

Did Jesus Christ Really Live? (Ca. 1922)

by Marshall J. Gauvin

Scientific inquiry into the origins of Christianity begins to-day with the question: "Did Jesus Christ really live?" Was there a man named Jesus, who was called the Christ, living in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, of whose life and teachings we have a correct account in the New Testament? The orthodox idea that Christ was the son of God--God himself in human form--that he was the creator of the countless millions of glowing suns and wheeling worlds that strew the infinite expanse of the universe; that the forces of nature were the servants of his will and changed their courses at his command--such an idea has been abandoned by every independent thinker in the world--by every thinker who relies on reason and experience rather than mere faith--by every man of science who places the integrity of nature above the challenge of ancient religious tales.

Not only has the divinity of Christ been given up, but his existence as a man is being more and more seriously questioned. Some of the ablest scholars of the world deny that he ever lived at all. A commanding literature dealing with the inquiry, intense in its seriousness and profound and thorough in its research, is growing up in all countries, and spreading the conviction that Christ is a myth. The question is one of tremendous importance. For the Freethinker, as well as for the Christian, it is of the weightiest significance. The Christian religion has been and is a mighty fact in the world. For good or for ill, it has absorbed for many centuries the best energies of mankind. It has stayed the march of civilization, and made martyrs of some of the noblest men and women of the race: and it is to-day the greatest enemy of knowledge, of freedom, of social and industrial improvement, and of the genuine brotherhood of mankind. The progressive forces of the world are at war with this Asiatic superstition, and this war will continue until the triumph of truth and freedom is complete. The question, "Did Jesus Christ Really Live?" goes to the very root of the conflict between reason and faith; and upon its determination depends, to some degree, the decision as to whether religion or humanity shall rule the world.

Whether Christ did, or did not live, has nothing at all to do with what the churches teach, or with what we believe. It is wholly a matter of evidence. It is a question of science. The question is--what does history say? And that question must be settled in the court of historical criticism. If the thinking world is to hold to the position that Christ was a real character, there must be sufficient evidence to warrant that belief. If no evidence for his existence can be found; if history returns the verdict that his name is not inscribed upon her scroll, if it be found that his story was created by art and ingenuity, like the stories of fictitious heroes, he will have to take his place with the host of other demigods whose fancied lives and deeds make up the mythology of the world.

What, then, is the evidence that Jesus Christ lived in this world as a man? The authorities relied upon to prove the reality of Christ are the four Gospels of the New Testament--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These Gospels, and these alone, tell the story of his life. Now we know absolutely nothing of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, apart from what is said of them in the Gospels. Moreover, the Gospels themselves do not claim to have been written by these men. They are not called "The Gospel of Matthew," or "The Gospel of Mark," but "The Gospel According to Matthew," "The Gospel According to Mark," "The Gospel According to Luke," and "The Gospel According to John." No human being knows who wrote a single line in one of these Gospels. No human being knows when they were written, or where. Biblical scholarship has established the fact that the Gospel of Mark is the oldest of the four. The chief reasons for this conclusion are that this Gospel is shorter, simpler, and more natural, than any of the other three. It is shown that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were enlarged from the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Mark knows nothing of the virgin birth, of the Sermon on the Mount, of the

Lord's prayer, or of other important facts of the supposed life of Christ. These features were added by Matthew and Luke.

But the Gospel of Mark, as we have it, is not the original Mark. In the same way that the writers of Matthew and Luke copied and enlarged the Gospel of Mark, Mark copied and enlarged an earlier document which is called the "original Mark." This original source perished in the early age of the Church. What it was, who wrote it, where it was written, nobody knows. The Gospel of John is admitted by Christian scholars to be an unhistorical document. They acknowledge that it is not a life of Christ, but an interpretation of him; that it gives us an idealized and spiritualized picture of what Christ is supposed to have been, and that it is largely composed of the speculations of Greek philosophy. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which are called the "Synoptic Gospels," on the one hand, and the Gospel of John, on the other, stand at opposite extremes of thought. So complete is the difference between the teaching of the first three Gospels and that of the fourth, that every critic admits that if Jesus taught as the Synoptics relate, he could not possibly have taught as John declares. Indeed, in the first three Gospels and in the fourth, we meet with two entirely different Christs. Did I say two? It should be three; for, according to Mark, Christ was a man; according to Matthew and Luke, he was a demigod; while John insists that he was God himself.

