

## SUPERNATURALISM VERIFIED IN EXPERIENCE.

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A few summers ago I had the inspiring pleasure of visiting the Valley of the Ten Peaks in the Canadian Rockies. A well-made trail crosses the face of the mountain leading from exquisite Lake Louise, nestling in the lap of the friendly mountains, to Moraine Lake, the waters of which are as green as an emerald. Above, in serried grandeur, stretch the Ten Peaks in jagged strength, their lofty crests covered with the perpetual snow, which the warm August sunshine can only melt a little. Yonder is a glorious fall so high that we cannot hear its silvery music but can only see its transparent, filmy gleam like a gauzy, bridal veil stretched across the mountain valley. It is a great masterpiece of the handiwork of the Creator.

In Palestine there are two ranges of mountains called the Eastern and Western Range. The same word is employed for single eminences, such as Sinai, Ebal, Gerizim, Zion, and Olivet, and for a range such as Lebanon. For instance, the names Horeb and Sinai are used interchangeably, Horeb being the central ridge of which Sinai is a prominent peak.

A fresh study of the Person and work of the historic Jesus, beginning with the incarnation and ending with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, might well be called the ten peaks of supernaturalism.

The whole mountain range of revelation, running through Old and New Testament, as the Western mountain range runs through North and South America, may be fittingly called the mountain range of supernaturalism.

The writer holds Christianity to be supernatural from center to circumference, not antagonistic, but vastly greater than the natural order, which is but a lesser peak in the great mountain range of the ordered system of God.

## DEFINITION.

By the natural we mean a known and fixed way in which God usually acts. The natural world, with all its laws, is but one of the lesser planets in the solar system of God's great purpose and Being. God is not shut up in the winding sheet of his own laws, nor is He a prisoner in His own mode of acting. Even man can act upon these natural laws. One law acts upon another law in the realm of law. By the supernatural we mean the way in which God chooses to work outside and above, but not antagonistic to the natural laws of the world. It is the manifestation of a loftier law for a moral and spiritual end. It was not the infraction of law for Christ to walk upon the water or to turn water into wine, but the appearance of a new method, which, under similar circumstances, would doubtless be God's constant way of acting. Christ's manifestation in time was supernatural.

Vital Christianity is a sublime and permanent fellowship with Jesus Christ. He is the mightiest manifestation of supernaturalism that this sin-stricken world has ever seen, or shall ever see. He is not to be accounted for by any natural process of evolution from lesser to greater vision and power.

The supernatural Christ in His vast and spacious purpose for the world relates Himself to the natural order not only to perfect and complete it, but, as Dr. Gore points out, because of the moral catastrophe of sin, to redeem and rescue it. To live in an order which has been surcharged with supernaturalism, and to have a vibrant fellowship with the strong and eternal Son of God is to have the soul held in peace, poise, and power.

## THE ISSUE.

There is always a great advantage in having an issue plainly and squarely stated. In essence the whole controversy between belief and unbelief can be stated in one word, the pregnant word, supernaturalism.

The Christian view of God, man, and the world has to do with a supernatural Christ, and there is an irreconcilable antagonism between this view and the postulates of unbelief in its various forms of anti-supernaturalism. There are many things involved in receiving Christ as Saviour and master: one is, the clear transition from a merely naturalistic view of religion to a supernatural view of our relation to God and our duty to our fellows. And let me say at once, so there may be no misunderstanding about it, that the meaning of supernaturalism for Christianity is not exhausted in the recorded miracles of Christ, with which, by the way, I have no difficulty. The mighty works given by Christ are but a segment of the circle of supernaturalism, they are but an illuminated page from the book of God. The question is wider than "isolated miracles". It is, as Dr. Orr points out in "The Christian View of God and the World", a "question about the whole conception of Christianity—what it is, and whether the supernatural does not enter into the very essence of it? It is the general question of a supernatural or non-supernatural conception of the universe. Is there a supernatural Being—God? Is there a supernatural government of the world? Is there a supernatural relation of God and man, so that God and man may have communion with one another? Is there a supernatural Revelation? Has that Revelation culminated in a supernatural Person—Christ? Is there a supernatural work in the souls of men? Is there a supernatural Redemption? Is there a supernatural hereafter? It is these larger questions that have to be settled first, and then the question of particular miracles will fall into its proper place."

