

§ 2. (continued)

8.

1 When I implied that in some points of view Christianity has not answered the
2 expectations of the old prophecies, of which it claims to be the fulfilment, I had in mind
3 principally the contrast which is presented to us between the picture which they draw of
4 the universality of the kingdom of the Messiah, and that partial development of it
5 through the world, which is all the Christian Church can show; and again the contrast
6 between the rest and peace which they said He was to introduce, and the Church's
7 actual history,—the conflicts of opinion which have raged within its pale, the violent acts
8 and unworthy lives of many of its rulers, and the moral degradation of great masses of
9 its people. I do not profess to meet these difficulties here, except by saying that the
10 failure of Christianity in one respect in corresponding to those prophecies cannot
11 destroy the force of its correspondence to them in others; just as we may allow that the
12 portrait of a friend is a faulty likeness to him, and yet be quite sure that it is his portrait.
13 What I shall actually attempt to show here is this,—that Christianity was quite aware
14 from the first of its own prospective future, so unlike the expectations which the
15 prophets would excite concerning it, and that it meets the difficulty thence arising by
16 anticipation, by giving us its own predictions of what it was to be in historical {448} fact,
17 predictions which are at once explanatory comments upon the Jewish Scriptures, and
18 direct evidences of its own prescience.

19 I think it observable then, that, though our Lord claims to be the Messiah, He shows so
20 little of conscious dependence on the old Scriptures, or of anxiety to fulfil them; as if it
21 became Him, who was the Lord of the Prophets, to take His own course, and to leave
22 their utterances to adjust themselves to Him as they could, and not to be careful to
23 accommodate Himself to them. The evangelists do indeed show some such natura1
24 zeal in His behalf, and thereby illustrate what I notice in Him by the contrast. They
25 betray an earnestness to trace in His Person and history the accomplishment of
26 prophecy, as when they discern it in His return from Egypt, in His life at Nazareth, in the
27 gentleness and tenderness of His mode of teaching, and in the various minute
28 occurrences of His passion; but He Himself goes straight forward on His way, of course
29 claiming to be the Messiah of the Prophets [Note 1], still not so much recurring to past
30 prophecies, as uttering new ones, with an antithesis not unlike that which is so
31 impressive in the Sermon on the Mount, when He first says, "It has been said by them
32 of old time," and then adds, "But I say unto you." Another striking instance of this is
33 seen in the Names under which He spoke of Himself, which {449} have little or no
34 foundation in anything which was said of Him beforehand in the Jewish Scriptures. They
35 speak of Him as Ruler, Prophet, King, Hope of Israel, Offspring of Judah, and Messiah;
36 and His Evangelists and Disciples call Him Master, Lord, Prophet, Son of David, King of
37 Israel, King of the Jews, and Messiah or Christ; but He Himself, though, I repeat, He
38 acknowledges these titles as His own, especially that of the Christ, chooses as His
39 special designations these two, Son of God and Son of Man, the latter of which is only
40 once given Him in the Old Scriptures, and by which He corrects any narrow Judaic
41 interpretation of them; while the former was never distinctly used of Him before He

42 came, and seems first to have been announced to the world by the Angel Gabriel and
43 St. John the Baptist. In those two Names, Son of God and Son of Man, declaratory of
44 the two natures of Emmanuel, He separates Himself from the Jewish Dispensation, in
45 which He was born, and inaugurates the New Covenant.

46 This is not an accident, and I shall now give some instances of it, that is, of what I may
47 call the independent autocratic view which He takes of His own religion, into which the
48 old Judaism was melting, and of the prophetic insight into its spirit and its future which
49 that view involves. In quoting His own sayings from the Evangelists for this purpose, I
50 assume (of which there is no reasonable doubt) that they wrote before any historical
51 events had happened of a nature to cause them unconsciously to modify or to colour
52 the language which their Master used. {450}

53 1. First, then, the fact has been often insisted on as a bold conception, unheard of
54 before, and worthy of divine origin, that He should even project a universal religion, and
55 that to be effected by what may be called a propagandist movement from one centre.
56 Hitherto it had been the received notion in the world, that each nation had its own gods.
57 The Romans legislated upon that basis, and the Jews had held it from the first, holding
58 of course also, that all gods but their own God were idols and demons. It is true that the
59 Jews ought to have been taught by their prophecies what was in store for the world and
60 for them, and that their first dispersion through the Empire centuries before Christ came,
61 and the proselytes which they collected around them in every place, were a kind of
62 comment on the prophecies larger than their own; but we see what was, in fact, when
63 our Lord came, their expectation from those prophecies, in the passages which I have
64 quoted above from the Roman historians of His day. But He from the first resisted those
65 plausible, but mistaken interpretations of Scripture. In His cradle indeed He had been
66 recognized by the Eastern Sages as their king; the Angel announced that He was to
67 reign over the house of Jacob; Nathanael, too, owned Him as the Messiah with a regal
68 title; but He, on entering upon His work, interpreted these anticipations in His own way,
69 and that not the way of Theudas and Judas of Galilee, who took the sword, and
70 collected soldiers about them,—nor the way of the Tempter, who offered Him "all the
71 kingdoms of the world." In the words of the Evangelists, He began, not to fight, but "to
72 {451} preach;" and further, to "preach the kingdom of heaven," saying, "The time is
73 accomplished, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the Gospel." This
74 is the significant title, "the kingdom of heaven,"—the more significant, when explained
75 by the attendant precept of repentance and faith,—on which He founds the polity which
76 He was establishing from first to last. One of His last sayings before He suffered was,
77 "My kingdom is not of this world." And His last words, before He left the earth, when His
78 disciples asked him about His kingdom, were that they, preachers as they were, and not
79 soldiers, should "be His witnesses to the end of the earth," should "preach to all nations,
80 beginning with Jerusalem," should "go into the world and preach the Gospel to every
81 creature," should "go and make disciples of all nations till the consummation of all
82 things."

