

CHAPTER II.

The Nature and Character of Jesus.

Before proceeding to the examination of the alleged miracles of Jesus, it is desirable that we form an established opinion in relation to his personal nature and character; for if we suppose him a mere man, we shall be the more ready to suspect that his alleged miracles were not real: on the other hand, if we give him a super-human nature, we shall be more inclined to believe the contrary. What evidence then is there, previous to his beginning to work miracles, that tends to shew that he was possessed of any other than a human nature?

We are told, in the first place, that he had a miraculous origin; that God (or the Holy Ghost) was his father, (Mat. i. 20-Luke i. 35), and Luke (i. 35) gives this fact as the reason why he was to be called the Son of God. But let us see whether this fact were so.

It is clear, on the one side, that if he had such an origin, no single human being could have had personal or absolute knowledge of the fact except his mother. Now, if we had the direct declaration of the mother that such was the truth, it would be idiocy to pretend that a fact, admitted to be contrary to the order of nature, and such as the whole world never witnessed before or since, ought to be taken as true, on the bare assertion of a single person, and of a person too, who, on the natural supposition in relation to her case, must have been under one of the strongest of all possible earthly temptations to deceive.

But we have not even her testimony at this point. We have only the simple declarations, made by two men (Mathew and Luke) more than forty years afterwards- men, who could not have personally known the truth of what they stated; who unquestionably never heard a syllable of the matter until thirty or forty years from the time when it was said to have occurred; who give us no account, either of the manner in which, or of the persons from whom, they obtained their information; and who differ widely in their account of the circumstances attending to their transaction- Luke relating many marvelous preliminaries of which Mathew makes no mention, although they are such as he too would likely to have related, if he had ever heard of them. Now he must have heard of them, if he had obtained his information of the principal fact from Mary, who was the only person that could have absolutely known the fact, if it were true.

It is evident, therefore, that each of these men took up some of the unattested stories, floating in that superstitious, credulous, ignorant, and deluded community, forty years after the supposed transaction.

After Jesus had begun to preach, many believed him to be a super-human personage, and it is easy to see that that circumstances alone would give rise, among those simple men, to many conjectures about his origin; and every one of his followers would be desirous to believe that it would be supernatural, and would, for the sake of thus believing, catch at the slightest suggestion, conjecture or circumstance, as sufficient evidence that it was so. Stories, thus originating, would at once circulate and gain currency among such a class of men as his followers were; and the marvelous character of the stories, instead of being an objection to their credibility, would only make them the more credible to the minds of those who were ready and

eager to believe anything supernatural, in relation to one, whom they considered the most marvelous personage that had ever appeared anywhere on earth.

But there is no ground for any pretence that he had a miraculous origin, unless he derived it in the particular manner related in the Bible; and in order to believe that he derived it in that manner, it is unnecessary to believe- what? Why, that Deity became physically a parent! (Luke i. 35). The verse is here simply referred to without being quoted; for it is fit only to be recorded with some of the fabulous accounts of the Jupiter of the ancients. [*1]

As to the miraculous occurrences at his birth, such as the appearances of angels in the air, &c. there is no more reason to believe that they actually took place, than there is to believe that those did, which are related to have happened at the birth of Mahomet—nor even so much (if there can be the slightest reason in the world for believing either); for those people among Christianity first spread, were probably even more simple and superstitious than those among whom Mahometanism first spread, and consequently such marvelous accounts, if equally untrue, would be more likely to gain currency among them than the latter.

But if the Bible itself contains more direct proof that the accounts about his origin, and about the supernatural appearances at the time of his birth, are both untrue.

If either of these circumstances had been true, his own parents must have preserved the remembrance of it, and would forever after, have looked on him as an extraordinary being. But the story, which is told of his conduct at Jerusalem when twelve years old, would, if true, entirely prove that, up to that time, they had not so viewed him. This story (Luke ii. 48 to 50) represents his parents as being “amazed” at seeing him in the temple; and when he asked them, “wist ye not that I must about my father's business?” “they understood not the sayings which he spake to them.” Now, if the accounts in relation to his birth were true, they must have forever after viewed him as Emmanuel, and must, of necessity, have understood what he meant by being about his father's business. So that either Luke's story of his origin and birth, or the one of his conduct at Jerusalem, must necessarily have been false, and if either of them to be false, the Bible is not a revelation from God. There is no room for reasonable doubt, that one story is as false as the other, and that these ignorant and simple biographers, who have related so many things, (of which these are a part,) that they could not have known to be true, even if they were true, picked them up thirty, forty, or fifty years after they relate them to have happened, from among the thousand unfounded ones, that would naturally be in circulation about him. [*2]

Again. If even the story of his conduct at Jerusalem alone had been true, he must from that time have been viewed with astonishment by his family, and regarded by them, as an uncommon being. If they had been (as they probably were,) as superstitious as the ignorant part of their countrymen generally, this single incident of his conduct at Jerusalem would have made him, in their eyes, an inspired man. Yet there is not, that I am aware of, the slightest evidence that, after this time, until he began to preach, they did so look upon him. On the contrary, there is the most direct proof that his brothers did not- for when he pretended to be able to work miracles, they tainted him with his pretensions, (John 7-3, 4 and 5) by telling him, if he could do such things, to show himself to the world, and also (evidently out of contempt towards him for the course he had taken) that no man, who sought to make himself publicly known, performed his miracles in

secret. This disrespect and contempt they never would have exhibited towards him, if they had ever been informed by their parents, (as they undoubtedly would have been, if the circumstances had actually happened, and that too for the very purpose of procuring him respect from them,) either of his having had a miraculous origin, of any remarkable circumstance attending his birth, or that he had ever exhibited to them any of that precocity, which he is related to have displayed at Jerusalem.