Dr. Delitzsch recognizes the contrast between the Christian and the naturalistic view. "It is plain", he says, "that the difference between old and modern theology coincides at bottom with the difference between the two conceptions of the world, which are at present more harshly opposed than ever before. The modern view of

the world declares the miracle to be unthinkable, and thus excluded from the historical mode of treatment; for there is only one world system, that of natural law, with whose permanence the direct, extraordinary interferences of God are irreconcilable. . . . An accommodation of this antagonism is impossible. We must belong to the one camp or the other. We may, it is true, inside the negative camp, tone down our negation to the very border of affirmation, and inside the positive camp we may weaken our affirmation so as almost to change it to a negation; the representation by individuals of the one standpoint or the other leaves room for a multitude of gradations and shades. But to the fundamental question—Is there a supernatural realm of Grace, and within it a miraculous interference of God in the world of nature, an interference displaying itself most centrally and decisively in the raising of the Redeemer from the dead?—to this fundamental question, however we may seek to evade it, the answer can only be yes or no. The deep gulf remains.”

And Neander, quoted by Dr. Orr, says in the commencement of his “History of the Church”: “Now we look upon Christianity not as a power that has sprung up out of the hidden depths of man’s nature, but as one that descended from above, when Heaven opened itself anew to man’s long alienated race; a power which, as both in its origin and in its essence it is exalted above all that human nature can create out of its own resources, was designed to impart to that nature a new life, and to change it in its inmost principles.”

Dr. Forsyth, in “The Work of Christ”, says: “In contrast with the church the various social forms that are offered to us today would build society upon a natural basis, the basis of natural brotherhood, natural humanity, natural goodness—on human nature. And the issue between the church and the chief rivals of the church is an issue between society upon this natural basis and society

upon a supernatural basis. Our Christian belief is based upon the work of Christ; and we hold that human society can only continue to exist in final unity upon that same supernatural basis. . . . The eternal promise is with supernatural faith." And later on in the discussion, Dr. Forsyth says: "Everything turns upon this—whether Christ was a created being, however grand, or whether He was of increate Godhead."

We must squarely meet the issue whether Christianity is a divine revelation supernaturally given or not, the supernatural element in Christ and through Him in Christianity is to be taken or left: it cannot be played with. John Morley places the issue very truly when he says: "If the preacher of the sermon on the Mount was more than man, if He was in any real sense whatever the bearer of a direct and special mission from the Supreme Being, if the ineffable attraction of His character had its secret in qualities conferred on Him by the Creator for the purpose of impressing men and leading them to loftier moral conceptions, then we are dealing with a supernatural transaction." Exactly so. We are dealing with a supernatural transaction and His earthly sojourn from Incarnation to Enthronement and the Coming of the Spirit is altogether a supernatural manifestation.

Dr. Fairbairn, in "The Philosophy of the Christian Religion", compares the Person of Christ in the gospels and the Pauline epistles. Jesus is not clothed in the garment of miracle in the epistles, but rather in humiliation and yet is declared to be an absolutely supernatural and creative personality. I quote: "This poverty of outward incident in the life lends all the more significance to the remarkable contrast between the local and particular supernaturalism of the histories and the universal and absolute supernaturalism of those apostolic epistles which originated so soon after His death. What stands there is a miracle of act and incident; what appears here is a Person so miraculous as to change the whole face of

nature and history, and make it as miraculous as Himself. He is so conceived that the race by His presence in it becomes a stupendous organism. . . .”