83 The last Evangelist of the four is equally precise in recording the initial purpose with
84 which our Lord began His ministry, viz. to create an empire, not by force, but by

85 persuasion. "Light is come into the world: every one that doth evil, hateth the light, but
86 he that doth truth, cometh to the light." "Lift up your eyes, and see the countries, for they
87 are white already to harvest." "No man can come to Me, except the Father, who hath
88 sent Me, draw him." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself."

89 Thus, while the Jews, relying on their Scriptures with great appearance of reason,
90 looked for a deliverer who should conquer with the sword, we find that Christianity, from
91 the first, not by an afterthought upon {452} trial and experience, but as a fundamental
92 truth, magisterially set right that mistake, transfiguring the old prophecies, and bringing
93 to light, as St. Paul might say, "the mystery which had been hidden from ages and
94 generations, but now was made manifest in His saints, the glory of this mystery among
95 the Gentiles, which is Christ in you," not simply over you, but in you, by faith and love,
96 "the hope of glory."

97 2. I have partly anticipated my next remark, which relates to the means by which the
98 Christian enterprise was to be carried into effect. That preaching was to have a share in
99 the victories of the Messiah was plain from Prophet and Psalmist; but then
100 Charlemagne preached, and Mahomet preached, with an army to back them. The same
101 Psalm which speaks of those "who preach good tidings," speaks also of their King's
102 "foot being dipped in the blood of His enemies;" but what is so grandly original in
103 Christianity is, that on its broad field of conflict its preachers were to be simply unarmed,
104 and to suffer, but to prevail. If we were not so familiar with our Lord's words, I think they
105 would astonish us. "Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves." This was to be
106 their normal state, and so it was; and all the promises and directions given to them
107 imply it. "Blessed are they that suffer persecution;" "blessed are ye when they revile
108 you;" "the meek shall inherit the earth;" "resist not evil;" "you shall be hated of all men
109 for My Name's sake;" "a man's enemies shall be they of his own household;" "he that
110 shall persevere to the end, he shall he saved." What sort of encouragement was this for
111 men who were {453} to go about an immense work? Do men in this way send out their
112 soldiers to battle, or their sons to India or Australia? The King of Israel hated Micaiah,
113 because he always "prophesied of him evil." "So persecuted they the Prophets that
114 were before you," says our Lord. Yes, and the Prophets failed; they were persecuted
115 and they lost the battle. "Take, my brethren," says St. James, "for an example of
116 suffering evil, of labour and patience, the Prophets, who spake in the Name of the Lord."
117 They were "racked, mocked, stoned, cut asunder, they wandered about,—of whom the
118 world was not worthy," says St. Paul. What an argument to encourage them to aim at
119 success by suffering, to put before them the precedent of those who suffered and who
120 failed!

121 Yet the first preachers, our Lord's immediate disciples, saw no difficulty in a prospect to
122 human eyes so appalling, so hopeless. How connatural this strange, unreasoning,
123 reckless courage was with their regenerate state is shown most signally in St. Paul, as
124 having been a convert of later vocation. He was no personal associate of our Lord's, yet
125 how faithfully he echoes back our Lord's language! His instrument of conversion is "the
126 foolishness of preaching;" "the weak things of the earth confound the strong;" "we
127 hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no home;" "we are reviled

128 and bless, we are persecuted, and blasphemed, and are made the refuse of this world,
129 and the offscouring of all things." Such is the intimate comprehension, on the part of one
130 who had never seen our Lord on earth, and knew little from His original {454} disciples
131 of the genius of His teaching;—and considering that the prophecies, upon which he had
132 lived from his birth, for the most part bear on their surface a contrary doctrine, and that
133 the Jews of that day did commonly understand them in that contrary sense, we cannot
134 deny that Christianity, in tracing out the method by which it was to prevail in the future,
135 took its own, independent line, and, in assigning from the first a rule and a history to its
136 propagation, a rule and a history which have been carried out to this day, rescues itself
137 from the charge of but partially fulfilling those Jewish prophecies, by the assumption of a
138 prophetic character of its own.

139 3. Now we come to a third point, in which the Divine Master explains, and in a certain
140 sense corrects, the prophecies of the Old Covenant, by a more exact interpretation of
141 them from Himself. I have granted that they seemed to say that His coming would issue
142 in a period of peace and religiousness. "Behold," says the Prophet, "a king shall reign in
143 justice, and princes shall rule in judgment. The fool shall no more be called prince,
144 neither shall the deceitful be called great. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the
145 leopard lie down with the kid. They shall not hurt nor kill in all My holy mountain, for the
146 earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the covering waters of the sea."

