

# THE LIVING CHRIST

AND  
THE FOUR GOSPELS

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## PREFACE.

THE Lectures printed in this volume were delivered to the Carrs Lane congregation, at irregular intervals, during the winter and early summer of the present year ; the five first and the last on Sunday mornings, and the rest at the usual Thursday evening service.

For whom were they intended ?

Eleven or twelve years ago I was preaching at Augustine Church, Edinburgh, a few months after Dr. Lindsay Alexander, a scholar and theologian of distinction, had resigned the pastorate. As I walked home with one of the deacons after the morning's service, he said some very gracious things, which I have unhappily forgotten, about the sermon ; he also said some things, not so gracious, about the ministers who had served the Church since Dr.

Alexander's resignation ; these, owing to some unamiable intellectual peculiarity, I remember. "Sir," he said, "they have preached to us as if we were all Masters of Arts." That was an error which I was not capable of committing, and therefore I deserved no credit for avoiding it. For if a preacher does something to form the habits of his people, the people do almost as much to form the habits of the preacher ; and for thirty-seven years I have been the minister of a congregation in the heart of a great manufacturing community—a congregation in which there are never many Masters of Arts, although there are in it many men and women with an active, vigorous, and speculative intellect, and with a keen interest in public affairs and in current theological controversies. For such persons the Lectures were prepared, and they are published with the hope that they may be of service to persons of the same description in other parts of England.

In delivering the Lectures to a popular audience, it was necessary to repeat in several

of the later Lectures some things which had been said in the earlier. These repetitions are unnecessary in a printed book, but I have not found it possible to cancel them without reconstructing the whole argument.

To those of my readers who may wish to see the question of the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels treated with greater fulness, I recommend Professor Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament*, Dr. Westcott's *History of the New Testament Canon*, Dr. Lightfoot's *Essays on the Work entitled "Supernatural Religion,"* Dr. Wace's *The Gospel and its Witnesses*, Professor Sanday's *The Gospels in the Second Century*, and *The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief*, by my friend Dr. Fisher, of Yale (U.S.), to all of which books I gratefully acknowledge my own obligations.

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## LECTURE I.

### *THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE.*

#### I.

THERE are large numbers of people who suppose that modern Science and modern Criticism have destroyed the foundations of Faith, and who cannot understand how it is possible, in these days, for intelligent, open-minded, educated men to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It may perhaps be well for us to remember that more than a hundred and fifty years ago there were large numbers of people of precisely the same mind. They believed that, as the result of the great changes which had passed upon the intellectual life of Europe since the Revival of Learning, the Christian Faith was no longer credible, and that its power was finally broken. Butler, in the preface to his *Analogy*, published in 1736, says: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age,

this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

Throughout the seventeenth century an undercurrent of unbelief had been rapidly gathering, strength in France, in Holland, in Germany, and in England. To check it Grotius had written his *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, Pascal had projected the great work, the fragments of which are preserved in his *Pensées*, and Richard Baxter, who, I think, was the earliest English writer on the "Evidences," had written his *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, his *Reasons for the Christian Religion*, and his *More Reasons for the Christian Religion, and no Reason against it*. Towards the end of the century the hostile movement became so formidable, that Robert Boyle founded his famous lectureship for the maintenance and defence of the Faith against unbelief. The first of the lecturers was Richard Bentley, who, in 1692, discoursed on *The Folly of Atheism and Deism, even with Respect to the Present Life*—not a promising argument with which to meet those who were denying or doubting the supernatural origin of the Christian revelation. He was followed, year after year, by a succession of men, eminent in their time, and some of whom had extensive learning and great intellectual force; but the sentences which I have quoted from Butler show that, after the Boyle



lecturers had been lecturing for more than forty years, the assailants of the Christian Faith claimed the victory. The confidence of unbelief was as high when Butler wrote in the early part of the eighteenth century as it is now at the end of the nineteenth.

Then came a great change; and within sixty years the writings and the very names of the English deists were almost forgotten; the ponderous folios in which the first generation of Boyle lecturers lay entombed in public libraries were rarely disturbed, and were covered with dust;<sup>1</sup> and the fires of a great religious revival were burning gloriously in every part of the country. Faith was triumphant.