Dr. Orr shows with great clearness how inconsistent it is to hold to Theism and to be afraid of the full implications of supernaturalism. He says: “In affirming the existence of God as Theism apprehends Him, we have already taken a great step into the supernatural, a step which should make many others easy. Many speak glibly of the denial of the supernatural, who never realize how much of the supernatural they have already admitted in affirming the existence of a personal, wise, holy and beneficent Author of the universe. They may deny supernatural actions in the sense of miracles, but they have affirmed supernatural Being on a scale and in a degree which casts supernatural action quite into the shade. If God is a reality, the whole universe rests on a supernatural basis. A supernatural presence pervades it; a supernatural power sustains it; a supernatural will operates in its forces; a supernatural wisdom appoints its ends. The whole visible order of things rests on another—an unseen, spiritual, supernatural order—and is the symbol, the manifestation, the revelation of it. . . . If the opposition to the supernatural is to be carried out to its logical issue, it must not stop with the denial of miracles, but must extend to the whole theistic conception.”

#### SUPERNATURALISM AND CHRIST.

The quintessence of supernaturalism is in Christ. Hostile criticism and naturalism in religion are now aiming their shafts neither at Moses, Isaiah, nor John, but at the sacred Person of Christ Himself. The supreme battle is now being fought. The controversies on theology, since the issue is supernaturalism, were certain to narrow to the one vital question concerning Christ. As Dr. Dale says: “The storm has moved round the whole horizon, but it is rapidly concentrating its strength and fury above

one Sacred Head. This then is the real issue of the fight—Is Christendom to believe in Christ any longer, or not? It is not a creed, it is not the Old Testament, or the New, but the claim of Christ Himself to be the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind which is questioned. It is a controversy not for theologians only, but for every man who has seen the face of Christ, and can bear personal testimony to His power and glory.”

We linger for a moment in the presence of three of the mountain peaks of His supernaturalism: His birth, death, and resurrection. (1) *His Birth*. Dr. Garvie, in “The Inner Life of Jesus”, confesses that for him the virgin-birth was a burden, and not a help to faith, long after all doubt and difficulty about the divinity of Jesus had been removed. It is his belief in the divinity which renders credible the virgin-birth. He insists that he is not reasoning in a circle, for he has not first treated the virgin-birth as a proof of divinity, and then dealt with the divinity as a reason for the virgin-birth. He declares that the virgin-birth, accepted as a fact, helps us to understand better than otherwise we could the “inner life” of Jesus.

Professor Briggs, who has been known as a “storm-bird” in the theological heavens, has said in his comparatively new book, “The Fundamental Christian Faith”: “Though conception by the divine Spirit and virgin-birth are stated distinctly only in two writings of the New Testament, Matthew and Luke; yet these statements are based on poetic sources, which are of such an early date and so close to the family of Jesus that they are worthy of all acceptance. The other writings of the New Testament, while they do not clearly teach or necessarily imply a virgin-birth, yet do teach in a most unmistakable manner the entrance of a divine pre-existent being into the world in the flesh of Jesus Christ, and therefore sustain the statement, conceived by the Holy Spirit. It is possible to think of an ordinary conception by the power of the divine Spirit; but it is difficult to do so, considering the

product; a holy seed; sinless, incorruptible flesh, and a life-giving spirit of holiness; a man, it is true, but different from any other man, in that He was God-man. Furthermore, an ordinary conception would make Jesus' birth no more divine than that of Isaac or John the Baptist." And he also says: "What philosophy demands is a *sufficient reason* for any extraordinary action, whether by God or man. We can assign a sufficient reason for the extraordinary action of God in entering the world by incarnation in a virgin's womb. He came in the fullness of time, as St. Paul says, born of a woman, in order to redeem mankind. He became a God-man by incarnation to become the Saviour of the world. That reason is sufficient, as it is the most important of all reasons, for such a unique conception and birth of a virgin."

We hold Christ to be the God-man, not the man-God. Was Christ's birth from Heaven or of earth? If of earth, then the perfect holiness of Christ appears inexplicable. If of Heaven, then His sinlessness becomes altogether credible, and there is natural harmony, instead of discrepancy, between His ministry and His genesis.

It is not for us to say, aside from the historic facts, what God could or could not have done, but a Jesus in incarnation does not appear inexplicable to our sense of harmony. The historic fact fits in gloriously with all we know of His life and work.

The advocates of an earthly Christ hedge when squarely asked about His sinlessness. Sinlessness is a logical expectation from a heavenly Christ. If He is of the earth without a new supernatural creation no matter to what exalted heights of our human life He may have climbed, we cannot see rational ground for declaring His divinity. If He is of Heaven, through incarnation, in a new creative act of God, a second Adam, then His deity, expressing itself in sinlessness and atonement, is altogether reasonable.