There is not the smallest fragment of trustworthy evidence to show that any of the Gospels were in existence, in their present form, earlier than a hundred years after the time at which Christ is supposed to have died. Christian scholars, having no reliable means by which to fix the date of their composition, assign them to as early an age as their calculations and their guesses will allow; but the dates thus arrived at are far removed from the age of Christ or his apostles. We are told that Mark was written some time after the year 70, Luke about 110, Matthew about 130, and John not earlier than 140 A.D. Let me impress upon you that these dates are conjectural, and that they are made as early as possible. The first historical mention of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, was made by the Christian Father, St. Irenaeus, about the year 190 A.D. The only earlier mention of any of the Gospels was made by Theophilus of Antioch, who mentioned the Gospel of John in 180 A.D.

There is absolutely nothing to show that these Gospels--the only sources of authority as to the existence of Christ--were written until a hundred and fifty years after the events they pretend to describe. Walter R. Cassels, the learned author of "Supernatural Religion," one of the greatest works ever written on the origins of Christianity, says: "After having exhausted the literature and the testimony bearing on the point, we have not found a single distinct trace of any of those Gospels during the first century and a half after the death of Christ." How can Gospels which were not written until a hundred and fifty years after Christ is supposed to have died, and which do not rest on any trustworthy testimony, have the slightest value as evidence that he really lived? History must be founded upon genuine documents or on living proof. Were a man of to-day to attempt to write the life of a supposed character of a hundred and fifty years ago, without any historical documents upon which to base his narrative, his work would not be a history, it would be a romance. Not a single statement in it could be relied upon.

Christ is supposed to have been a Jew, and his disciples are said to have been Jewish fishermen. His language, and the language of his followers must, therefore, have been Aramaic--the popular language of Palestine in that age. But the Gospels are written in Greek--every one of them. Nor were they translated from some other language. Every leading Christian scholar since Erasmus, four hundred years ago, has maintained that they were originally written in Greek. This proves that they were not written by Christ's disciples, or by any of the early Christians. Foreign Gospels, written by unknown men, in a foreign tongue, several generations after the death of

those who are supposed to have known the facts--such is the evidence relied upon to prove that Jesus lived.

But while the Gospels were written several generations too late to be of authority, the original documents, such as they were, were not preserved. The Gospels that were written in the second century no longer exist. They have been lost or destroyed. The oldest Gospels that we have are supposed to be copies of copies of copies that were made from those Gospels. We do not know who made these copies; we do not know when they were made; nor do we know whether they were honestly made. Between the earliest Gospels and the oldest existing manuscripts of the New Testament, there is a blank gulf of three hundred years. It is, therefore, impossible to say what the original Gospels contained.

There were many Gospels in circulation in the early centuries, and a large number of them were forgeries. Among these were the "Gospel of Paul," the Gospel of Bartholomew," the "Gospel of Judas Iscariot," the "Gospel of the Egyptians," the "Gospel or Recollections of Peter," the "Oracles or Sayings of Christ," and scores of other pious productions, a collection of which may still be read in "The Apocryphal New Testament." Obscure men wrote Gospels and attached the names of prominent Christian characters to them, to give them the appearance of importance. Works were forged in the names of the apostles, and even in the name of Christ. The greatest Christian teachers taught that it was a virtue to deceive and lie for the glory of the faith. Dean Milman, the standard Christian historian, says: "Pious fraud was admitted and avowed." The Rev. Dr. Giles writes: "There can be no doubt that great numbers of books were then written with no other view than to deceive." Professor Robertson Smith says: "There was an enormous floating mass of spurious literature created to suit party views." The early church was flooded with spurious religious writings. From this mass of literature, our Gospels were selected by priests and called the inspired word of God. Were these Gospels also forged? There is no certainty that they were not. But let me ask: If Christ was an historical character, why was it necessary to forge documents to prove his existence? Did anybody ever think of forging documents to prove the existence of any person who was really known to have lived? The early Christian forgeries are a tremendous testimony to the weakness of the Christian cause.

Spurious or genuine, let us see what the Gospels can tell us about the life of Jesus. Matthew and Luke give us the story of his genealogy. How do they agree? Matthew says there were forty-one generations from Abraham to Jesus. Luke says there were fifty-six. Yet both pretend to give the genealogy of Joseph, and both count the generations! Nor is this all. The Evangelists disagree on all but two names between David and Christ. These worthless genealogies show how much the New Testament writers knew about the ancestors of their hero.