Furthermore, if God were ever to violate the order of nature, he would not be likely to do it unnecessarily—and an occurrence, such as that in which Jesus is said to have had his origin, must have been useless, on the supposition that men would act rationally in judging of its reality from the testimony of the only one, who could have had absolute knowledge of the fact.

Finally, Jesus was human in all his appearance, from his youth up; he is supposed to have labored like a man; he lived like a man, he looked like a man; his own brothers esteemed him as nothing but a man; *he was born of a woman*; and unless God were his father, he was a man, and nothing but a man.

But Christians say there is still other evidence—separate from the miraculous—which tends to sustain the divinity of Jesus. We are told by them that the moral grandeur and importance of the object, at which he is said to have aimed in his public career, is of this kind. Now, as it is possible that a mistake exists as to the nature of this object, some inquiry in relation to it is proper.

There has always been disagreement between the Jews and Christians, as to the real design of Jesus in attempting to gain followers in the manner he did. The Jews always contended—and they surely had the proper means of knowing—that he was only one of many, who started up nearly at the same time, and claimed to be entitled to reign over the Jewish nation as temporal, or perhaps rather as semi-temporal, semi-spiritual kings—as such kings, in short, as the one, whom the Jews, who depended specially upon the almighty to send them rulers, expected would, about that time, be sent to them.

It had been predicted, by those, whom the Jews considered prophets, that an extraordinary king, to be called the Messiah, would be sent to that nation.

What the particular terms of all the predictions were, need not be here set forth, since it is admitted by Christians that they were such, as the universal opinion, gathered from them by the Jews, to whom they were addressed, was, that this messiah was to be at least a temporal, though perhaps also a religious ruler.

It is admitted by Christian writers that, at and about the time of Jesus, a large number of persons appeared in Judea, who claimed to be the Messiah that had been predicted as about to come, and who went about attempting to gain adherents by pretending to work miracles, &c. [*3]

It is further admitted by all Christians, that the Jewish nation *en masse* looked upon Jesus as having the same object in view as these other pretended Messiahs; and it also admitted by many Christians, that up to the very time when Jesus was taken and crucified, even his own

confidential and immediate adherents, who, if Jesus had been honest towards them, must have known his real purposes, so far looked upon him in the same light as did the Jews, and in the same also as it is supposed to the followers of the other pretended Messiahs looked upon them, as to believe that he was aiming at the acquisition of the temporal government of the Jews. And yet Christian now say that it is reasonable to believe that Jesus, although he claimed to be the Messiah, aimed at an object widely different from what was universally expected of that Messiah, and at an object widely different from what, during the whole of his career, his own adherents supposed him to be pursuing.

Now it is clear that these admissions of Christians, as to what were, up to the time of his crucifixion, the ostensible designs of Jesus, and their pretensions as to his real designs during the same period, can be reconciled only by supposing, that, for so long a time, at least, he knowingly cheated and deceived the best, truest, and most intimate friends. It is preposterous to say—as Christians are obliged to do, in order to extricate their case from this dilemma—that these disciples were such dunces, (although that they were simple men I agree) that, for a year and a half or more, (the time he is supposed to have been with them), Jesus found it impossible to make them understand the difference between a being, who came to establish an universal religion, and one who came merely to govern, as a King, the little territory of Judea; because men so foolish as that supposition would make them, could ever have been educated so as even to be what some of these disciples afterwards became; and because also men could hardly be so simple as to be unable to distinguish between things so widely different.

It may be true, and probably is, as John says, (18-36,) that, *after his followers had deserted him, and he found himself in the power of his enemies*, he Pilate told that “his kingdom was not of this world;” but he appears to have been himself brought to that conviction just at that time, and solely by the fact that his former supporters had abandoned his cause, for he immediately add, “if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

But whatever may have been his opinion of himself, or whatever may have been his own ideas of the of the destiny for which he supposed God had designed him, after he was apprehended, the evidence is abundant as to what had previously been his purpose.

One important part of this evidence, that Daniel- the only one, I believe, of the supposed prophets, who mentions a Messiah by that name- had evidently described him (Chap. 9- 25, 26,) as one, who was to be the temporal king of the Jews, and Jesus, imagining himself to be this Messiah, would naturally try to fulfill the prediction by making himself answer the description as well as he could. And we accordingly find that he not only continually represented himself as the Messiah, but that there is also an evident attempt, on the part of his biographers to make it appear that he had fulfilled the predictions, which had been made concerning the Messiah.

Another piece of evidence, to the same point, is found in John, (6-15,) where it is related that the people, who followed him, wished then “to take him by force, and make him king;” a thing, that it would naturally seem, they never would have thought of, had he not intimated to them that he was, at some time, to become their king.

Another fact, which shows that he expected to have become the king of Jews, is, that he once rode from Bethany to Jerusalem in a very in a very triumphal and kingly manner, attended by a great body of men, who were shouting in a manner clearly indicative of their belief that he was a descendant of David, and was about to take possession of the throne which David had occupied. (Mat. 21-1 to 11. Mark 11. Luke 19-28 to 44. John 12-12 to 15.) Now if he did not intend to become their king at this time, as they expected, he was fraudulently sanctioning the mistake, under which he must have known they were acting, and must have knowingly led them on in a delusion. The only supposition therefore, that is consistent with his honesty, is, that he himself expected at this time to be made king.

It appears also (John 12-14, 15) that “it had been written,” that a king of Jerusalem should come to that city, “sitting on an ass's colt,” and Jesus at this time took pains to have all ass's colt obtained for him to ride on, (Mat. 21-1 to 7.)