It is perfectly evident that Christ's life, death, spirit, power, and influence were marvelously unique and declare



Him not only in close touch with God, but proclaim His inherent possession of supernatural gifts and powers. It is more reasonable to connect a miraculous history with a supernatural birth, than to join a natural birth and a miraculous history. To try to accept His character without His miraculous birth is to cut the splendid flower from the stalk that made its beauty and perfume possible. We hold, in a word, that His birth from Heaven is a new creative act of God, and that the second sinless Adam was not the offspring of the first sinning Adam, but a new creation, continuing His heavenly life on earth. The life of every other man began on earth. His life was with the Father before He came to earth.

The record in Matthew and Luke and its absence from the narrative in Mark and John is exactly what we should expect.

Matthew writes for the Jewish people, and primarily wishes to set forth the royalty of Christ. He is peculiarly desirous of showing the fulfillment of prophecy and thus declares the virgin-birth. The two original sources of information regarding Christ's birth were Mary and Joseph. Matthew's narrative evidently reflects Joseph's perplexities and actions.

Luke writes for the Gentiles, particularly the Greeks, and declares a universal Saviour. This Gospel contains Mary's narrative, for it is full of a feminine modesty, delicacy and devotion. Luke, the physician, is the one to whom Mary would have been most likely to tell the facts concerning the annunciation and birth of her Son. These chapters which would seem out of place in the purpose of Mark or John are most harmonious with the purpose and place of Luke. Well do writers declare that the holy secret of Christ's nativity is told in beautiful taste and harmony, together with exquisite delicacy and simplicity in the book of Luke.

Mark's Gospel for the Romans, men of action, throbs with vigor and swift movement. It is perfectly consistent

with his purpose of writing that he does not mention Christ's virgin-birth.

John's Gospel deals with the pre-existent Christ. He knew perfectly the history of Christ's birth. Think of the holy hours of fellowship with Mary and Joseph enjoyed after Christ on the cross had committed her to the care of His beloved disciple. John made reference to His birth when he wrote: "The Word was made flesh", and again the resemblance between the spiritual birth of believers and Christ's supernatural birth stands forth in the words, "which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The other writings of the New Testament teach in a most unmistakable manner the entrance into our humanity of the pre-existent Son of God. Paul declares Him "sent forth" on a mission from God, and "born of a woman". Yes, Jesus was "the Word made flesh". Why talk so much of Christ's birth? Because we desire to lay impregnable foundations for our holy faith.

Dr. Briggs says: "It is evident that the virgin-birth was not included in the preaching of St. Peter and his associates in the early days of the founding of the church in Jerusalem and Palestine. We have already noted in that preaching the other five redemptive acts or states of Christ. What does this silence mean? The argument from silence depends for its use, first, upon the question whether the matter came fairly within the scope of the author's argument; and, second, upon whether a good reason may be assigned for its omission. We cannot say that these early preachers were bound to preach the doctrine of the virgin-birth. They were witnesses of the resurrection; they testified to what they themselves had seen and known and the relation of these things to the Old Testament Scriptures, in order to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of the Old Testament. It was not necessary to mention the virgin-birth for that purpose. Furthermore, there were good reasons not to mention the

virgin-birth, even if these apostles were aware of it at the time, because it was not a doctrine suitable to proclaim in public during the first days of Christianity."

It was esoteric, for the Christian community; not to be made public, and so expose the virgin during her lifetime, and the early Christians, to the blasphemous calumny which did arise so soon as the doctrine of the virgin-birth was made public, and which, as any prudent man could see, was certain to arise. I do not insist here that the apostle at that time knew of the virgin-birth; but I do say that, if they knew it, they would not have publicly proclaimed it; but would have retained it for esoteric teaching, on the same principle on which Jesus acted, when He refrained from declaring His Messiahship till late in His ministry, and even then commanded the Twelve to keep this knowledge to themselves."