If Jesus lived, he must have been born. When was he born? Matthew says he was born when Herod was King of Judea. Luke says he was born when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria. He could not have been born during the administration of these two rulers for Herod died in the year 4 B.C., and Cyrenius, who, in Roman history is Quirinius, did not become Governor of Syria until ten years later. Herod and Quirinius are separated by the whole reign of Archelaus, Herod's son. Between Matthew and Luke, there is, therefore, a contradiction of at least ten years, as to the time of Christ's birth. The fact is that the early Christians had absolutely no knowledge as to when Christ was born. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: "Christians count one hundred and thirty-three contrary opinions of different authorities concerning the year the Messiah appeared on earth." Think of it--one hundred and thirty-three different years, each one of which is held to be the year in which Christ came into the world. What magnificent certainty!

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Antonmaria Lupi, a learned Jesuit, wrote a work to show that the nativity of Christ has been assigned to every month in the year, at one time or another.

Where was Christ born? According to the Gospels, he was habitually called "Jesus of Nazareth." The New Testament writers have endeavored to leave the impression that Nazareth of Galilee was his home town. The Synoptic Gospels represent that thirty years of his life were spent there. Notwithstanding this, Matthew declares that he was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of a prophecy in the Book of Micah. But the prophecy of Micah has nothing whatever to do with Jesus; it prophesies the coming of a military leader, not a divine teacher. Matthew's application of this prophecy to Christ strengthens the suspicion that his Gospel is not history, but romance. Luke has it that his birth occurred at Bethlehem, whither his mother had gone with her husband, to make the enrollment called for by Augustus Caesar. Of the general census mentioned by Luke, nothing is known in Roman history. But suppose such a census was taken. The Roman custom, when an enrollment was made, was that every man was to report at his place of residence. The head of the family alone made report. In no case was his wife, or any dependent, required to be with him. In the face of this established custom, Luke declares that Joseph left his home in Nazareth and crossed two provinces to go Bethlehem for the enrollment; and not only this, but that he had to be accompanied by his wife, Mary, who was on the very eve of becoming a mother. This surely is not history, but fable. The story that Christ was born at Bethlehem was a necessary part of the program which made him the Messiah, and the descendant of King David. The Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David; and by what Renan calls a roundabout way, his birth was made to take place there. The story of his birth in the royal city is plainly fictitious.

His home was Nazareth. He was called "Jesus of Nazareth"; and there he is said to have lived until the closing years of his life. Now comes the question--Was there a city of Nazareth in that age? The Encyclopaedia Biblica, a work written by theologians, the greatest biblical reference work in the English language, says: "We cannot perhaps venture to assert positively that there was a city of Nazareth in Jesus' time." No certainty that there was a city of Nazareth! Not only are the supposed facts of the life of Christ imaginary, but the city of his birth and youth and manhood existed, so far as we know, only on the map of mythology. What amazing evidence to prove the reality of a Divine man! Absolute ignorance as to his ancestry; nothing whatever known of the time of his birth, and even the existence of the city where he is said to have been born, a matter of grave question!

After his birth, Christ, as it were, vanishes out of existence, and with the exception of a single incident recorded in Luke, we hear absolutely nothing of him until he has reached the age of thirty years. The account of his being found discussing with the doctors in the Temple at Jerusalem when he was but twelve years old, is told by Luke alone. The other Gospels are utterly ignorant of this discussion; and, this single incident excepted, the four Gospels maintain an unbroken silence with regard to thirty years of the life of their hero. What is the meaning of this silence? If the writers of the Gospels knew the facts of the life of Christ, why is it that they tell us absolutely nothing of thirty years of that life? What historical character can be named whose life for thirty years is an absolute blank to the world? If Christ was the incarnation of God, if he was the greatest teacher the world has known, if he came to save mankind from everlasting pain--was there nothing worth remembering in the first thirty years of his existence among men? The fact is that the Evangelists knew nothing of the life of Jesus, before his ministry; and they refrained from inventing a childhood, youth and early manhood for him because it was not necessary to their purpose.

Luke, however, deviated from the rule of silence long enough to write the Temple incident. The story of the discussion with the doctors in the Temple is proved to be mythical by all the circumstances that surround it. The statement that his mother and father left Jerusalem, believing that he was with them; that they went a day's journey before discovering that he was not in their company; and that after searching for three days, they found him in the Temple asking and answering questions of the learned Doctors, involves a series of tremendous improbabilities. Add to this the fact that the incident stands alone in Luke, surrounded by a period of silence covering thirty years; add further that none of the other writers have said a word of the child Jesus discussing with the scholars of their nation; and add again the unlikelihood that a child would appear before serious-minded men in the role of an intellectual champion and the fabulous character of the story becomes perfectly clear.

