the useful arts always has a crowd of spurious imitations; but the worthlessness of the imitation does not in any degree detract from the solid usefulness of the original discovery, or from the real merit of the discoverer. Why, then, should the spurious imitations of miraculous power with which the history of the Church of the Middle Ages is filled detract from the reality of the Gospel miracles which they strove to imitate?

It is not difficult to palm off miracles on credulous ignorance in behalf of systems already firmly established. It is quite a different thing to appeal to them in order to establish a new religion in the face of inveterate prejudice guarding an ancient religion. Yet this is what Christ and His Apostles did. He appeals to His miracles against the prejudices of the Jews, and declares it to be their crowning sin that they rejected Him in spite of them. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father."[1] Professor Huxley says:

> It cannot be pretended in the face of all evidence that the Jews of the year 30, or thereabouts, were less imbued with faith in the supernatural than were the Franks of the year A.D. 800. The same influences were at work in each case, and it is only reasonable to suppose that the results were the same. If the evidence of Eginhard is insufficient to lead reasonable men to believe in the miracles he relates, *à fortiori* the evidence afforded by the Gospels and Acts must be so.

That the Jews of our Lord's time believed in the supernatural we do not doubt. Whether their belief was as credulous and unintelligent as that of the Franks of 800, we shall afterwards see very good reason to question; but that "the same influences were at work in each case," is an entire misstatement of facts. The belief of the Jews in the supernatural did not make them believe in the miracles of Christ. So far from that, when they could not gainsay them or convict Him of imposture, they attributed them to Beelzebub. If there had been any flaw in His miracles, we may feel quite sure that their inveterate hatred and consequent vigilance would soon have discovered it.

The accounts of the miracles of Christ appear to us absolutely inexplicable, except on the assumption that He really wrought them as He claimed to do. If He really performed them, the narratives of the Gospels are perfectly intelligible.

[1] John xv. 22, 24. It is to be noticed that our Lord in this passage does not separate His *works* from His *words*, and seems rather to give precedence to the latter.

His character and teaching are fully in harmony with them, and they serve to illustrate and enforce the words which He spoke.

But if He did not perform them, then one of two explanations must hold good. Either He pretended to work them and deceived others, or He fancied He worked them when He did not.

If He pretended to work them, and did not, He was the "brilliant liar" that M. Renan represents Him, and His conduct is utterly at variance with that intellectual and moral greatness which all men—even those who are most hostile to His higher claims—agree in attributing to Him. And how He could manage to cheat prejudiced and hostile multitudes into the belief that He wrought them publicly and before the face of men, it passes the wit of ordinary human nature to conceive. If He pretended to work miracles and did not, both His conduct and that of the multitudes who believed in Him are equally unintelligible.

But if He did not pretend to work them, He must have fancied He had worked them before the face of the world, and the world must have fancied it too. He was then the "delirious enthusiast" which Strauss represents Him. How is such a character consistent with the self-possession, the calmness, the singular prudence, the absence of all traces of an ill-balanced mind—qualities which shine through the character and sayings of the historic Christ?[1] To conclude, therefore, one reason why we believe that the miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels were real is because the fourfold picture given to us of Him is utterly unintelligible to us on any other supposition.

Professor Huxley dwells upon and makes much of Eginhard's credit as a historian, when he has only matters of ordinary occurrence to relate, as in his "Life of Charlemagne," and contrasts it with his credulity and apparent innocence of the fact that his statements contravene probability when he has to do with the miraculous. In so doing, he of course insinuates that the Gospels, notwithstanding their plain, unvarnished simplicity and matter-of-fact narrative, may be equally untrue—at least, as regards their miraculous contents. But the Professor forgets that the age of Charlemagne was an age of intellectual darkness as compared with the age in which the Gospels were written. He says in the passage quoted above: "It cannot be pretended, in the face of all evidence,

[1] For a clear statement of this argument, see Rogers on the "Superhuman Origin of the Bible." The above paragraph is only a condensed summary of Appendix II. of that work.

that the Jews of the year 30, or thereabouts, were less imbued with faith in the supernatural than were the Franks of the year A.D. 800."

We should like to know what the "evidence" is on which Professor Huxley makes this comparison; and, in the absence of it, we venture to deny that there is any similarity between the two periods. At the time of the Gospel's history the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean was illumined with Greek civilization and culture. The works of Plato and Aristotle were known over all the region where the Christian faith was first preached. The time of our Lord's birth was the golden age of Roman literature. Cicero, the orator and philosopher, had died only forty years before, Virgil and Horace within twenty years before, Ovid and Livy died while our Lord was still a boy at Nazareth. It was therefore an age of great intellectual activity. The age of Charlemagne, on the contrary, was immediately subsequent to the invasion of the barbarians and their settlement on the ruins of the old Roman Empire, when all intellectual activity ceased for a time, ignorance prevailed, and men blindly followed the instruction of their spiritual guides.