Naturally unbelief lifts its hand against this element of supernaturalism, which at the very beginning of Christ's advent becomes a drawn issue with skepticism. We hold that the throwing of the miraculous birth of Christ into doubt, and the putting of a huge question mark after the divine narrative, is, in essence, attacking the deity of Jesus Christ. In the last analysis, as Dr. Forsyth says, "Everything turns on whether Christ was a created being, however grand, or whether He was of increate Godhead." To believe in the miraculous birth is to listen to the overture worthy of the oratorio of His wonderful ministry and atoning death. A believer in the sinlessness of Christ and in His perfect atonement can find no other worthy genesis of His coming into our humanity, and wants no other way of entrance save that recorded in the Word of God. His nativity was from Heaven. Adam's birth was the beginning of the race of men, for whom the created earth was but an arena in which the great drama of soul possession should be enacted. After sin had gotten its grip upon our race, God in a new creation gives a second Adam, through whom a new race and

a new humanity are to rule on the earth. The new Adam is to be related to the ancient Adam through Mary's humanity, and as the first Adam brought disaster upon our race so the second Adam is to bring deliverance and blessing. We all have a share in Him and His blessed work. On our behalf He has created a new headship of the race.. This clearly is Paul's teaching.

(2) *His Cross.* The cross, likewise, is a sublime peak of supernaturalism, not to be devitalized and demagnetized by considering it some spectacular exhibition of unusual love, but it is the focal place of vicarious sin-bearing. To stand beneath the cross is to behold Christ gathering into His own sinless bosom the judgments of His own divine nature upon sin. Christ was never more pleasing to the Father or more fully within the divine will than at the climax of the long redemptive purpose when God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. In every suffering of Christ the Father suffered also. The cross is the birthplace of redemption.

(3) *His Resurrection.* The resurrection is the sublime vindication of His supernatural ministry and vicarious death. The virgin birth at the beginning, and the resurrection at the end of Christ's earth-visit are clearly and convincingly supernatural.

He had clearly foretold His resurrection in connection with His death. The resurrection is combined with His death, just as the ascension is united with His resurrection; all golden links in the chain of love. He had conquered Satan step by step in hard fought battles, and had never fallen beneath the craft or the strength of the ancient foe of the race. Is it not self-evident that such a Christ as the Gospels depict could not be holden of death? Our faith in the resurrection, even before we come to the indisputable facts in the historical evidence, is great because He had been victorious in sinlessness in every assault of evil; in each instance when He came into touch with death He conquered; there remains the com-

plete victory yet to be attained in the final demonstration that the temple of His body would be rebuilt in three days.

These presuppositions are not to take the place of Easter facts. The faith in Christ which makes His resurrection logically and spiritually imperative is not to be substituted for the historical evidence which is simply overwhelming in its strength and consistency. The empty tomb with the angels on guard; the ten appearances of Christ for the purpose of consolation, confirmation and commission; the marvelous changes in the apostles, they passing from timidity to boldness, from perplexity to assurance, from dullness to keenness; the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, whose whole life was changed by a vision of the risen Christ; the new church founded on the resurrection of the Son of God—these five facts make it almost incredible that any doubt should arise regarding His resurrection in a glorified body.

And why should any man seek to question the fact of His resurrection? Not because there is any doubt of the genuineness of the documents or the credibility of the witnesses, but because there is a deep-seated aversion on the part of those who are intoxicated with naturalism and rationalism to anything supernatural. They see, as do we, that the miracle of His resurrection involves much for the presence of supernatural power bursting through the natural order of things. If a man's mind is absolutely closed against the immediate action of God in relation to our humanity then the supernatural becomes next to impossible to him.