The Gospels know nothing of thirty years of Christ's life. What do they know of the last years of that life? How long did the ministry, the public career of Christ, continue? According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, the public life of Christ lasted about a year. If John's Gospel is to be believed, his ministry covered about three years. The Synoptics teach that Christ's public work was confined almost entirely to Galilee, and that he went to Jerusalem only once, not long before his death. John is in hopeless disagreement with the other Evangelists as to the scene of Christ's labors. He maintains that most of the public life of Christ was spent in Judea, and that Christ was many times in Jerusalem. Now, between Galilee and Judea there was the province of Samaria. If all but the last few weeks of Christ's ministry was carried on in his native province of Galilee, it is certain that the greater part of that ministry was not spent in Judea, two provinces away.

John tells us that the driving of the money-changers from the Temple occurred at the beginning of Christ's ministry; and nothing is said of any serious consequences following it. But Matthew, Mark and Luke declare that the purification of the Temple took place at the close of his career, and that this act brought upon him the wrath of the priests, who sought to destroy him. Because of these facts, the Encyclopedia Biblica assures us that the order of events in the life of Christ, as given by the Evangelists, is contradictory and untrustworthy; that the chronological framework of the Gospels is worthless; and that the facts "show only too clearly with what lack of concern for historical precision the Evangelists write." In other words, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote, not what they knew, but what they imagined.

Christ is said to have been many times in Jerusalem. It is said that he preached daily in the Temple. He was followed by his twelve disciples, and by multitudes of enthusiastic men and women. On the one hand, the people shouted hosannas in his honor, and on the other, priests engaged him in discussion and sought to take his life. All this shows that he must have been well known to the authorities. Indeed, he must have been one of the best known men in Jerusalem. Why, then, was it necessary for the priests to bribe one of his disciples to betray him? Only an obscure man, whose identity was uncertain, or a man who was in hiding, would need to be betrayed. A man who appeared daily in the streets, who preached daily in the Temple, a man who was continually before the public eye, could have been arrested at any moment. The priests would not have bribed a man to betray a teacher whom everybody knew. If the accounts of Christ's betrayal are true, all the declarations about his public appearances in Jerusalem must be false.

Nothing could be more improbable than the story of Christ's crucifixion. The civilization of Rome was the highest in the world. The Romans were the greatest lawyers the world had ever known. Their courts were models of order and fairness. A man was not condemned without a trial; he was not handed to the executioner before being found guilty. And yet we are asked to believe that an innocent man was brought before a Roman court, where Pontius Pilate was Judge; that no charge of wrongdoing having been brought against him, the Judge declared that he found

him innocent; that the mob shouted, "Crucify him; crucify him!" and that to please the rabble, Pilate commanded that the man who had done no wrong and whom he had found innocent, should be scourged, and then delivered him to the executioners to be crucified! Is it thinkable that the master of a Roman court in the days of Tiberius Caesar, having found a man innocent and declared him so, and having made efforts to save his life, tortured him of his own accord, and then handed him over to a howling mob to be nailed to a cross? A Roman court finding a man innocent and then crucifying him? Is that a picture of civilized Rome? Is that the Rome to which the world owes its laws? In reading the story of the Crucifixion, are we reading history or religious fiction? Surely not history.

On the theory that Christ was crucified, how shall we explain the fact that during the first eight centuries of the evolution of Christianity, Christian art represented a lamb, and not a man, as suffering on the cross for the salvation of the world? Neither the paintings in the Catacombs nor the sculptures on Christian tombs pictured a human figure on the cross. Everywhere a lamb was shown as the Christian symbol--a lamb carrying a cross, a lamb at the foot of a cross, a lamb on a cross. Some figures showed the lamb with a human head, shoulders and arms, holding a cross in his hands--the lamb of God in process of assuming the human form--the crucifixion myth becoming realistic. At the close of the eighth century, Pope Hadrian I, confirming the decree of the sixth Synod of Constantinople, commanded that thereafter the figure of a man should take the place of a lamb on the cross. It took Christianity eight hundred years to develop the symbol of its suffering Savior. For eight hundred years, the Christ on the cross was a lamb. But if Christ was actually crucified, why was his place on the cross so long usurped by a lamb? In the light of history and reason, and in view of a lamb on the cross, why should we believe in the Crucifixion?