John himself acknowledges (12-16,) that even “his disciples understood not these things at the first;” that is to say, at the time when they not only saw, but joined in, all this pageantry, they did not understand that they were paying homage to one, who was to be a spiritual king; and if they did not so understand, there can be no doubt as to what kind of a person they thought they thought they were honoring. So that Jesus, according to the express acknowledgment of his own advocate, must either have deceived this whole crowd of followers, or he expected at this time to have been made king; because the impression, that he was about to become their king, could not have become so universal, and continued so long, among this crowd, unless he had directly countenanced it. John indeed represents (12-16) that after “Jesus was glorified (or risen, as they supposed, from the dead,) they understood exactly what these which at the time of their occurrence, they did not rightly understand, must have meant. But this was an afterthought , on the part of the disciples, and is therefore good for nothing to the advocate of Christianity, although it enables the unbeliever to see how it was, that the re-appearance of Jesus after his crucifixion, (a thing for which they could not naturally account) turned the heads of his followers, and made them see every event, which had previously taken place, in a very different light from that true and natural one, in which they had viewed it at the time of its occurrence. After he was “glorified,” they “glorified” and spiritualized every thing that he had previously said or done, and, by so doing, they gave to this benighted world a Revelation fit for use.

When Jesus, in this triumphal rise, had come near to Jerusalem, (Luke 19-37 to 44) some of the Pharisees told him to “rebuke his disciples” (meaning undoubtedly, by ‘his disciples,’ the crowd generally who were attending him,) and they would be likely, under such circumstances, to say to him many other things, which his biographers would not choose to tell to us. But the fact that the Pharisees, who were among the principal men of the Jews, told him to rebuke his followers, shows that they had no idea of receiving him, and he was probably thereby convinced that he could not be made king, for he immediately falls into a lamentation for the fate of the city-not for the souls of the Jews, as he would naturally have done, had he designed to be only a spiritual redeemer- but for the fate of the city itself. He virtually says that if the Jews would have accepted him as their king, their city would have been safe; but now, he safe; but now, he says, that “its enemies shall cast a trench about it, and compass it around, and keep it on every side and lay it even on the ground,” &c. Now this is not the language of a purely spiritual teacher; it is precisely such language as we might reasonably expect to hear from a man, who wished to be the ruler of a

people, but ho, on being rejected as such, should endeavor to alarm their fears for the fate of their city. Or it is such language as we might reasonably expect to hear from a man so deluded as to imagine that he had been appointed by God to be the deliverer of a city, but, who, on finding that he could not become its deliverer, should suppose, as a matter of course, that it would fall into the hands of its enemies and be destroyed.

The desertion of Jesus, by his followers, furnishes an argument in support of the supposition that he attempted to be king of the Jews, rather than that he was a superior being. There was a time when he had a company, estimated at about five thousand, following him, (John 6-2, 10). Yet they soon began to leave him, (John 6-66, 67) and but a handful finally remained. Now it would be nothing strange that the followers of a man, who was attempting to make himself king of the Jews, should, after a little time, desert his cause; but it would be very strange if a Son of God should either be unable to make proselytes of all who should come to hear him, or should fail to keep them after he had once made them.

When he was finally taken prisoner, the universal charge against him was, that he had claimed to be the "King of the Jews." The people scoffed at, and insulted him, on that very account. They placed a mimic crown on his head, put on him a purple robe, and jeered him with "Hail, King of the Jews." How are these unanimous opinion of him, and sentiment towards him, to be accounted for, otherwise than by supposing him to have attempted to make himself a king? The answer is obvious- they cannot otherwise be accounted for.

Luke says also, (23-1, 2) that men declared before Pilate, that they had "found that fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar saying that he himself is Christ, a king." Yes, he even went so far as to forbid any longer his adherents to pay any tribute unto Caesar, and gave us reason why they should not, that he himself was a king, (their king). But Christians will probably say that these men did not speak the truth. And what reason have we to believe that they did not? Did any one contradict what they stated? No- everybody at the time acquiesced. Still, because they told a natural and probable story about Jesus Christ, instead of a marvelous and improbable one, they are not to be credited; because they made neither a God, nor a Son of God, out of "this fellow," they must be set down as "false witnesses;" because there were several, who said that they heard the same language, they must all have conspired to destroy him by false testimony; because their statements corroborate, and are corroborated by, what had already become notoriously the public belief, they must of course be untrue; because, in short, these men testified against Jesus, instead of testifying for him, they are not to be believed. This is the kind of reasoning to which Christians must resort.

Jesus once told his disciples (Luke 22-28 to 30) in substance that as a reward for their fidelity to him through all the difficulties and opposition he had met with, he should give each of them a kingdom, and that they should "sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Now if he meant earthly thrones, he of course was himself to be an earthly king, for his language evidently implies that his twelve disciples were to be kings under him. His language is, "I appoint unto you, a kingdom as my father hath appointed unto me; that ye may drink and eat at my table, and sit in thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Observe, they were to eat and drink at his table at the same time that they were to be kings over the tribes of Israel; of course, if their thrones were on earth, his table must have been set on earth too and he must have been an earthly king.

But the Christian will reply that these thrones were to be thrones in heaven. Well, be it so—what then is the inference? Why, that they have kings in heaven.