The Bishop of London[1] has well described how the education of the world was retarded by the return to barbarism at the disruption of the Empire. The age of the Christian era and the classical period which preceded it was an age of great intellectual activity, corresponding in the life of a man to the meeting-point of the youth and the man—shall we call it the undergraduate period of the world's life? This is a time in a man's life when the intellect expands, and grows, and absorbs new ideas in a way it does at no other period. It comes in contact with a larger world of thought, and into collision with other minds as active as itself. It is forced to search deeper into the meaning of things, and to examine the grounds of the opinions in which it has been educated and which it has hitherto received without questioning. The period of Greek and Roman civilization corresponded to this in the life of the world. It was the time of the academic philosopher—who considered everything an open question—whose first idea when any truth was propounded to him was to sit down and try to find out what could be said against it, and when consequently every opinion put forth was subjected to the keenest criticism. That myths should have grown and become generally received at such a time is inconceivable. At the time of Charlemagne the world had returned to a state of childhood. This is the only rational explanation of the rise of the Papacy. The

[1] In his Essay "On the Education of the World."

Papacy, with its hierarchy, its ceremonies, its assumption of authority over men in the minute details of duty, arose because the new infant required to be held in leading-strings. Hence there was no questioning of authority: men believed what they were told by their spiritual superiors. And we fear it must be said that their spiritual guides told them a great deal that was not true, to increase their own power and swell the revenues of Mother Church.

To compare the two ages, then, is to compare semi-barbarous ignorance with intellectual enlightenment. It is not fair to compare the histories of our Lord with the wonderful stories of a semi-barbarous age. If the Professor had wished to make a fair comparison, he should have compared Him with a man who lived in an equally or more enlightened age—say with Socrates. We do not read of any miracles having been attributed to Socrates; and the reason we do not is obviously that he did not perform any acts which could be so called, and did not lay claim to miraculous power. If he had, the fact would certainly have been recorded by his admiring disciples. We do not see why the disciples of our Lord should have been more disposed to deify and attribute miraculous power—supposing there to be no ground for it—to their Master than the disciples of Socrates were to theirs; nor, if they did so, were they more likely to be believed in the first century after Christ than in the fourth century before. And we cannot understand why myths were not quite as likely to arise in the years succeeding the death of Socrates as in the generation who survived our Lord.

But Socrates *did* lay claim to something supernatural, and his followers have not failed to record it, and it has been universally believed. He used to say that he was divinely guided by a voice which made itself heard within him. This voice never spoke positively to urge him to a right action, but always negatively to restrain him from a wrong one. If it occurred to him when one of his friends mentioned to him what he was about to do, it was a warning for his friend to abstain. The same Divine power, he says, exercised paramount influence over his intercourse with companions. Towards many it was positively adverse, so that he could not even enter into companionship with them. Towards others it did not forbid, yet neither did it co-operate, so that they derived no benefit from him. There were others, again, in whose case it co-operated, and these were the persons who made rapid progress. Socrates was so accustomed to allow himself to be led by this voice, that when he did not hear it he always assumed that he was acting rightly. And this implicit obedience to the Divine voice was ultimately the cause of his

condemnation and death; since he expressly says in his apology that he did not hear the voice during the whole of his trial, and therefore knew that he was right in assuming the attitude he did towards his judges, and in refusing to name a fine, by paying which he might have been acquitted.[1]

We think Professor Huxley must have forgotten these facts about Socrates when he penned the following paragraph at the end of his article. He has been speaking of St. Paul and George Fox as being both believers in the "inner light." Fox was accustomed to say openly and publicly that the Lord spoke to him and by him, and Professor Huxley remarks:

> This modern reproduction of the ancient prophet with his "Thus saith the Lord," "This is the work of the Lord," steeped in supernaturalism and glorying in blind faith, is the mental antipodes of the philosopher, founded in naturalism and a fanatic for evidence, to whom these affirmations inevitably suggest the previous question, "How do you know that the Lord saith it?" "How do you know that the Lord doeth it?" and who is compelled to demand that rational ground for belief, without which, to the man of science, assent is merely an immoral pretence.
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> And it is this rational ground of belief which the witness of the Gospels and Paul, Eginhard and Fox, so little dream of offering that they would regard the demand for it as a kind of blasphemy.

Socrates, then, according to Professor Huxley, was "the mental antipodes of the philosopher." This sounds very much like a *reductio ad absurdum;* but it necessarily follows from Professor Huxley's statement.