And let us ask, if Christ performed the miracles the New Testament describes, if he gave sight to blind men's eyes, if his magic touch brought youthful vigor to the palsied frame, if the putrefying dead at his command returned to life and love again--why did the people want him crucified? Is it not amazing that a civilized people--for the Jews of that age were civilized--were so filled with murderous hate towards a kind and loving man who went about doing good, who preached forgiveness, cleansed the leprous, and raised the dead--that they could not be appeased until they had crucified the noblest benefactor of mankind? Again I ask--is this history, or is it fiction?

From the standpoint of the supposed facts, the account of the Crucifixion of Christ is as impossible as is the raising of Lazarus from the standpoint of nature. The simple truth is, that the four Gospels are historically worthless. They abound in contradictions, in the unreasonable, the miraculous and the monstrous. There is not a thing in them that can be depended upon as true, while there is much in them that we certainly know to be false.

The accounts of the virgin birth of Christ, of his feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes, of his cleansing the leprous, of his walking on the water, of his raising the dead, and of his own resurrection after his life had been destroyed, are as untrue as any stories that were ever told in this world. The miraculous element in the Gospels is proof that they were written by men, who did not know how to write history, or who were not particular as to the truth of what they wrote. The miracles of the Gospels were invented by credulity or cunning, and if the miracles were invented, how can we know that the whole history of Christ was not woven of the warp and woof of the imagination? Dr. Paul W. Schmiedel, Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Zurich, Switzerland, one of the foremost theologians of Europe, tells us in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, that there are only nine passages in the Gospels that we can depend upon as being the sayings of Jesus; and Professor Arthur Drews, Germany's greatest exponent of the doctrine that Christ is a myth, analyses these passages and shows that there is nothing in them that could not easily have been invented. That these passages are as unhistorical as the rest is also

the contention of John M. Robertson, the eminent English scholar, who holds that Jesus never lived.

Let me make a startling disclosure. Let me tell you that the New Testament itself contains the strongest possible proof that the Christ of the Gospels was not a real character. The testimony of the Epistles of Paul demonstrates that the life story of Jesus is an invention. Of course, there is no certainty that Paul really lived. Let me quote a passage from the Encyclopaedia Biblica, relative to Paul: "It is true that the picture of Paul drawn by later times differs utterly in more or fewer of its details from the original. Legend has made itself master of his person. The simple truth has been mixed up with invention; Paul has become the hero of an admiring band of the more highly developed Christians." Thus Christian authority admits that invention has done its work in manufacturing at least in part, the life of Paul. In truth, the ablest Christian scholars reject all but our of the Pauline Epistles as spurious. Some maintain that Paul was not the author of any of them. The very existence of Paul is questionable.

But for the purpose of my argument, I am going to admit that Paul really lived; that he was a zealous apostle; and that all the Epistles are from his pen. There are thirteen of these Epistles. Some of them are lengthy; and they are acknowledged to be the oldest Christian writings. They were written long before the Gospels. If Paul really wrote them, they were written by a man who lived in Jerusalem when Christ is supposed to have been teaching there. Now, if the facts of the life of Christ were known in the first century of Christianity, Paul was one of the men who should have known them fully. Yet Paul acknowledges that he never saw Jesus; and his Epistles prove that he knew nothing about his life, his works, or his teachings.

In all the Epistles of Paul, there is not one word about Christ's virgin birth. The apostle is absolutely ignorant of the marvellous manner in which Jesus is said to have come into the world. For this silence, there can be only one honest explanation--the story of the virgin birth had not yet been invented when Paul wrote. A large portion of the Gospels is devoted to accounts of the miracles Christ is said to have wrought. But you will look in vain through the thirteen Epistles of Paul for the slightest hint that Christ ever performed any miracles. Is it conceivable that Paul was acquainted with the miracles of Christ--that he knew that Christ had cleansed the leprous, cast out devils that could talk, restored sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, and even raised the dead--is it conceivable that Paul was aware of these wonderful things and yet failed to write a single line about them? Again, the only solution is that the accounts of the miracles wrought by Jesus had not yet been invented when Paul's Epistles were written.