The evidence already offered ought, as it seems to me, to be decisive; but there is one additional fact, which, if it do not prove that he attempted to make himself king, does, nevertheless, put it beyond a reasonable doubt, that, up to the time when he was seized, he had had no such object in view as Christians pretend. It appears (Luke 22-36, 37, 38.) that in the evening before he was apprehended, and after Judas had left the room under circumstances, which led Jesus to suppose that he was going to prove treacherous, he directed his remaining disciples to provide themselves with swords, evidently in order that they might be prepared for any danger, that might ensue. And when his disciples told him “here are two swords”- (an incident, which shows that after their affairs began to grow desperate, they kept swords by them) he assented to their taking them by answering “it is enough,” and it appears afterwards that the swords were accordingly taken. Now I suppose it can hardly be necessary to go into an argument, even with Christians, in order to prove that a real “Prince of peace,” a purely religious or moral teacher, or any Divine Being, just as he was about to offer up his life voluntarily for mankind, who would not be very likely to put swords into the hands of his followers. The single fact, that Jesus should ever authorize his followers to arm themselves with swords, brushes away, at a single sweep, all the subsequent conjectures and assertions of the ignorant, simple and deluded men, who followed him, that he intended only to be a moral or religious teacher. The confidence too, with which, when he was about to be seized, his disciples appealed to him with “Lord, shall we smite with the sword?” and the manner in which Peter rushed on and struck off an ear of one of the party, show that Jesus had given them other lessons than that of turning the other cheek also. Nor is the inference, naturally to be drawn from these facts, to be avoided by saying that Jesus forbade the further use of the swords, after Peter had thus employed his; because it is evident that he encouraged their use until he found the numbers against him too great to be resisted with safety. These circumstances show that his command to his disciples, to desist from further violence, was a matter of policy instead of principle.

There can be no doubt as to the fact, that this party had swords with them at this time, for it does not rest on the testimony of Luke alone. Mathew and John, who were of the twelve, and probably were on the spot at the time, both say that a man's ear was cut off with a sword.

It is clear, therefore, from these facts, that Jesus could not have been such a personage as Christians believe him to have been; and if he was not, it is of no consequence to us what he may have been, although the evidence may leave us in no doubt in relation to it.

Taking it for granted then, that the evidence has settled the question, so far as it was necessary to be settled, in relation to his object in his public career, we come now to another matter, to which Christians refer as evidence of his divinity, viz, the alleged perfection of his personal character. This point will be examined, although somewhat of his personal character has already been developed.

Perhaps the most conspicuous defects in his personal character were, 1st, his readiness to resort to subterfuge, when challenged to work miracles, by those who doubted his miraculous powers,

2d, his propensity to practice concealment; and 3d, his notorious cowardice. A few instances only of conduct, illustrative of each of these characteristics, need be referred to.

As evidence of his readiness to resort to subterfuge, when challenged to work miracles by those who doubted his miraculous power, the following cases are deemed sufficient.

On one occasion (Mark 8-11 to 13) when some of the Pharisees came to question him, and asked them how to show them a sign - apparently that they might judge of the justice of his claims to be the Messiah- he pretended to his disciples that these Pharisees were a very unreasonable set of men to ask such a thing of him, and said he would give them no sign, but left them and departed.

Mark says that their object was to entrap him, or to work some mischief with him- but how did Mark know that they had any other design than their question implies? The biographers of Jesus were very good at conjecturing reasons, finding apologies, and hunting excuses for the dastardly conduct of their master.

At another time, (John 2-13 to 21) when he had been attempting to drive the Jews from the Temple, and they had asked him, as they reasonably might do- what sign he could give them as evidence of his right to do so, the only sign he proposed to show them was this, that if they would destroy their beautiful temple- a thing which he knew of course they would not do- he would rebuild it in three days. It is possible to imagine an evasion more mean or contemptible?

John says that Jesus, in his instance, referred to “the temple of his body.” But if he did, he acted the knave outright, because he must have known that he was deceiving those whom he addressed.

Once (Luke 4-16 to 30) in his travels came to “Nazareth, where he had been brought up,” and where he was proudly known. He there told the people that he was the one who had been prophesied of, but virtually acknowledged that they had a right to expect that they would work miracles, for he said, “ye will surely say unto me, whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.” But as an excuse for not working any miracles, he made use of this despicable pretence, viz: that “no prophet is accepted in his own country”—innuendo, that it would be of no avail even to work miracles before those who knew him. It appears—putting the natural construction upon the remainder of Luke's story- that the people thereupon thrust him out of the place, dragged him to the brow of the hill, frightened him by pretending to be about to cast him headlong down it, and then let him go. And, in my judgment, he had no reason to complain of treatment he received.

On another occasion John says (6-30) that the people put the question to him directly, “what sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?” It appears, from the context, that these, men had taken much pains to find him, and had come from a distance to see him; and although their question indicates an intention to be convinced by nothing less than a miracle, they, at the same time, declare their intention to believe in him, the very thing he desired of all men,) if he would but work one plainly. In all this they asked nothing which was not entirely reasonable. They desired only that he should exhibit the credentials, which he professed to carry with him, as evidence of his authority. They, in fact, offered him just such an

opportunity as a real miracle-worker would have desired. But Jesus, instead of working a miracle, chose to talk about something else, about their motives following him, about his being “the bread that came down from heaven,” &c., and went on talking about one thing and another, that had nothing to do with the miracle which they had challenged him to work, until (John 6-60, 61, 66, and 67) the company left him in evident disgust.

I suppose Christians would say, as John says that Jesus intimated, (John 6-26) that he had already wrought miracles before them, and since they did not give him credit for them, it was not his business to go on working them. Now this apology is but a poor compliment to the character of his miracles, for it assumes that they did not convince eye-witnesses. But-leaving that consideration- how did Jesus know that these particular men, who had now come so far, apparently for no other reason than to ascertain whether he could work miracles, had ever before seen him work what he called miracles ? Besides, their question implies that they never had seen him work a miracle, and their declaration is, at least, its good, in such a case, as his. Admitting it therefore to be true-as we must do until the contrary be unequivocally proved- that they never had seen a miracle wrought by him, he was without excuse in retailing them, and his conduct is to be accounted for, only by supposing that he could not work miracles before those who were disposed to insist upon seeing a real miracle, and not to be satisfied with one of the common kind of pretended miracles, such as great numbers of persons, at that time, were in the habit of performing.