147 These words seem to predict a reversal of the consequences of the fall, and that
148 reversal has not yet been granted to us, it is true; but let us consider how distinctly
149 Christianity warns us against any such anticipation. {455} While it is so forcibly laid
150 down in the Gospels that the history of the kingdom of heaven begins in suffering and
151 sanctity, it is as plainly said that it results in unfaithfulness and sin; that is to say, that,
152 though there are at all times many holy, many religious men in it, and though sanctity,
153 as at the beginning, is ever the life and the substance and the germinal seed of the
154 Divine Kingdom, yet there will ever be many too, there will be more, who by their lives
155 are a scandal and injury to it, not a defence. This again is an astonishing
156 announcement, and the more so when viewed in contrast with the precepts delivered by
157 our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount, and His description to the Apostles of their
158 weapons and their warfare. So perplexing to Christians was the fact when fulfilled, as it
159 was in no long time on a large scale, that three of the early heresies more or less
160 originated in obstinate, unchristian refusal to readmit to the privileges of the Gospel
161 those who had fallen into sin. Yet our Lord's words are express: He tells us that "Many
162 are called, few are chosen;" in the parable of the Marriage Feast, the servants who are
163 sent out gather together "all that they found, both bad and good;" the foolish virgins "had
164 no oil in their vessels;" amid the good seed an enemy sows seed that is noxious or
165 worthless; and "the kingdom is like to a net which gathered together all kind of fishes;"
166 and "at the end of the world the Angels shall go forth, and shall separate the wicked
167 from among the just."

168 Moreover, He not only speaks of His religion as destined to possess a wide temporal
169 power, such, that, {456} as in the case of the Babylonian, "the birds of the air should
170 dwell in its branches," but He opens on us the prospect of ambition and rivalry in its

171 leading members, when He warns His disciples against desiring the first places in His
172 kingdom; nay, of grosser sins, in His description of the Ruler, who "began to strike his
173 fellow-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken,"—passages which have an awful
174 significance, considering what kind of men have before now been His chosen
175 representatives, and have sat in the chair of His Apostles.

176 If then it be objected that Christianity does not, as the old prophets seem to promise,
177 abolish sin and irreligion within its pale, we may answer, not only that it did not engage
178 to do so, but that actually in a prophetic spirit it warned its followers against the
179 expectation of its so doing.

180 9.

181 According to our Lord's announcements before the event, Christianity was to prevail and
182 to become a great empire, and to fill the earth; but it was to accomplish this destiny, not
183 as other victorious powers had done, and as the Jews expected, by force of arms or by
184 other means of this world, but by the novel expedient of sanctity and suffering. If some
185 aspiring party of this day, the great Orleans family, or a branch of the Hohenzollern,
186 wishing to found a kingdom, were to profess, as their only weapon, the practice of
187 virtue, they would not startle us more than it startled {457} a Jew eighteen hundred
188 years ago, to be told that his glorious Messiah was not to fight, like Joshua or David, but
189 simply to preach. It is indeed a thought so strange, both in its prediction and in its
190 fulfilment, as urgently to suggest to us that some Divine Power went with him who
191 conceived and proclaimed it. This is what I have been saying;—now I wish to consider
192 the fact, which was predicted, in itself, without reference to its being the subject whether
193 of a prediction or of a fulfilment: that is, the history of the rise and establishment of
194 Christianity; and to enquire whether it is a history that admits of being resolved, by any
195 philosophical ingenuity, into the ordinary operation of moral, social, or political causes.

196 As is well known, various writers have attempted to assign human causes in
197 explanation of the phenomenon: Gibbon has especially mentioned five, viz. the zeal of
198 Christians, inherited from the Jews, their doctrine of a future state, their claim to
199 miraculous power, their virtues, and their ecclesiastical organization. Let us briefly
200 consider them.

201 He thinks these five causes, when combined, will fairly account for the event; but he has
202 not thought of accounting for their combination. If they are ever so available for his
203 purpose, still that availableness arises out of their coincidence, and out of what does
204 that coincidence arise? Until this is explained, nothing is explained, and the question
205 had better have been let alone. These presumed causes are quite distinct from each
206 other, and, I say, the wonder is, what made them come together. How came a multitude
207 of Gentiles to {458} be influenced with Jewish zeal? How came zealots to submit to a
208 strict, ecclesiastical *régime*? What connexion has a secular *régime* with the immortality
209 of the soul? Why should immortality, a philosophical doctrine, lead to belief in miracles,
210 which is a superstition of the vulgar? What tendency had miracles and magic to make
211 men austere and virtuous? Lastly, what power was there in a code of virtue, as calm and

212 enlightened as that of Antoninus, to generate a zeal as fierce as that of Maccabæus?
213 Wonderful events before now have apparently been nothing but coincidences, certainly;
214 but they do not become less wonderful by cataloguing their constituent causes, unless
215 we also show how these came to be constituent.