To those who try to use the name of Christian while denying the power of His resurrection the literal resurrection of Christ becomes a stumbling stone, a stone of offense. Instead of the resurrection being a weight to be carried by Christianity, it is a cornerstone of our holy faith, and a stepping stone to glorious things. We hold unswervingly that, now as ever, His resurrection is the pivotal fact of Christianity. God raised Him from the

dead. His life and death and resurrection are altogether harmonious. He laid down life and He took it again, as He said He was to do. He and the Father are one in the essence of their Being and in their work. The earthly disciples knew that He had risen from the dead, not only because some of them had seen Him, and because others knew those who had seen him, but because they had fellowship with Him day by day. He was with them as He had promised He would be. To be risen with Christ in a living, vital experience is to know that He is risen. How could we have arisen to the new spiritual life had He not risen from the grave? Easter in our lives is the verification of Easter in history. In order that each one may have within, the infallible proofs of the historic resurrection we are invited to enter into the experience of having risen with Christ. Thus the most stupendous doctrine of Christianity is brought into my own affection and understanding.

Do you remind me that Harnack in "What is Christianity?" seeks to differentiate the Easter message and the Easter faith and says that a living experience can be based on the Easter faith whatever may have happened at the grave, and thereby we shall escape depending on a foundation unstable and always exposed to fresh doubts? Harnack holds there is certainty in this "that the grave was the birthplace of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished and there is a life eternal."

Paul certainly knows nothing of such a differentiation between an Easter message and an Easter faith. He insists that men could never have been brought to faith without the resurrection which he preaches as an ambassador from Heaven. Does he not say, "and if Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins"? He preaches an Easter message leading to an Easter faith.

## A PERSONAL CHRIST.

And this brings me to the verification of the supernatural in experience. Such an experience is possible because Christianity is a fellowship with the living Christ.

The personal Christ stands forth in the thought and life of our age as perhaps He has not been seen in any other age since that radiant morning-time when primitive Christians knew Him and knew Him intimately. Hugh McIntosh, in "Is Christ Infallible and the Bible True?", says, in words of deep significance, regarding the prominence of Christ in recent theology: "Nothing is more remarkable or precious in recent religious thought and life than the central and unique position given to Christ Himself. Perhaps never before since the primitive Christian times when the personal Jesus was all in all, has the consciousness of a living Christ so much pervaded and dominated religious thought, life and literature as now. As He was the Alpha in the first ages, so He is fast becoming the Omega in these last times. The tide and passion of our time flow strongly Christward. Round Himself, rather than any lesser center, recent theological ideas gather and crystalize. From Him rather than from any abstract truth or principle, leaders of Christian thought and activity draw their inspiration and draw their power. Doubtless in every age, Christ has been more or less the heart and motive power of Christianity and the burning, creative souls who have made and moulded new eras and pulsed fresh life and influence adown all after ages, have derived their force from fellowship with Him."

But when we leave the fullness and vitality infused into and permeating the primitive ages by the conscious nearness of a risen Lord, when Christ like a river in full flood issuing from its fountain, breathed and teemed with a unique realization of the presence and spirit of a personal Christ, the fragrance of which has lingered through the ages, and refreshes the church today, we find the doc-

trine about Christ rather than Christ Himself, more and more takes the pre-eminence.

The controversies with the early heretic and skeptic unconsciously tended to this. The first great controversy as to the Person and Divinity of Christ, though unavoidable, and in its ultimate results invaluable, nevertheless somewhat diverted men's thoughts and affection from our Lord Himself to words and phrases, discussions and creeds about Him. During the Augustinian age, religious thought through the Pelagian and cognate controversies, was turned largely away from theology proper to anthropology, and though great and lasting service was done for truth and the church thereby, a personal ever-present Jesus, with the glory of His unique personality and the preciousness of His ever-living Presence with His people, became less and less realized. Through the middle ages, He was largely lost sight of, and thought of Him was replaced by the cultivation and development of formalism and sacerdotalism, by the creation of purgatory and the establishment of the papacy. Even at the Reformation, inestimable and enduring though its achievements for truth and liberty were, it was more the *work* of Christ and that, too, in its bearing mainly on man's justification, one section of soteriology, than the living Christ Himself that stood forth with great prominence. In the 17th century when the Dutch and Puritan divines laid the church under everlasting obligations for the unparalleled services rendered to Scripture exposition and experimental religion, it was not so much a personal Christ as the covenant of grace—not so much the living Jesus as the eternal purpose that formed the center and burden of their thought and teaching.