Not only is Paul silent about the virgin birth and the miracles of Jesus, he is without the slightest knowledge of the teaching of Jesus. The Christ of the Gospels preached a famous sermon on a mountain: Paul knows nothing of it. Christ delivered a prayer now recited by the Christian world: Paul never heard of it. Christ taught in parables: Paul is utterly unacquainted with any of them. Is not this astonishing? Paul, the greatest writer of early Christianity, the man who did more than any other to establish the Christian religion in the world--that is, if the Epistles may be trusted--is absolutely ignorant of the teaching of Christ. In all of his thirteen Epistles he does not quote a single saying of Jesus.

Paul was a missionary. He was out for converts. Is it thinkable that if the teachings of Christ had been known to him, he would not have made use of them in his propaganda? Can you believe that a Christian missionary would go to China and labor for many years to win converts to the religion of Christ, and never once mention the Sermon on the Mount, never whisper a word about the Lord's Prayer, never tell the story of one of the parables, and remain as silent as the grave about the precepts of his master? What have the churches been teaching throughout the Christian centuries if not these very things? Are not the churches of to-day continually preaching

about the virgin birth, the miracles, the parables, and the precepts of Jesus? And o not these features constitute Christianity? Is there any life of Christ, apart from these things? Why, then, does Paul know nothing of them? There is but one answer. The virgin-born, miracle-working, preaching Christ was unknown to the world in Paul's day. That is to say, he had not yet been invented!

The Christ of Paul and the Jesus of the Gospels are two entirely different beings. The Christ of Paul is little more than an idea. He has no life story. He was not followed by the multitude. He performed no miracles. He did no preaching. The Christ Paul knew was the Christ he was in a vision while on his way to Damascus--an apparition, a phantom, not a living, human being, who preached and worked among men. This vision-Christ, this ghostly word, was afterwards brought to the earth by those who wrote the Gospels. He was given a Holy Ghost for a father and a virgin for a mother. He was made to preach, to perform astounding miracles, to die a violent death though innocent, and to rise in triumph from the grave and ascend again to heaven. Such is the Christ of the New Testament--first a spirit, and later a miraculously born, miracle working man, who is master of death and whom death cannot subdue.

A large body of opinion in the early church denied the reality of Christ's physical existence. In his "History of Christianity," Dean Milman writes: "The Gnostic sects denied that Christ was born at all, or that he died," and Mosheim, Germany's great ecclesiastical historian, says: "The Christ of early Christianity was not a human being, but an "appearance," an illusion, a character in miracle, not in reality--a myth.

Miracles do not happen. Stories of miracles are untrue. Therefore, documents in which miraculous accounts are interwoven with reputed facts, are untrustworthy, for those who invented the miraculous element might easily have invented the part that was natural. Men are common; Gods are rare; therefore, it is at least as easy to invent the biography of a man as the history of a God. For this reason, the whole story of Christ--the human element as well as the divine--is without valid claim to be regarded as true. If miracles are fictions, Christ is a myth. Said Dean Farrar: "If miracles be incredible, Christianity is false." Bishop Westcott wrote: "The essence of Christianity lies in a miracle; and if it can be shown that a miracle is either impossible or incredible, all further inquiry into the details of its history is superfluous." Not only are miracles incredible, but the uniformity of nature declares them to be impossible. Miracles have gone: the miraculous Christ cannot remain.

If Christ lived, if he was a reformer, if he performed wonderful works that attracted the attention of the multitude, if he came in conflict with the authorities and was crucified--how shall we explain the fact that history has not even recorded his name? The age in which he is said to have lived was an age of scholars and thinkers. In Greece, Rome and Palestine, there were philosophers, historians, poets, orators, jurists and statesmen. Every fact of importance was noted by interested and inquiring minds. Some of the greatest writers the Jewish race has produced lived in that age. And yet, in all the writings of that period, there is not one line, not one word, not one letter, about Jesus. Great writers wrote extensively of events of minor importance, but not one of them wrote a word about the mightiest character who had ever appeared on earth--a man at whose command the leprous were made clean, a man who fed five thousand people with a satchel full of bread, a man whose word defied the grave and gave life to the dead.

John E. Remsburg, in his scholarly work on "The Christ," has compiled a list of forty-two writers who lived and wrote during the time or within a century after the time, of Christ, not one of whom ever mentioned him.