216 However, this by the way; the real question is this,—are these historical characteristics
217 of Christianity, also in matter of fact, historical causes of Christianity? Has Gibbon given
218 proof that they are? Has he brought evidence of their operation, or does he simply
219 conjecture in his private judgment that they operated? Whether they were adapted to
220 accomplish a certain work, is a matter of opinion; whether they did accomplish it is a
221 question of fact. He ought to adduce instances of their efficiency before he has a right to
222 say that they are efficient. And the second question is, what is this effect, of which they
223 are to be considered as causes? It is no other than this, the conversion of bodies of
224 men to the Christian faith. Let us keep this in view. We have to determine whether these
225 five characteristics of Christianity were efficient causes of bodies of men becoming
226 Christians? I think {459} they neither did effect such conversions, nor were adapted to
227 do so, and for these reasons:—

228 1. For first, as to zeal, by which Gibbon means party spirit, or *esprit de corps*; this
229 doubtless is a motive principle when men are already members of a body, but does it
230 operate in bringing them into it? The Jews were born in Judaism, they had a long and
231 glorious history, and would naturally feel and show *esprit de corps*; but how did party
232 spirit tend to transplant Jew or Gentile out of his own place into a new society, and that
233 a society which as yet scarcely was formed in a society? Zeal, certainly, may be felt for
234 a cause, or for a person; on this point I shall speak presently; but Gibbon's idea of
235 Christian zeal is nothing better than the old wine of Judaism decanted into new
236 Christian bottles, and would be too flat a stimulant, even if it admitted of such a
237 transference, to be taken as a cause of conversion to Christianity without definite
238 evidence in proof of the fact. Christians had zeal for Christianity after they were
239 converted, not before.

240 2. Next, as to the doctrine of a future state. Gibbon seems to mean by this doctrine the
241 fear of hell; now certainly in this day there are persons converted from sin to a religious
242 life, by vivid descriptions of the future punishment of the wicked; but then it must be
243 recollected that such persons already believe in the doctrine thus urged upon them. On
244 the contrary, give some Tract upon hell-fire to one of the wild boys in a large town, who
245 has had no education, who has no faith; and instead of being startled by it, he will laugh
246 at it as something frightfully ridiculous. {460} The belief in Styx and Tartarus was dying
247 out of the world at the time that Christianity came in, as the parallel belief now seems to
248 be dying out in all classes of our own society. The doctrine of eternal punishment does
249 only anger the multitude of men in our large towns now, and make them blaspheme;
250 why should it have had any other effect on the heathen population in the age when our
251 Lord came? Yet it was among those populations, that He and His made their way from
252 the first. As to the hope of eternal life, that doubtless, as well as the fear of hell, was a
253 most operative doctrine in the case of men who had been actually converted, of
254 Christians brought before the magistrate, or writhing under torture, but the thought of

255 eternal glory does not keep bad men from a bad life now, and why should it convert
256 them then from their pleasant sins, to a heavy, mortified, joyless existence, to a life of ill-
257 usage, fright, contempt, and desolation.

258 3. That the claim to miracles should have any wide influence in favour of Christianity
259 among heathen populations, who had plenty of portents of their own, is an opinion in
260 curious contrast with the objection against Christianity which has provoked an answer
261 from Paley, viz. that "Christian miracles are not recited or appealed to, by early Christian
262 writers themselves, so fully or so frequently as might have been expected." Paley solves
263 the difficulty as far as it is a fact, by observing, as I have suggested, that "it was their lot
264 to contend with magical agency, against which the mere production of these facts was
265 not sufficient for the convincing of their adversaries:" {461} "I do not know," he
266 continues, "whether they themselves thought it quite decisive of the controversy." A
267 claim to miraculous power on the part of Christians, which was so unfrequent as to
268 become now an objection to the fact of their possessing it, can hardly have been a
269 principal cause of their success.

270 4. And how is it possible to imagine with Gibbon that what he calls the "sober and
271 domestic virtues" of Christians, their "aversion to the luxury of the age," their "chastity,
272 temperance, and economy," that these dull qualities were persuasives of a nature to win
273 and melt the hard heathen heart, in spite too of the dreary prospect of the *barathrum*,
274 the amphitheatre, and the stake? Did the Christian morality by its severe beauty make a
275 convert of Gibbon himself? On the contrary, he bitterly says, "It was not in this world that
276 the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful."
277 "The virtue of the primitive Christians, like that of the first Romans, was very frequently
278 guarded by poverty and ignorance." "Their gloomy and austere aspect, their abhorrence
279 of the common business and pleasures of life, and their frequent predictions of
280 impending calamities, inspired the Pagans with the apprehension of some danger which
281 would arise from the new sect." Here we have not only Gibbon hating the moral and
282 social bearing, but his heathen also. How then were those heathen overcome by the
283 amiableness of that which they viewed with such disgust? We have here plain proof that
284 the Christian character repelled the heathen; where is the evidence that it converted
285 them? {462}

286 5. Lastly, as to the ecclesiastical organization, this, doubtless, as time went on, was a
287 special characteristic of the new religion; but how could it directly contribute to its
288 extension? Of course it gave it strength, but it did not give it life. We are not born of
289 bones and muscles. It is one thing to make conquests, another to consolidate an
290 empire. It was before Constantine that Christians made their great conquests. Rules are
291 for settled times, not for time of war. So much is this contrast felt in the Catholic Church
292 now, that, as is well known, in heathen countries and in countries which have thrown off
293 her yoke, she suspends her diocesan administration and her Canon Law, and puts her
294 children under the extraordinary, extra-legal jurisdiction of Propaganda.