Another defect in his character, which was to be mentioned, was his propensity to practice concealment. He again and again, when he had done something, which his biographers have called a miracle, charged those, who were with him, to “let no man *know* it.” In one instance (Mark 1-40 to 44) where he is said to have cured a leper, after he had done it, “he straitly charged him, and said unto him, see thou *say nothing* to any man.”

In a case, (Mark 8-22 to 26) where it is said that he cured a blind man, “*he led the blind man out of the town*” to do it; and not satisfied with that, he told the man, when the work was done, “neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.”

In the case (Mark 5-37 to 43) where he is said to have restored to life the dead daughter of Jairus, he suffered none but Peter, James, John and the father and mother of the child to go into the room with him, although others desired to go in; and when the scene was over, he even “charged” those, who had been witnesses, “that no man should know of it;” and John in his biography of Jesus, says not a word about it; and we are indebted, for such a story as we have, to those who were not eyewitnesses.

In another instance, (Mark 7-32 to 36) where he is said to have cured (after a great deal of apparently unnecessary ceremony) a man, who “was deaf and had an impediment in his speech,” “he charged” those, who had been present, “that they should tell no man.”

In still another case (Mat. 9-27 to 30) where it is related of him that he cured two blind men, after the work was done, “he straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.”

Is there any excuse for such conduct as this in a real miracle-worker? Was not the taunt of his brothers well applied, when they said to him, (John 7-4) in substance, that no man did his works in secret, when he was seeking to make himself publicly known, and told him, if he could work miracles, to do it before the world ?

His brothers appear to have been men of some understanding—for, although they, like the rest of their countrymen, believed in miracles, yet they saw readily enough that for a pretended miracle-worker, either to avoid the scrutiny of those who doubted his miraculous power, to select the right kind of witnesses of his acts, or to be careful to have no witnesses at all, was “no way to do things.”

He appears also to have been very cautious, in the early part of his career, that the public should not know that he claimed to be the Messiah. He once (Mat. 16-13 to 20. Mark 8-27 to 30. Luke 9-18 to 21) asked his disciples, “Who say the people that I am?” And when they had told him that men had different Opinions about him, “he saith unto them, But who say ye that I am?” Peter then expressed his belief that he was “the Christ.” Whereupon “he charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ.”[*4]

Cowardice was another defect in his character, and it is made so manifest that it cannot be concealed. He repeatedly betrayed it by fleeing from his enemies, and by so doing, he must have brought himself, and his pretensions into public contempt.

When his disciples came to him, and told him that John the Baptist had been beheaded by order of Herod, (Mat. 14-12, 13) “he departed into a desert place apart;” or, in plain English, he fled.

John says, (10-39, 40) in speaking of another occasion, “Therefore they sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hands, and went away beyond Jordan, and there he abode;” that is to say, he run away, and stayed away.

On another occasion also John says, (11-53 and 54) “Then from that day forth they took council together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews.”

Mathew says, (12-14, 15, 16) in still another case, “Then the Pharisees went out, and held council against, him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence, and charged his followers that they should not make him known:” that is, he took himself off, and told his friends to let nobody know where he had gone.

John says again, (8-59) “Then took they up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple,” &c. Yes, it seems that this Son of God, in a case of emergency, could even “Aide” himself.

But the most contemptible instance of the cowardice of Jesus is related by John, (7-1 to 10) who says of him, that “he walked in Galilee, for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.” He then adds, that the feast of the tabernacles was at hand, and that his brothers wished him, if he could work miracles, to go up to the feast and perform them openly. They also taunted him with doing his works in secret. But neither solicitations nor taunts could induce him

to go with them. He attempted to excuse himself by saying that the world hated him; and said to them, "Go ye up to this feast, I go not up yet into this feast, for my time is not yet full come." What then did this man do? This bold reformer? This pretended Messiah? This man, who afterwards (Mat. 26-30) said that he could call upon his Father, and he would give him more than twelve legions of angels to protect him? Why, he remained behind until his brothers had gone, "but (to use John's own language) when his brethren had gone up, then went he also to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret."

The man, who can read these accounts of his secrecy, his cowardice, and of the miserable subterfuges to which he would resort to prevent an exposure of his incapacity to work miracles before scrutinizing eyes, and not feel "ashamed of Jesus" as a Master, must not only be quite content to have a master, but very indifferent in his choice of one. And be it not forgotten, that those, who, after having had their attention called to this conduct of Jesus, shall continue to advocate Christianity, must practice the effrontery of pretending that this creeping, skulking, hiding, fleeing fellow was acting a part appropriate to a Son of God, and exhibiting a perfect pattern of moral greatness.

Such, be it remembered, is one part of the character given to this man by his best friends. It is no "enemy that has done this." It all comes from men, who evidently did not intend to let out any thing, which would make against their cause, but who happened to be too simple always to know what it would be expedient to keep back. And we can easily judge, from the character given to this man by his friends, what an one would have been given to him by an unbelieving eye-witness, if such an one had cared enough about him to take the trouble of exposing the whole of his conduct.

Christians have the opinion that Jesus, at last, delivered himself up magnanimously and willingly, a martyr for the benefit of mankind. Now this opinion is founded entirely upon the improbable, to the rejection of the probable, part of the contradictory testimony in relation to his conduct on that occasion. The probable part of the testimony (and there is enough of it for any purpose,) goes, directly and manifestly, to show that Jesus skulked and endeavored to escape in this instance, in the same manner he had so often done before.

But before introducing this testimony, let us look at the absurdity of that which Christians adopt. The latter is, that at the supper, on the evening before Jesus was taken, it was understood between him and Judas, that the latter should betray him; that Judas thereupon left the room, obtained a posse of men, went in search of Jesus, and found him, not in the room where he had left him, but concealed in a garden; that he approached him, addressed him as a friend, and kissed him; that Jesus then addressed Judas as a friend, saying to him, "Friend, wherefore are thou come?" (Mat. 26-49, 50) Now is it to be supposed that such a solemn face of affected friendship would have been acted over between two men, if it had been previously understood with certainty, that the one would turn enemy, and deliver the other into the hands of those who put him to death?