Now again, as in Butler's time, "it is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry." The temper with which all but the coarsest and least cultivated of those who reject the Christian Faith regard it is happily very different from what it was in the last century. They do not "set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule"; they

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<sup>1</sup> "We too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves free-thinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world. In a few years their few successors will go to the family vault of 'all the Capulets.'"—BURKE: *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. [1790.]

speak with respect, sometimes with pathetic regret, of the vanished illusions which once consoled the sorrows and sustained the courage, the hope, and the virtue of mankind ; but still they take it for granted that, "among all people of discernment"—or, to use the current phrases, among all cultivated men who are familiar with the best and most advanced thought of our time—Christianity, as a religion claiming to have originated in Divine revelation, is a lost cause.

Their confidence is not, I think, as firm as it was ten or fifteen years ago ; for they are beginning to discover that renewed and prolonged assaults on the Christian Faith—assaults from various quarters and sustained with great intellectual vigour and with all the resources both of the older learning and of the new sciences—have produced very little effect.

Fifty years ago, the discoveries of geology were supposed to be fatal to the inspiration of Moses ; and it was contended that, if fatal to the inspiration of Moses, they must also be fatal to the claims of Christ as Son of God and Son of man, the Lord and the Saviour of the human race. The assailants of the Faith were sure that at last they were about to be victorious ; among its defenders there was anxiety, anger, alarm. Ingenious theories were invented, illustrating the harmony between Genesis and geology ; but plain men felt instinctively that they were very much too ingenious to be satisfactory. Since that time, Christian scholars have given themselves

more seriously than before to the scientific investigation of the literature of ancient races ; and they are coming to the conclusion that, when the true nature of the earlier books of the Old Testament is understood, the objections to their authority suggested by the discoveries of modern science cease to be relevant. Meanwhile ordinary Christian people, who know very little about investigations of this kind, have frankly accepted all that the geologists have ascertained in relation to the antiquity of the earth and the antiquity of man ; but their faith in Christ is undisturbed.

More recently, the conclusions of Mr. Darwin concerning the origin of species, and especially concerning the origin of man, created similar excitement. At first, and when the boldness and grandeur of his theories were very imperfectly apprehended, they provoked more resentment than apprehension ; for they seemed to impeach the dignity of human nature. But the geological controversies had helped to discipline thoughtful Christian men to a new conception of the nature of Divine revelation and of the literature in which the revelation is preserved. As soon as it became apparent that the general conclusions of Mr. Darwin were sustained by the almost universal concurrence of the highest scientific opinion in Europe and America, most Christian people accepted them without hesitation—but with one necessary and reasonable reservation. It lies within the scope of the physical sciences to investigate the origin and history of the physical organization of man ; but

their resources and methods are at fault when they attempt to investigate the origin and history of his ethical and spiritual life. By no process of development is the transition from mere necessity to freedom conceivable. The region of moral freedom, and of religious faith and hope, lies beyond the boundaries of the sciences that deal with a world of phenomena governed by fixed and unvarying laws. These distinctions however remain unknown to the immense majority of Christian people. They are assured that the highest scientific authorities are practically agreed in accepting the great outlines of Mr. Darwin's theory of the origin of species, and they are also assured that this theory is irreconcilable with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Through popular magazines, through newspapers, through a thousand channels, they are informed that the old beliefs concerning the creation of the heavens and the earth, and concerning the creation of man and the fall of man, are finally destroyed : but they still rely on Christ with their old confidence for the remission of sins ; they still make His will the law of conduct ; they still pray to Him for consolation in sorrow, for defence against temptation, and for strength in duty ; and they still hope, through Him, for a glorious immortality. They are sure that the foundations on which their faith is built are firm and unshaken.

Assaults of another kind have been made on the traditional Christian beliefs during the last fifty years. Attacks on the historical trustworthiness of the Four

Gospels have taken a new form ; and the theories of their origin maintained by Strauss and by Ferdinand Baur have been discussed with great vigour all over Europe. The learning and the industry and the splendid intellectual vigour of Baur have produced a great impression on theological scholars ; but, if I may trust my own observation, neither the speculations of Strauss on the origin of the story of Christ, nor of Baur on the origin of the books of the New Testament have produced the general alarm that was created for a time by the discoveries of geology and their alleged conflict with the early chapters of Genesis, or by the theories of Mr. Darwin and their alleged conflict with the Christian conception of the origin and destiny of man. Forty or fifty years ago ordinary Christian people heard that an eminent German theologian had written a great book to show that the story of Christ in the New Testament was as mythical as the story of Hercules ; that the book had produced immense excitement in Germany, France, and Holland ; and that it had been translated into several European languages. They listened with astonishment, many of them with a certain scornful amusement ; but very few of them felt that this assault on the Christian Faith was at all formidable. Some years later they heard that another eminent German theologian was maintaining that most of the books of the New Testament were written in the second century, in the interests of conflicting parties in the Church, or to bring about a reconciliation

between them ; that they were the productions of unknown authors, who, to add to the authority of their writings, had attributed them to Paul and Peter and John and Luke ; that, to use the rough language of plain men, they were deliberate forgeries. Most Christian people listened to this account of the Christian Scriptures with indignation, and dismissed it as wholly incredible. It did not disturb their faith.