295 This is what I am led to say on Gibbon's Five Causes. I do not deny that they might
296 have operated now and then; Simon Magus came to Christianity in order to learn the

297 craft of miracles, and Peregrinus from love of influence and power; but Christianity
298 made its way, not by individual, but by broad, wholesale conversions, and the question
299 is, how they originated?

300 It is very remarkable that it should not have occurred to a man of Gibbon's sagacity to
301 inquire, what account the Christians themselves gave of the matter. Would it not have
302 been worth while for him to have let conjecture alone, and to have looked for facts
303 instead? Why did he not try the hypothesis of faith, hope, and charity? Did he never
304 hear of repentance towards God, and faith in Christ? Did he not recollect the many
305 words of Apostles, Bishops, Apologists, Martyrs, {463} all forming one testimony? No;
306 such thoughts are close upon him, and close upon the truth; but he cannot sympathize
307 with them, he cannot believe in them, he cannot even enter into them, *because* he
308 needs the due formation for such an exercise of mind [Note 2]. Let us see whether the
309 facts of the case do not come out clear and unequivocal, if we will but have the patience
310 to endure them.

311 A Deliverer of the human race through the Jewish nation had been promised from time
312 immemorial. The day came when He was to appear, and He was eagerly expected;
313 moreover, One actually did make His appearance at that date in Palestine, and claimed
314 to be He. He left the earth without apparently doing much for the object of His coming.
315 But when He was gone, His disciples took upon themselves to go forth to preach to all
316 parts of the earth with the object of preaching *Him*, and collecting converts *in His Name*.
317 After a little while they are found wonderfully to have succeeded. Large bodies of men in
318 various places are to be seen, professing to be His disciples, owning Him as their King,
319 and continually swelling in number and penetrating into the populations of the Roman
320 Empire; at length they convert the Empire itself. All this is historical fact. Now, we want
321 to know the farther historical fact, viz. the cause of their conversion; in other words,
322 what were the topics of that preaching which was so effective? If we believe what is told
323 us by the preachers and their converts, the answer is plain. They "preached Christ;"
324 they called on men {464} to believe, hope, and place their affections, in that Deliverer
325 who had come and gone; and the moral instrument by which they persuaded them to do
326 so, was a description of the life, character, mission, and power of that Deliverer, a
327 promise of His invisible Presence and Protection here, and of the Vision and Fruition of
328 Him hereafter. From first to last to Christians, as to Abraham, He Himself is the centre
329 and fulness of the dispensation. They, as Abraham, "see His day, and are glad."

330 A temporal sovereign makes himself felt by means of his subordinate administrators,
331 who bring his power and will to bear upon every individual of his subjects who
332 personally know him not; the universal Deliverer, long expected, when He came, He
333 too, instead of making and securing subjects by a visible graciousness or majesty,
334 departs;—*but* is found, through His preachers, to have imprinted the Image [Note 3] or
335 idea of Himself in the minds of His subjects individually; and that Image, apprehended
336 and worshipped in individual minds, becomes a principle of association, and a real bond
337 of those subjects one with another, who are thus united to the body by being united to
338 that Image; and moreover that Image, which is their moral life, when they have been
339 already converted, is also the original instrument of their conversion. It is the Image of

340 Him who fulfils the one great need of human nature, the Healer of its wounds, the
341 Physician of the soul, this Image it is which both creates faith, and then rewards it. {465}

342 When we recognize this central Image as the vivifying idea both of the Christian body
343 and of individuals in it, then, certainly, we are able to take into account at least two of
344 Gibbon's causes, as having, in connexion with that idea, some influence both in making
345 converts and in strengthening them to persevere. It was the Thought of Christ, not a
346 corporate body or a doctrine, which inspired that zeal which the historian so poorly
347 comprehends; and it was the Thought of Christ which gave a life to the promise of that
348 eternity, which without Him would be, in any soul, nothing short of an intolerable burden.

349 Now a mental vision such as this, perhaps will be called cloudy, fanciful, unintelligible;
350 that is, in other words, miraculous. I think it is so. How, without the Hand of God, could a
351 new idea, one and the same, enter at once into myriads of men, women, and children of
352 all ranks, especially the lower, and have power to wean them from their indulgences
353 and sins, and to nerve them against the most cruel tortures, and to last in vigour as a
354 sustaining influence for seven or eight generations, till it founded an extended polity,
355 broke the obstinacy of the strongest and wisest government which the world has ever
356 seen, and forced its way from its first caves and catacombs to the fulness of imperial
357 power?

358 In considering this subject, I shall confine myself to the proof, as far as my limits allow,
359 of two points,—first, that this Thought or Image of Christ was the principle of conversion
360 and of fellowship; and next, that {466} among the lower classes, who had no power,
361 influence, reputation, or education, lay its principal success [Note 4].

362 As to the vivifying idea, this is St. Paul's account of it: "I make known to you the gospel
363 which I preached to you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by
364 which also you are saved. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received,
365 how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," &c., &c. "I am the least of
366 the Apostles; but, whether I or they, so we preached, and so you believed." "It has
367 pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." "We preach
368 Christ crucified." "I determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him
369 crucified." "Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, shall appear,
370 then you also shall appear with Him in glory." "I live, but now not I, but Christ liveth in
371 me."