And it is only in recent times, and largely within the present generation, mainly within the last decade of the 19th century, that Christ Himself the Divine Man, Christ Jesus has resumed, or has begun to resume, something of His primitive pre-eminence and central position in re-



ligious thought, Christian life, and theological literature. It places Him at the center and heart of the whole system of salvation, instead of any abstract doctrine or system of truth. Him to whom as The Truth that position only belongs, and who alone can properly occupy it.

This is the ground of our fellowship. Fellowship congeals in relationship with a doctrine or an abstract truth but blossoms into an abiding and growing friendship with a personal Christ. The fruit of such a friendship is an enthusiastic and a sane evangelism, and a mighty conviction which neither narrows into prejudice nor broadens into conventionality.

The most glorious apologetic for Christ is a holy practical life and paradoxical as it may seem the forces that stand for amelioration in the twentieth century are those that have the upward look of faith. There have been centuries where there has been no vision of God and the people have cast off restraint and have perished. Progress in the Christian era has been due more largely to spiritual than to intellectual forces. There is no power of progress in a man or century whose face is turned earthward. In the first half of the eighteenth century in England there was a downward look. Formalism and impiety were in the pulpit, ignorance and immorality were demoralizing the people, bribery was the ruling principle of politics. In the last half of the same century men's faces were turned upward through the great Methodist movement in which spiritual experience was magnified, and then there followed the great modern inventions and discoveries, which would have been impossible in the spirit of the first half of the century.

To walk with God on the heights will be to walk with the needy in the valley.

#### EXPERIENCE.

The function of experience does not seem to me to be a subjective standard at the judgment bar of which revealed truth must stand for vindication, but rather the

verification in vital, personal, and lofty knowledge of the truth of supernaturalism.

We must be careful to give neither more nor less weight to experience than is given it in the great system of God's unfolding grace. In all our dealing with experience and intuitions we must never make sin and consequent opaqueness of mind, with our limited and warped knowledge, negligible conditions, for they bear very directly upon the necessity of an objective standard. Experience at its best, when under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, is but the unfolding, in beautiful flower, of the seed or plant growing in the garden of Scriptures.

The spirit's age-long work is to take of the things of Christ and make them living realities in the inward experience of willing hearts. Be sure the inward experience born of God will not disagree with the objective standard of revelation. Dr. Strong says: "Christian experience is sometimes regarded as an original source of religious truth. Experience, however, is but a testing and proving of the truth objectively contained in God's revelation." Dr. George A. Gordon says that Christian history is a revelation of Christ additional to that contained in the New Testament. Should we not say "illustrative", instead of "additional"?

Dr. Fairbairn, in "The Philosophy of the Christian Religion", speaks of "the tragedy of Christian experience"—"the co-existence and conflict in the same soul of a double sense, a fear of sin that almost craves annihilation, and a love of holy being that yearns toward the vision of God. Yet these are both due to the action in us of the ideal, sinless personality, and express the love by which He guides men into the light of life."

And in this profound experience, which does not ignore but which recognizes the catastrophe of sin, we translate into a living verification the great facts of God's grace.

Experience is not a substitute for revelation. Coleridge spoke truly for the assurance of many a believer

in his argument of the truth which found him. It was not truth because it found him, but it found him because it was truth. We are bidden in the supposed flux of religious certainty to turn to experience as being independent of the results of criticism. We can hold tenaciously to the spiritual life which results in a fact of a changed character. We certainly can, but experience flows from high mountain lakes of revelation. It would require but a brief time for the fructifying experience to dwindle as did the brook at Cherith under the blight of the drought of an uncertain revelation.

I can verify a part of revelation. In each fresh experience I can have a fresh verification and perhaps if I had a universal experience I could verify all. The experience that verifies divine truth harmonizes with a spiritual view of God. To make experience a criterion in itself is probably to miss largely the kind of experience that has deepest value.

It is altogether true that things which need not be proven by arguments can be experienced and many feed on "the Soul's fundamental experience of God" as Dr. Denney says in "The Way Everlasting". He says: "The being and personality of God, so far as there is any religious interest in them, are not to be proved by arguments; they are to be experienced in the kind of experience here described. The man who can say, 'O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me', does not need any argument to prove that God is, and that He is a person, and that He has an intimate and importunate interest in his life. If that is a real experience—as who will deny that it is?—and if it is not a morbid phenomenon, but one which is sane and normal, then the *thou* in it is just as real as the *me*. The Psalmist is as certain of God as he is of his own existence."