It is nevertheless probable that, previously to the supper, Jesus had seen reason to suspect the fidelity of Judas, and that, when he saw him leave the room, he apprehended that an immediate attempt was tempt was to be made, by Judas to have him seized. This supposition accounts for

Jesus's leaving the house, after the departure of Judas, and going as he did, into the darkness of the night, into the concealment of a garden. (John 18-1.) It is natural too, that, when approached him in the garden, Jesus, seeing that escape was impossible, should return a friendly reply to the salutation of his suspected enemy, because he might have irritated one whom he feared, if he had showed any suspicion of his malicious design. But it is beyond credibility, if it had previously been explicitly understood between them, that Judas should act the enemy, that Jesus should thus seriously address him as a friend.

This particular story about Jesus's conversation with Judas at supper was probably made up or "glorified," by these apostles, out of something that had passed, as some other conversation appeared to have been, for the purpose of making, it appear that their "Divine Lord and Master" could not have met with any disaster, which he had not foreseen [sic], and intended to meet. Jesus's alleged predictions (which none of his disciples appear to have understood at the time they were made) that he should raise again, were probably manufactured, or "glorified" out of something or other, and in the same way, to meet the necessities of the case, or to make every thing correspond with the ideas, which they had come to entertain of Jesus, at the time they wrote.

Perhaps it will be thought strange that Judas should have *found* Jesus in the night, if there had been *no* previous concert between them. But John says (18-2) that Judas knew where this garden was, and knew also that Jesus often went there with his disciples. He therefore, after having procured men to go with him, probably went first to the house where he had left Jesus and his disciples at supper, and on not finding them there, suspected this garden to be the place of their concealment.

There are several items of testimony, which tend to show that Jesus intended, at this time, to escape the danger, which he apprehended to his life. One is, (Mat. 26-24) that, at the supper, he said, *in the presence of Judas*, (whom, as was before remarked, he probably *suspected* of having a design against him,) "wo unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born." What was the occasion for such a remark, unless it were intended as a menace to deter Judas from any attempt against his life?

Another is, (John 18-1) that after Judas had left the room, Jesus and his disciples left it also, (although it was a dark night, as proved by the fact that those, who came to take him, carried lanterns and torches, (John 18-3) for the purpose of finding him,) went away, crossed a brook, and took up quarters for the night in a garden. Now can any reason be imagined why this man should leave a house, and go into a garden, in the darkness of the night, and remain there, unless it were for concealment and safety?

But there is less reason to suppose that Jesus had any other motive than that of concealment and security, in this instance, than there would be in the case of many other persons in the like circumstances; because it was a common thing for him to hide himself from his enemies: and, moreover, if he had wished, as Christians would have it, to offer up his life at this time, he would have had this special reason for remaining where Judas had left him, viz: that he might not *fail of being found* by those who were seeking to destroy him.

Another fact, too unequivocal and decisive to admit of argument, is, that in this crisis of his affairs, he directed his followers to provide themselves with *swords*, and assented to their taking with them the two, which they had. (Luke 22-36 and 38).

The fact also, that some of his disciples, when they saw that Jesus was likely to be taken, evinced so much readiness to *fight*, and appealed to him to know whether they should not “smite with the sword,” show that they had looked forward to such an exigency, and had made up their minds to defend themselves, if it should be practicable, and that he had no idea of just then offering himself up, or of being offered up, as a sacrifice for mankind—at least, if he could prevent it.

Another item of the same kind of testimony is, that after he had come into the garden, he directed his disciples to “watch,” (keep guard), while he went and prayed, (Mark 14-34). When he returned also, and found them asleep, he said unto Peter, “What, could ye not *watch* with me one hour?” (Mat. 26-40).

Still another item is, that when Jesus discovered those who had come to take him; he said to his disciples, “Rise up, let us go: Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand.” (Mark 14-42). What is this but saying, “*Let us run, we’re going to be taken!*” But it was too late to escape, for Mark adds, that “*immediately*, while he yet spake, Judas and a great multitude, with swords and staves, came,” and, after Judas had designated the one to be seized, “laid their hands on him, and took him.”

Here is evidence enough, one would think, to satisfy any candid mind, possessed of common discernment, that Jesus, in this case, as he had so often done before, sought, in the most cowardly manner, to escape the fate that overtook him. His disciples indeed would represent him as having courted death, and perhaps, at the time when these accounts were written, the authors had brought themselves to believe, that he had actually desired to die for the benefit of mankind. But we are to judge from the facts themselves, and not from the subsequent construction put upon those facts by simple men, who, as we can easily see, may have been, “after Jesus had been glorified,” and all that, in a state of perfect delusion in relation to the meaning of the whole affair.

The manner of Jesus, while upon the cross, is in strict accordance with the supposition of his being a weak spirited victim, rather than a voluntary martyr, conscious of the importance and necessity of his dying, and refutes the pretence that he died for the purpose which Christians allege; for if such were the purpose of his dying, there was more in that purpose, to one who could appreciate it, to sustain a man through the scene, than any other martyr ever had. But this man sunk under the infliction, said that God had forsaken him, and throughout, disclosed the weakness of his character.

His conduct too after his recover from his crucifixion, if he did recover from it, corresponds well with his conduct before it. He lurks about privately. He does not, as Peter, one of his disciples, expressly acknowledges, (Acts 10-41), “show himself to all people,” but to a few friends only—and to these he shews himself, as far as appears by the evidence, but a few times during forty days, and at those times “in the evening,” and within closed doors, (John 20-19 and 26), or in some other private and stealthy manner.