Nor has modern criticism on the Jewish Scriptures produced any general and enduring anxiety. The excitement which followed the appearance of the writings of Bishop Colenso, twenty or thirty years ago, soon passed over ; and there is something very remarkable in the indifference with which at the present time the majority of Christian people regard the whole critical controversy concerning the Old Testament.

I do not mean that these successive assaults on traditional Christian beliefs—assaults in the name of Science, assaults in the name of Criticism—have had no disastrous results. There are many persons who are convinced that the ascertained conclusions of modern Science and of modern Criticism are destructive of the authority which has been attributed both to the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, that the traditional opinions concerning the authorship and the dates of many of the books of the Old Testament are false ; and that most of the writings contained in the New Testament are spu-

rious. Or, if some of the extreme conclusions of the destructive criticism are not regarded as finally established, it is known that great names can be quoted for, as well as against, them. And as it is assumed that the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures are the foundations of Christian faith, that we must believe in the genuineness and historical trustworthiness of these ancient books, and even in their inspiration, before we can believe in Christ, they argue that, until these discussions are finally closed in favour of the traditional opinions, faith in Christ is impossible. The controversies have not, in any large number of cases, destroyed faith *where faith already existed*; but where faith does not exist, they appear to very many persons to create an insuperable obstacle to faith.

To such persons, if they are serious and well informed, there is something perplexing in the persistency of the faith of the great majority of Christian believers. Among those who remain Christian there are men whose intellectual vigour, patience, and keenness are equal to their own; men who are their equals in general intellectual culture, and who know as much as they know about the currents of modern thought; candid men; men who are incorruptible in their loyalty to truth; men who have a due sense of the immense importance, in relation to the higher life of the human race, of the questions at issue: *How is it that the faith in Christ of such men is unshaken?*

This is the precise question which I propose to answer in the earlier lectures of the course which I begin this morning. It is not my primary intention to state the reasons why those who do not believe in Christ should believe in Him, but to explain *why it is that those who believe in Him continue to believe*. This explanation however ought to show that those are in error who suppose that present controversies on the authority of the Holy Scriptures make a firm and settled faith in Christ impossible.

## II.

The substance of my first answer to the question why it is that those who believe in Christ continue to believe, may be given in a single sentence: *Whatever may have been the original grounds of their faith, their faith has been verified in their own personal experience.*

They have trusted in Christ for certain great and wonderful things, and they have received great and wonderful things. They have not perhaps received precisely what they expected when their Christian life began, for the kingdom of heaven cannot be really known until a man has entered into it; but what they have received assures them that Christ is alive, that He is within reach, and that He is the Saviour and Lord of men.

That they have received these blessings in answer to their faith in Christ is a matter of personal con-



sciousness. They know it, as they know that fire burns.

Their experience varies. Some of them would say that they can recall acts of Christ in which His personal volition and His supernatural power were as definitely manifested as in any of the miracles recorded in the Four Gospels. They were struggling unsuccessfully with some evil temper—with envy, jealousy, personal ambition—and could not subdue it. They hated it; they hated themselves for being under its tyranny; but expel it they could not. If it seemed suppressed for a time, it returned; and returned with its malignant power increased rather than diminished. They scourged themselves with scorpions for yielding to it; still they yielded. In their despair they appealed to Christ; and in a moment the evil fires were quenched, and they were never rekindled. These instantaneous deliverances are perhaps exceptional; but to those who can recall them they carry an irresistible conviction that the Living Christ has heard their cry and answered them.

The more ordinary experiences of the Christian life, though less striking, are not less conclusive. The proof that Christ has heard prayer is not always concentrated into a moment, but is more commonly spread over large tracts of time. Prayer is offered for an increase of moral strength in resisting temptation, or for the disappearance of reluctance in the discharge of duties which are distasteful, or for a