Verification for the supernatural in the New Testament is found in the spiritual miracles of conversion, in which millions of living witnesses will give glad testi-

mony. The living church is a demonstration of the word of God. In spite of its virulent enemies and its so-called friends, who have betrayed it by inconsistent lives and perverted doctrines, it abides in its mighty strength and is today the greatest power for good in the world.

In individual experience men have tested the promise of Christ to forgive sin and to flood the life with peace and power. He is the "Sinless One" who brings help to the sinner. Salvation was demonstrated in the first centuries. The favorable witness of saints was more important than the slanders of critics. There are literally millions of living men and women who have accepted the experience called conversion, and they have received one unvarying result—the passing from condemnation to peace. They would lay down their lives in a severe test for Jesus Christ—not every one, perhaps, but multitudes of them.

In each conversion there is a miracle performed, not on inanimate clay, not on bread or water, but on a living person with an active, hostile will, who must first be won to a consideration of the claims of Christ, and then to a personal acceptance of Him. To raise a sinner, with active alienation against God and a will set against righteousness, to spiritual love and service is a mightier miracle than the raising of Lazarus. To cause a man to love the bread of life is a greater deed than to multiply bread on the hillside.

Each saved man who knows the joy of converting grace, is a verification of the claims of the sinless Christ and an evidence of the mighty power of a supernatural Christianity.

#### CONCLUSION.

Such an experimental knowledge of the supernatural Christ, matched by the experiences of others will give renewed faith in eternal realities.

Mr. Clow, in "The Cross in Christian Experience", speaks of Dr. Dale, who in "The Living Christ and The

Four Gospels", describes the Christian scholar who had spent his morning over his books until his intellectual certainties have been shaken. Questions he could not answer troubled his spirit. In the afternoon he sat by the side of some poor, aged, and illiterate man, whose strength was slowly wasting, and the condition of whose life was cheerless. But the old man had traveled by the same path as all the saints have traveled. His words, simple and rude, about what Christ had been to him and done for him had the accent of reality. As the scholar listened he could recall, at point after point, identical experience of his own. The old man's theories and explanations of them, and his own were different. But it was certain that he had seen what the old man had seen. As he walked home he remembered corresponding experiences which had been told him by other men, and of which he had read in the lives of the saints of other churches, other countries, other times. He was sure, with a renewed confidence, that there is one Mediator between God and man, Himself man, the man Christ Jesus.

Supernaturalism verified by experience will be winsome and compelling to the young manhood of the twentieth century.

The church has its duty in this time of opportunity to show that its faith is resonant and heaven-born, and that its social service is broad and Christlike. Young men will be won by a faith which is positive and a service which is catholic. The supernaturalism of the Christian faith is not underbrush to be cleared out and turned into bonfires, but it is timber from which to build temples. There is no attractiveness to young men in unnecessary bonfires upon which green wood has been piled until the eyes are blinded with smoke from the uncanny fire. Dismal doubt need not precede luminous faith. On the other hand, a religion divorced from conduct and service will never demand the enthusiastic loyalty of strong men who are intensely common-sense in this practical age. They

desire a religion which is not primarily the acceptance of a formula but the possession of a fellowship with Christ which will thrill their entire manhood, and then a service which will be vocational and successful. The breadth of the enterprise of our evangelism, the glories of our philanthropy, the determined effort to touch life at every point, putting religion into business and business into religion will rally young men to seize the opportunities in this age of individualism and transmute their strength and initiative into new victories for the Kingdom of God. It is the fault of the church if this spiritual renaissance of youth, possessed by a dynamic faith in a supernatural Christianity, does not flood with its abundant vigor all of its coast lines, and fill its harbors with treasure ships.

The strength of the church, now as ever, lies in an abiding faith, in a supernatural Christ, verifiable in personal experience. Thus one carries in his own bosom the assurance of God's holy presence in life.