One other trait in his character deserves an allusion. We have some little evidence that the notoriety, which he acquired among the ignorant, produced upon him somewhat of the effect which it frequently does upon vulgar minds, and none others, viz: an idea that the happiness of those, who were once their equals, is not now to be considered in comparison with their own pleasure or convenience, and also an inflated assumption of superiority over them. He seems to have sometimes considered himself entitled, solely by the elevation of his rank above that of his followers, to servile and degrading manifestations of reverence from them, and to have been very willing to receive this kind of incense even at the expense of the “weightier matters of the law,” if it but served to raise the estimation of his superiority in the minds of his followers. Look, for example, at the self-complacent assumption of dignity and importance, with which, when Mary had lavished the costly ointment on his head, he replied to the remonstrance against the foolish waste of what might have been made so valuable to the poor, (John 12-2 to 8.) He did not point out any good that was to come of the act, but silenced the objector by intimating that what had been done was only a proper manifestation of reverence towards so wonderful a being as himself; and added, in substance, that there were always so many poor, that it was of no importance to attend to their wants when he was present, and when his followers were blessed with an opportunity of appropriating their funds to demonstrations of devotion towards him. And yet this man was the author of a religion “*peculiarly adapted to the poor.*”

On another occasion (Luke 7-38), this delightful fellow permitted even a *female* to “Kiss *his FEET,—to wash them with her tears—and to wipe them with the hairs of her head,*” and yet women are now told that the author of this elegant act of gallantry was the founder of a religion, which their *self-respect* and a proper regard for the dignity of their sex, imperiously require them to embrace.

But Christians have a saying that Jesus “went about doing good.” Well, supposing he did for a year or two give his attention to “doing good”—is there any thing so remarkable in the fact that it can be accounted for only by supposing him a divine being? But how was this matter? Did he really “*go about doing good?*” Was he “doing good” when he consented to the foolish waste of “three hundred pence worth of ointment, which might have been sold and given to the poor?” Was he “doing good,” when he suffered Mary to “kiss his feet?” Was he “doing good,” when he sneaked up to the feast of Jerusalem in *secret*? Was he “doing good,” when he rode an ass’s colt to Jerusalem, to make the people believe that he had been appointed by the Almighty to be their king? Was he “doing good,” when he told his followers to arm themselves with swords? Was he “doing good,” when practicing the mean evasions, the subterfuges and the secrecy, which have been before referred to? “Why, no, perhaps not,” the Christian will probably answer, “but then he healed a great many sick folks, and cast out a great, great many devils.” But it is a supposable case, and perhaps it will hereafter satisfactorily appear, that he could work only such miracles as these, (where doubtless the imaginations of men did the business,) and that he wrought such more for the purpose of gaining adherents, and thus making himself king of the Jews, than of “doing good.”

But Christians will say that there is one kind of evidence, by which the divinity of Jesus is unequivocally proved, and that is furnished by his moral and religious instructions.

Now one objection to the moral and religious precepts and doctrines ascribed to Jesus—considering them as evidence of his divine nature—is, that a part of the moral ones are very silly, and a part of the religious ones are very blasphemous and absurd—as any person may see, who will take the trouble to read them with the view of seeing whether they are or not—and another objection to them is, that it is not likely that many of them were ever uttered by him.

Besides, if a man, who should set himself up in opposition to a portion of the community, in the manner Jesus did, and should attempt to lead those whom he could persuade to join him, should now and then utter a sentiment somewhat original and singular, and correct withal, it would be no more than might reasonably be expected. We generally see such things in every one, who has never, had his mind moulded by intercourse with the many, and who attempts to lead the few. Such a man generally has something original and peculiar in his ideas.

One reason for believing that Jesus never uttered many of the sentiments ascribed to him, is, that a person attempting to prove himself such a Messiah as the Jews expected, and to make himself their king, would not be likely to give such instructions as are many of those ascribed to Jesus—but he *would* be likely to give such as could very easily be “glorified” into such as these are. For example, when he was addressing those, who followed him, on the subject of that combined temporal and religious government, which he pretended to be appointed by God to establish, he would naturally speak of his kingdom in terms, which could easily be “glorified” into “the kingdom of God,” “the kingdom of heaven,” &c. And the Evangelists, although, at the time he spoke, they understood him as referring to his kingdom among the Jews, would yet, at the time they wrote, when their ideas of the nature of his kingdom had been changed by his supposed resurrection from the dead, consider every thing, that he had previously said, as referring to a different kingdom from what they had before supposed, and would record it accordingly.

Many of his moral precepts are such too as would naturally be thrown out to his ears by such a man as I have supposed him to be; because it would be necessary that one, who proposed to make himself such a king as the Jews expected, one who was to control both their civil and religious affairs, should give to those whom he was persuading to join him, some idea of the social regulations, and the moral and religious observances, which he intended to establish among the people.

Another reason for believing that many of the sayings, attributed to Jesus, were never uttered by him, is, that the time, when they were recorded, was so long after they were represented to have been spoken, as to forbid the belief that there is any great accuracy in them. It is preposterous, to pretend that these men should remember conversations in the manner they assume to have done. [*5]

Still another reason is, that these narrators, at the time they wrote, had probably become more capable of being themselves the authors of whatever would seem to be above the capacity of a very simple man, (if indeed there be any such sentiments in the New Testament), than Jesus himself, for they had then had much intercourse with mankind, they had travelled extensively, and had spoken and labored much as preachers, and their talents must have been improved by such an education. And of their readiness to relate the best and the most they could either remember or *imagine* of the sayings of Jesus, having the semblance of similarity to any thing that

he had ever uttered, it seems to me there can reasonably be little doubt in the mind of any man who reads their stories.