Socrates was at the same time a "fanatic for evidence," and doubtless had a "rational ground for his belief." But I cannot find that he ever gave a definite answer to the questions, "How do you know that it is a Divine voice which speaks to you?" "How do you know that you are right in following its guidance?" Yet few will deny that he was right in following it, though he probably could not have given an answer to these questions which would have satisfied Professor Huxley.

And this suggests an answer to the question, Why should we believe the testimony of the Evangelists? Because they speak with demonstration and power to the heart and conscience of man as no other records do. They appeal to the spiritual faculty, and they speak with authority, which the conscience of man, deep down in his heart of hearts, cannot but acknowledge, however much his intellect may be exercised with questions of authenticity and date.

When Professor Huxley tells us that we know nothing certainly of the authorship of the Gospels, he makes a state-

[1] See Plato's "Apology of Socrates and Theages," Grote's Plato, vol. i., p. 434, and "History of Greece," chap. lxviii.

ment which, whatever his grounds for it may be, is thoroughly misleading. The question of the authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels—one of the most interesting, as he himself says, of literary and historical problems—has been fully investigated during the last half-century by critics, both friendly and hostile. All the light of the best intellect of Europe has been brought to bear upon it, and the result has been that the wild rationalistic guesses which agitated the world in the early part of this period have disappeared without hope of return. Criticism has restored the documents to a date very near that to which the Church has always assigned them, and has stamped her seal upon them as honest, intelligent, and substantially accurate accounts of that which they profess to relate. The history of the formation of the New Testament is marked in clearer outlines than it ever was before. The historical setting of the life of Him it portrays is vivid and clear. We know more than we ever did before of the social, political, and religious conditions of the age in which He lived. His character is drawn in sharp and clear outline, and His words are proved to be no mythic creations falsely attributed to Him by a later age, but the actual, living words of Him who "spake as never man spake."

We are thankful for these results of criticism, and we bid Godspeed to all honest critics in their further labours, in perfect confidence that their labours will serve to bring out in more vivid reality the "truth as it is in Jesus."

But we repeat that the authority of the Gospels, as the guide of our conduct and the ground of our hope, is not founded on disputed questions of date and authorship, but on their invaluable contents: on the picture they give us of the person and character, the life and death, of Him who was God in man. "We beheld His glory: the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So said St. John; and in the Gospels we behold that glory too, partly manifested forth, as St. John tells us afterwards, by mighty works, which were at once the credentials of His Divine mission, and served as object-lessons to illustrate and enforce His gracious sayings. His miracles were the fitting and natural attribute of the character He assumed as the Revealer of His Father. It would have been strange indeed if One who came to reveal things invisible, and to teach man things which he could not find out for himself, should have shown no sign that He possessed superhuman knowledge and power. It was only natural and appropriate that He who told of resurrection and eternal life should show Himself triumphant over death.

The miracles of our Lord must never be divorced from His teaching. The two are wedded together

Like perfect music unto noble words.

"The miracles," says Archbishop Trench, "have been spoken of as though they borrowed nothing from the truths they confirmed, but those truths everything from the miracles by which they were confirmed; when, indeed, the true relation is one of mutual interdependence, the miracles proving the doctrines, and the doctrines approving the miracles, and both held together for us in a blessed unity, in the Person of Him who spake the words and did the works, and through the impress of highest holiness and of absolute truth and goodness which that Person leaves stamped on our souls; so that it may be more truly said that we believe the miracles for Christ's sake than Christ for the miracles' sake. Neither, when we thus affirm that the miracles prove the doctrine, and the doctrine the miracles, are we arguing in a circle: rather we are receiving the sum total of the impression which this Divine revelation is intended to make on us, instead of taking an impression only partial and one-sided."[1]

The fact is, that the Professor begs the whole question when he calls the Gospels "stories of a like character" with that of Eginhard. The story of Eginhard, we have already said, is discredited by the worthlessness and immorality of its own contents. But the Gospels are witnessed to by the conscience to be true, for they picture to us Him who is the Truth; the Teacher, to sit at whose feet purifies the heart and saves the soul; the Lord, who alone is worthy of our supreme affection, and alone has authority to demand our absolute obedience; the Ideal of humanity, and the Pattern, which all the best and noblest aspirations of our human nature impel us to imitate.

C. R. Gilbert.

Art. V.—THE PROSECUTION OF THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

BY the courtesy of the Editor of the Churchman I am permitted to reply to the attack made in the May number, upon the Association of which I have the honour to be the Secretary. I feel naturally, and with more reason than Mr. Gedge could possibly do, the need of that charitable "allowance for want of literary skill" for which he asks; but I also

[1] Trench on the Miracles, chap. vi.