372 St. Peter, who has been accounted the master of a separate school, says the same:
373 "Jesus Christ, whom you have not seen, yet love; in whom you now believe, and shall
374 rejoice."

375 And St. John, who is sometimes accounted a third master in Christianity: "It hath not yet
376 appeared what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to
377 Him, because we shall see Him as He is." {467}

378 That their disciples followed them in this sovereign devotion to an Invisible Lord, will
379 appear as I proceed.

380 And next, as to the worldly position and character of his disciples, our Lord, in the well-
381 known passage, returns thanks to His Heavenly Father, "because," He says, "Thou hast
382 hid these things"—the mysteries of His kingdom—"from the wise and prudent, and hast
383 revealed them to little ones." And, in accordance with this announcement, St. Paul says
384 that "not many wise men according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,"
385 became Christians. He, indeed, is one of those few; so were others his contemporaries,
386 and, as time went on, the number of these exceptions increased, so that converts were
387 found, not a few, in the high places of the Empire, and in the schools of philosophy and
388 learning; but still the rule held, that the great mass of Christians were to be found in
389 those classes which were of no account in the world, whether on the score of rank or of
390 education.

391 We all know this was the case with our Lord and His Apostles. It seems almost
392 irreverent to speak of their temporal employments, when we are so simply accustomed
393 to consider them in their spiritual associations; but it is profitable to remind ourselves
394 that our Lord Himself was a sort of smith, and made ploughs and cattle-yokes. Four
395 Apostles were fishermen, one a petty tax collector, two husbandmen, and another is
396 said to have been a market gardener [Note 5]. When Peter {468} and John were
397 brought before the Council, they are spoken of as being, in a secular point of view,
398 "illiterate men, and of the lower sort," and thus they are spoken of in a later age by the
399 Fathers.

400 That their converts were of the same rank as themselves, is reported, in their favour or
401 to their discredit, by friends and enemies, for four centuries. "If a man be educated,"
402 says Celsus in mockery, "let him keep clear of us Christians; we want no men of
403 wisdom, no men of sense. We account all such as evil. No; but, if there be one who is
404 inexperienced, or stupid, or untaught, or a fool, let him come with good heart." "They are
405 weavers," he says elsewhere, "shoemakers, fullers, illiterate, clowns." "Fools, low-born
406 fellows," says Trypho. "The greater part of you," says Cæcilius, "are worn with want,
407 cold, toil, and famine; men collected from the lowest dregs of the people; ignorant,
408 credulous women;" "unpolished, boors, illiterate, ignorant even of the sordid arts of life;
409 they do not understand even civil matters, how can they understand divine?" "They
410 have left their tongs, mallets, and anvils, to preach about the things of heaven," says
411 Libanius. "They deceive women, servants, and slaves," says Julian. The author of
412 Philopatris speaks of them as "poor creatures, blocks, withered old fellows, men of
413 downcast and pale visages." As to their religion, it had the reputation popularly,
414 according to various Fathers, of being an anile superstition, the discovery of old women,
415 a joke, a madness, an infatuation, an absurdity, a fanaticism.

416 The Fathers themselves confirm these statements, so {469} far as they relate to the
417 insignificance and ignorance of their brethren. Athenagoras speaks of the virtue of their
418 "ignorant men, mechanics, and old women." "They are gathered," says St. Jerome, "not
419 from the Academy or Lyceum, but from the low populace." "They are whitesmiths,

420 servants, farm-labourers, woodmen, men of sordid trades, beggars," says Theodoret.
421 "We are engaged in the farm, in the market, at the baths, wine-shops, stables, and fairs;
422 as seamen, as soldiers, as peasants, as dealers," says Tertullian. How came such men
423 to be converted? and, being converted, how came such men to overturn the world? Yet
424 they went forth from the first, "conquering and to conquer."

425 The first manifestation of their formidable numbers is made just about the time when St.
426 Peter and St. Paul suffered martyrdom, and was the cause of a terrible persecution. We
427 have the account of it in Tacitus. "Nero," he says, "to put an end to the common talk
428 [that Rome had been set on fire by his order], imputed it to others, visiting with a
429 refinement of punishment those detestable criminals who went by the name of
430 Christians. The author of that denomination was Christus, who had been executed in
431 Tiberius's time by the procurator, Pontius Pilate. The pestilent superstition, checked for
432 a while, burst out again, not only throughout Judea, the first seat of the evil, but even
433 throughout Rome, the centre both of confluence and outbreak of all that is atrocious and
434 disgraceful from every quarter. First were arrested those who made no secret of their
435 sect; and by this clue a vast multitude {470} of others, convicted not so much of firing
436 the city, as of hatred to the human race. Mockery was added to death; clad in skins of
437 beasts, they were torn to pieces by dogs; they were nailed up to crosses; they were
438 made inflammable, so that, when day failed, they might serve as lights. Hence, guilty as
439 they were, and deserving of exemplary punishment, they excited compassion, as being
440 destroyed, not for the public welfare, but from the cruelty of one man."

441 The two Apostles suffered, and a silence follows of a whole generation. At the end of
442 thirty or forty years, Pliny, the friend of Trajan, as well as of Tacitus, is sent as that
443 Emperor's Proprætor into Bithynia, and is startled and perplexed by the number,
444 influence, and pertinacity of the Christians whom he finds there, and in the neighbouring
445 province of Pontus. He has the opportunity of being far more fair to them than his friend
446 the historian. He writes to Trajan to know how he ought to deal with them, and I will
447 quote some portions of his letter.