In order to show how little reliance is to be placed upon the pretended authorship of the sentiments ascribed to Jesus by the Evangelists, nothing more need be done than exhibit the authority, on which his talk to the people on the mount has come down to us. Matthew would have us believe that he has given us the matter of a discourse, which Jesus held to his followers at this time. And yet, as I shall attempt to satisfy the reader, Matthew not only was not present when the speech was made, but was not even a disciple of Jesus at the time.

The seventh chapter of Matthew closes the speech; the eighth gives accounts of miracles, &c., the first verse of the ninth then says, that “he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city,” (Nazareth.) It would appear from the remark here quoted, and from the last fourteen verses of the *fourth* chapter, that his harangue was made in Galilee, on the other side, from Nazareth, of the sea of Galilee. By the ninth verse of the ninth chapter, it appears that Matthew was found in Nazareth, and called to be a disciple, *after* Jesus had returned from Galilee. It is probable, from the fact that Matthew was found in Nazareth, that he *lived* there, and of course, at a distance from the place where the speech was made. This fact, and the fact that he was not called to be a disciple until after the speech was made, render it improbable that he was present at the delivery of the speech, or that he knew any thing about it until it was over. And yet, some ten, twenty or thirty years afterward, he pretends to give us the substance of a discourse, containing remarks upon a great variety of subjects, having no connection with each other.

Even if he had heard them uttered, it is preposterous to suppose that he could have remembered so great a variety of disconnected remarks. But when we consider that he probably did not hear them, all confidence in the correctness of his report vanishes. So that, whether we consider this production either as heard, or only as *heard of*, by Matthew, it comes to us in the shape of a thing mainly fabricated or “glorified,” years afterwards.

But there is another and stronger objection to the instructions, which are attributed to Jesus, than has yet been mentioned. This objection is, that the whole system of morals and religion is based upon the selfish principle. The system throughout, is one of rewards and punishments—the most debasing, to men’s motives, of all imaginable systems. In it, right and wrong are not recognized as fundamental principles of action, but are made referrible [sic] to ulterior considerations of personal pleasure and pain. Jesus never instructed men to do what was right, *because it was right*; yet this is the true reason why they *should* do it. Nor did he instruct them to avoid what was wrong, for the reason that it was wrong: yet that should be the fundamental and principal reason in every man’s mind, because it is the moral reason. But the Bible, by the uniformity, with which it makes the selfish inducement, the promise of reward, or the threat of punishment, follow the moral precept, *impliedly admits* that the principal reason why we should do right, is, that we shall be rewarded for it, and the principal reason why we should not do wrong, is, that we should be punished for it. How much real honesty of principle, or how much of purely virtuous sentiment, can be infused into men’s minds by means of such mercenary inducements, I leave to others to decide.

Men's moral principles are weak enough without their being made subordinate to selfishness; and their selfishness is quite active enough, without such effort as Christianity makes to constitute it the mainspring of all their conduct. There are *natural* sentiments of justice, rectitude and virtue, in men's minds, which *when directly appealed to* as motives to action, are generally found capable of being cultivated and strengthened, and of controlling the conduct of any of mankind. There are few, (if indeed there are any,) men, who cannot be persuaded to do what is right, by having it urged upon them that it *is* right, and dissuaded from doing what is wrong, by the argument that it is wrong, would consider it, and justly too, a despicable and degrading descent, to yield to, or act under, the influence of such hopes of reward, and such fears of punishment, as the Bible and its advocates attempt to awaken. And the very men, whose trade and incessant effort it is to bring others under the control of these base and mercenary and false motives of action, would consider it an imputation upon their virtue and their characters, to insinuate that they themselves are governed by such means; and would take it in high dudgeon to have it intimated that their natural sense of right was scanty, or that it would in general be insufficient to control their conduct. But they have great fears for the virtue of their fellow men—it is entirely unsafe to trust mankind in general with no motives but such as truth would furnish—their fellow men are generally either such simpletons that they must be wheedled by prospects a thousand times too extravagant to be probable, by promises of “sweet things” hereafter, or they are such perfect monsters that they must be set upon and overawed by menace, or enslaved by fear; they are utterly incapable of appreciating any consideration of right or reason; and hence the *absolute necessity* of Christianity.

[*1] Some may perhaps believe that this verse was not intended to convey such a meaning as I have attributed to it—but can such persons tell us what other definite idea can be gathered from it?

[*2] We have evidence that there actually were in circulation after his death, and in credit among his followers, a great variety of stories about miraculous occurrences of the most ludicrous character imaginable, though hardly more ludicrous than some related in the four gospels. That evidence is furnished by those books, (now published under the title “Apocryphal New Testament”) which were discarded as not being canonical, or at least as doubtful, by the Council of Nice, about three centuries after Christ. As they are now admitted by Christians to be false, on that admission they prove all I wish to prove by them, viz. that after the death of Jesus, there were many stories in circulation respecting him, which rested on no authority but the tongue of rumor, and we are to judge whether these narratives, which are now esteemed by Christians, canonical—considering how many years after the death of Jesus they were written—are not as likely to have been gathered in part for simple rumor, as those others.

[*3] For a more full account of these Messiahs, see Rev. Thomas Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies, Chap. 19, also Josephus, Book 2d. Chap. 13. Several of them were finally put to death. Some of them succeeded in gaining a much larger number of followers than Jesus, *in his lifetime*, ever had.

[*4] Some of the expressions, employed by the writers in relating this affair, appear to have been so unreasonably “glorified,” that in order to put together a story which should appear natural and unstrained throughout, I have selected the most natural expressions from each of the accounts, instead of quoting the whole of a single one.

[*5] Both Matthew and John are supposed to have written their narratives more than thirty years after the crucifixion. See Rees' Cyclopaedia.