Philo, one of the most renowned writers the Jewish race has produced, was born before the beginning of the Christian Era, and lived for many years after the time at which Jesus is supposed to have died. His home was in or near Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have preached, to have performed miracles, to have been crucified, and to have risen from the dead. Had Jesus done these things, the writings of Philo would certainly contain some record of his life. Yet this philosopher, who must have been familiar with Herod's massacre of the innocents, and with the preaching, miracles and death of Jesus, had these things occurred; who wrote an account of the Jews, covering this period, and discussed the very questions that are said to have been near to Christ's heart, never once mentioned the name of, or any deed connected with, the reputed Savior of the world.

In the closing years of the first century, Josephus, the celebrated Jewish historian, wrote his famous work on "The Antiquities of the Jews." In this work, the historian made no mention of Christ, and for two hundred years after the death of Josephus, the name of Christ did not appear in his history. There were no printing presses in those days. Books were multiplied by being copied. It was, therefore, easy to add to or change what an author had written. The church felt that Josephus ought to recognize Christ, and the dead historian was made to do it. In the fourth century, a copy of "The Antiquities of the Jews" appeared, in which occurred this passage: "Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works; a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Such is the celebrated reference to Christ in Josephus. A more brazen forgery was never perpetrated. For more than two hundred years, the Christian Fathers who were familiar with the works of Josephus knew nothing of this passage. Had the passage been in the works of Josephus which they knew, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen and Clement of Alexandria would have been eager to hurl it at their Jewish opponents in their many controversies. But it did not exist. Indeed, Origen, who knew his Josephus well, expressly affirmed that that writer had not acknowledged Christ. This passage first appeared in the writings of the Christian Father Eusebius, the first historian of Christianity, early in the fourth century; and it is believed that he was its author. Eusebius, who not only advocated fraud in the interest of the faith, but who is known to have tampered with passages in the works of Josephus and several other writers, introduces this passage in his "Evangelical Demonstration," (Book III., p.124), in these words: "Certainly the attestations I have already produced concerning our Savior may be sufficient. However, it may not be amiss, if, over and above, we make use of Josephus the Jew for a further witness."

Everything demonstrates the spurious character of the passage. It is written in the style of Eusebius, and not in the style of Josephus. Josephus was a voluminous writer. He wrote extensively about men of minor importance. The brevity of this reference to Christ is, therefore, a strong argument for its falsity. This passage interrupts the narrative. It has nothing to do with what precedes or what follows it; and its position clearly shows that the text of the historian has been separated by a later hand to give it room. Josephus was a Jew--a priest of the religion of Moses. This passage makes him acknowledge the divinity, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ--that is to say, it makes an orthodox Jew talk like a believing Christian! Josephus could not possibly have written these words without being logically compelled to embrace Christianity. All the arguments of history and of reason unite in the conclusive proof that the passage is an unblushing forgery.

For these reasons every honest Christian scholar has abandoned it as an interpolation. Dean Milman says: "It is interpolated with many additional clauses." Dean Farrar, writing in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, says: "That Josephus wrote the whole passage as it now stands no sane critic can believe." Bishop Warburton denounced it as "a rank forgery and a very stupid one, too." Chambers' Encyclopaedia says: "The famous passage of Josephus is generally conceded to be an interpolation."

In the "Annals" of Tacitus, the Roman historian, there is another short passage which speaks of "Christus" as being the founder of a party called Christians--a body of people "who were abhorred for their crimes." These words occur in Tacitus' account of the burning of Rome. The evidence for this passage is not much stronger than that for the passage in Josephus. It was not quoted by any writer before the fifteenth century; and when it was quoted, there was only one copy of the "Annals" in the world; and that copy was supposed to have been made in the eighth century--six hundred years after Tacitus' death. The "Annals" were published between 115 and 117 A.D., nearly a century after Jesus' time--so the passage, even if genuine, would not prove anything as to Jesus.

The name "Jesus" was as common among the Jews as is William or George with us. In the writings of Josephus, we find accounts of a number of Jesuses. One was Jesus, the son of Sapphias, the founder of a seditious band of mariners; another was Jesus, the captain of the robbers whose followers fled when they heard of his arrest; still another Jesus was a monomaniac who for seven years went about Jerusalem, crying, "Woe, woe, woe unto Jerusalem!" who was bruised and beaten many times, but offered no resistance; and who was finally killed with a stone at the siege of Jerusalem.

The word "Christ," the Greek equivalent of the Jewish word "Messiah," was not a personal name; it was a title; it meant "the Anointed One."