448 He says he does not know how to proceed with them, as their religion has not received
449 toleration from the state. He never was present at any trial of them; he doubted whether
450 the children among them, as well as grown people, ought to be accounted as culprits;
451 whether recantation would set matters right, or whether they incurred punishment all the
452 same; whether they were to be punished, merely because Christians, even though no
453 definite crime was proved against them. His way had been to examine them, and put
454 questions to them; if they confessed the {471} charge, he gave them one or two
455 chances, threatening them with punishment; then, if they persisted, he gave orders for
456 their execution. "For," he argues, "I felt no doubt that, whatever might be the character
457 of their opinions, stubborn and inflexible obstinacy deserved punishment. Others there
458 were of a like infatuation, whom, being citizens, I sent to Rome."

459 Some satisfied him; they repeated after him an invocation to the gods, and offered wine
460 and incense to the Emperor's image, and in addition, cursed the name of Christ.
461 "Accordingly," he says, "I let them go; for I am told nothing can compel a real Christian

462 to do any of these things." There were others, too, who sacrificed; who had been
463 Christians, some of them for as many as twenty years.

464 Then he is curious to know something more definite about them. "This, the informers
465 told me, was the whole of their crime or mistake, that they were accustomed to
466 assemble on a stated day before dawn, and to say together a hymn to Christ as a god,
467 and to bind themselves by an oath [sacramento] (not to any crime, but on the contrary)
468 to keep from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of promise, and making free with deposits.
469 After this they used to separate, and then to meet again for a meal, which was social
470 and harmless. However, they left even that off, after my Edict against their meeting."

471 This information led him to put to the torture two maid-servants, "who were called
472 ministers," in order to find out what was true, what was false in it; but he says he could
473 make out nothing, except a depraved {472} and excessive superstition. This is what led
474 him to consult the Emperor, "especially because of the number who were implicated in
475 it; for these are, or are likely to be, many, of all ages, nay, of both sexes. For the
476 contagion of this superstition has spread, not only in the cities, but about the villages
477 and the open country." He adds that already there was some improvement. "The almost
478 forsaken temples begin to be filled again, and the sacred solemnities after a long
479 intermission are revived. Victims, too, are again on sale, purchasers having been most
480 rare to find."

481 The salient points in this account are these, that, at the end of one generation from the
482 Apostles, nay, almost in the lifetime of St. John, Christians had so widely spread in a
483 large district of Asia, as nearly to suppress the Pagan religions there; that they were
484 people of exemplary lives; that they had a name for invincible fidelity to their religion;
485 that no threats or sufferings could make them deny it; and that their only tangible
486 characteristic was the worship of our Lord.

487 This was at the beginning of the second century; not a great many years after, we have
488 another account of the Christian body, from an anonymous Greek Christian, in a letter
489 to a friend whom he was anxious to convert. It is far too long to quote, and difficult to
490 compress; but a few sentences will show how strikingly it agrees with the account of the
491 heathen Pliny, especially in two points,—first, in the numbers of the Christians,
492 secondly, on devotion to our Lord as the vivifying principle of their association.

493 "Christians," says the writer, "differ not from other {473} men in country, or speech, or
494 customs. They do not live in cities of their own, or speak in any peculiar dialect, or adopt
495 any strange modes of living. They inhabit their native countries, but as sojourners; they
496 take their part in all burdens, as if citizens, and in all sufferings, as if they were
497 strangers. In foreign countries they recognize a home, and in every home they see a
498 foreign country. They marry like other men, but do not disown their children. They obey
499 the established laws, but they go beyond them in the tenor of their lives. They love all
500 men, and are persecuted by all; they are not known, and they are condemned; they are
501 poor, and make many rich; they are dishonoured, yet in dishonour they are glorified;
502 they are slandered, and they are cleared; they are called names, and they bless. By the

503 Jews they are assailed as aliens, by the Greeks they are persecuted, nor can they who
504 hate them say why.

505 "Christians are in the world, as the soul in the body. The soul pervades the limbs of the
506 body, and Christians the cities of the world. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against
507 it, though suffering no wrong from it; and the world hates Christians. The soul loves the
508 flesh that hates it, and Christians love their enemies. Their tradition is not an earthly
509 invention, nor is it a mortal thought which they so carefully guard, nor a dispensation of
510 human mysteries which is committed to their charge; but God Himself, the Omnipotent
511 and Invisible Creator, has from heaven established among men His Truth and His
512 Word, the Holy and Incomprehensible, and has deeply fixed the same in {474} their
513 hearts; not, as might be expected, sending any servant, angel, or prince, or
514 administrator of things earthly or heavenly, but the very Artificer and Demiurge of the
515 Universe. Him God hath sent to man, not to inflict terror, but in clemency and
516 gentleness, as a King sending a King who was His Son; He sent Him as God to men, to
517 save them. He hated not, nor rejected us, nor remembered our guilt, but showed
518 Himself long-suffering, and, in His own words, bore our sins. He gave His own Son as a
519 ransom for us, the just for the unjust. For what other thing, except His Righteousness,
520 could cover our guilt? In whom was it possible for us, lawless sinners, to find
521 justification, save in the Son of God alone? O sweet interchange! O heavenly
522 workmanship past finding out! O benefits exceeding expectation! Sending, then, a
523 Saviour, who is able to save those who of themselves are incapable of salvation, He
524 has willed that we should regard Him as our Guardian, Father, Teacher, Counsellor,
525 Physician; our Mind, Light, Honour, Glory, Strength, and Life." [Note 6]