The Jews were looking for a Messiah, a successful political leader, who would restore the independence of their nation. Josephus tells us of many men who posed as Messiahs, who obtained a following among the people, and who were put to death by the Romans for political reasons. One of these Messiahs, or Christs, a Samaritan prophet, was executed under Pontius Pilate; and so great was the indignation of the Jews that Pilate had to be recalled by the Roman government.

These facts are of tremendous significance. While the Jesus Christ of Christianity is unknown to history, the age in which he is said to have lived was an age in which many men bore the name of "Jesus" and many political leaders assumed the title of "Christ." All the materials necessary for the manufacture of the story of Christ existed in that age. In all the ancient countries, divine Saviors were believed to have been born of virgins, to have preached a new religion, to have performed miracles, to have been crucified as atonements for the sins of mankind, and to have risen from the grave and ascended into heaven. All that Jesus is supposed to have taught was in the literature of the time. In the story of Christ there is not a new idea, as Joseph McCabe has shown in his "Sources of the Morality of the Gospels," and John M. Robertson in his "Pagan Christs."

"But," says the Christian, "Christ is so perfect a character that he could not have been invented." This is a mistake. The Gospels do not portray a perfect character. The Christ of the Gospels is shown to be artificial by the numerous contradictions in his character and teachings. He was in favor of the sword, and he was not; he told men to love their enemies, and advised them to hate their friends; he preached the doctrine of forgiveness, and called men a generation of vipers; he announced himself as the judge of the world, and declared that he would judge no man; he taught

that he was possessed of all power, but was unable to work miracles where the people did not believe; he was represented as God and did not shrink from avowing, "I and my Father are one," but in the pain and gloom of the cross, he is made to cry out in his anguish: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And how singular it is that these words, reputed as the dying utterance of the disillusioned Christ, should be not only contradicted by two Evangelists, but should be a quotation from the twenty-second Psalm!

If there is a moment when a man's speech is original, it is when, amid agony and despair, while his heart is breaking beneath its burden of defeat and disappointment, he utters a cry of grief from the depth of his wounded soul with the last breath that remains before the chill waves of death engulf his wasted life forever. But on the lips of the expiring Christ are placed, not the heart-felt words of a dying man, but a quotation from the literature of his race!

A being with these contradictions, these transparent unrealities in his character, could scarcely have been real.

And if Christ, with all that is miraculous and impossible in his nature, could not have been invented, what shall we say of Othello, of Hamlet, of Romeo? Do not Shakespeare's wondrous characters live upon the stage? Does not their naturalness, their consistency, their human grandeur, challenge our admiration? And is it not with difficulty that we believe them to be children of the imagination? Laying aside the miraculous, in the story of the Jewish hero, is not the character of Jean Valjean as deep, as lofty, as broad, as rich in its humanity, as tender in its pathos, as sublime in its heroism, and as touchingly resigned to the cruelties of fate as the character of Jesus? Who has read the story of that marvelous man without being thrilled? And who has followed him through his last days with dry eyes? And yet Jean Valjean never lived and never died; he was not a real man, but the personification of suffering virtue born in the effulgent brain of Victor Hugo. Have you not wept when you have seen Sydney Carton disguise himself and lay his neck beneath the blood-stained knife of the guillotine, to save the life of Evremonde? But Sydney Carton was not an actual human being; he is the heroic, self-sacrificing spirit of humanity clothed in human form by the genius of Charles Dickens.

Yes, the character of Christ could have been invented! The literature of the world is filled with invented characters; and the imaginary lives of the splendid men and women of fiction will forever arrest the interest of the mind and hold the heart enthralled. But how account for Christianity if Christ did not live? Let me ask another question. How account for the Renaissance, for the Reformation, for the French Revolution, or for Socialism? Not one of these movements was created by an individual. They grew. Christianity grew. The Christian church is older than the oldest Christian writings. Christ did not produce the church. The church produced the story of Christ.

The Jesus Christ of the Gospels could not possibly have been a real person. He is a combination of impossible elements. There may have lived in Palestine, nineteen centuries ago, a man whose name was Jesus, who went about doing good, who was followed by admiring associates, and who in the end met a violent death. But of this possible person, not a line was written when he lived, and of his life and character the world of to-day knows absolutely nothing. This Jesus, if he lived, was a man; and if he was a reformer, he was but one of many that have lived and died in every age of the world. When the world shall have learned that the Christ of the Gospels is a myth, that Christianity is untrue, it will turn its attention from the religious fictions of the past to the vital problems of to-day, and endeavor to solve them for the improvement of the well-being of the real men and women whom we know, and whom we ought to help and love.