526 The writing from which I have been quoting is of the early part of the second century.
527 Twenty or thirty years after it St. Justin Martyr speaks as strongly of the spread of the
528 new Religion: "There is not any one race of men," he says, "barbarian or Greek, nay, of
529 those who live in waggons, or who are Nomads, or Shepherds in tents, among whom
530 prayers and eucharists are not offered to the Father and Maker of the Universe, through
531 the name of the crucified Jesus. {475}

532 Towards the end of the century, Clement:—"The word of our Master did not remain in
533 Judea, as philosophy remained in Greece, but has been poured out over the whole
534 world, persuading Greeks and Barbarians alike, race by race, village by village, every
535 city, whole houses, and hearers one by one, nay, not a few of the philosophers
536 themselves."

537 And Tertullian, at the very close of it, could in his *Apologia* even proceed to threaten the
538 Roman Government:—"We are a people of yesterday," he says; "and yet we have filled
539 every place belonging to you, cities, islands, castles, towns, assemblies, your very
540 camp, your tribes, companies, palaces, senate, forum. We leave you your temples only.
541 We can count your armies, and our numbers in a single province will be greater. In what
542 war with you should we not be sufficient and ready, even though unequal in numbers,
543 who so willingly are put to death, if it were not in this Religion of ours more lawful to be
544 slain than to slay?"

545 Once more, let us hear the great Origen, in the early part of the next century:—"In all
546 Greece and in all barbarous races within our world, there are tens of thousands who
547 have left their national laws and customary gods for the law of Moses and the word of
548 Jesus Christ; though to adhere to that law is to incur the hatred of idolaters, and the risk
549 of death besides to have embraced that word. And considering how, in so few years, in
550 spite of the attacks made on us, to the loss of life or property, and with no great store of
551 teachers, the preaching of that word has found its way into every part of the world, so
552 that Greek and {476} barbarians, wise and unwise, adhere to the religion of Jesus,
553 doubtless it is a work greater than any work of man."

554 We need no proof to assure us that this steady and rapid growth of Christianity was a
555 phenomenon which startled its contemporaries, as much as it excites the curiosity of
556 philosophic historians now; and they too had their own ways then of accounting for it,
557 different indeed from Gibbon's, but quite as pertinent, though less elaborate. These
558 were principally two, both leading them to persecute it,—the obstinacy of the Christians
559 and their magical powers, of which the former was the explanation adopted by educated
560 minds, and the latter chiefly by the populace.

561 As to the former, from first to last, men in power magisterially reprobate the senseless
562 obstinacy of the members of the new sect, as their characteristic offence. Pliny, as we
563 have seen, found it to be their only fault, but one sufficient to merit capital punishment.
564 The Emperor Marcus seems to consider obstinacy the ultimate motive-cause to which
565 their unnatural conduct was traceable. After speaking of the soul, as "ready, if it must
566 now be separated from the body, to be extinguished, or dissolved, or to remain with it;"
567 he adds, "but the readiness must come of its own judgment, not from simple
568 perverseness, as in the case of Christians, but with considerateness, with gravity, and
569 without theatrical effect, so as to be persuasive." And Diocletian, in his Edict of
570 persecution, professes it to be his "earnest aim to punish the depraved persistence of
571 those most wicked men." {477}

572 As to the latter charge, their founder, it was said, had gained a knowledge of magic in
573 Egypt, and had left behind him in his sacred books the secrets of the art. Suetonius
574 himself speaks of them as "men of a magical superstition;" and Celsus accuses them of
575 "incantations in the name of demons." The officer who had custody of St. Perpetua,
576 feared her escape from prison "by magical incantations." When St. Tiburtius had walked
577 barefoot on hot coals, his judge cried out that Christ had taught him magic. St.
578 Anastasia was thrown into prison as dealing in poisons; the populace called out against
579 St. Agnes, "Away with the witch! away with the sorceress!" When St. Bonosus and St.
580 Maximilian bore the burning pitch without shrinking, Jews and heathen cried out, "Those
581 wizards and sorcerers!" "What new delusion," says the magistrate concerning St.
582 Romanus, in the Hymn of Prudentius, "has brought in these sophists who deny the
583 worship of the Gods? how doth this chief sorcerer mock us, skilled by his Thessalian
584 charm to laugh at punishment?" [\[Note 7\]](#)

585 It is indeed difficult to enter into the feelings of irritation and fear, of contempt and
586 amazement, which were excited, whether in the town populace or in the magistrates, in

587 the presence of conduct so novel, so unvarying, so absolutely beyond their
588 comprehension. The very young and the very old, the child, the youth in the heyday of
589 his passions, the sober man of middle age, maidens and mothers of families, boors and
590 slaves as well as philosophers and nobles, solitary confessors {478} and companies of
591 men and women,—all these were seen equally to defy the powers of darkness to do
592 their worst. In this strange encounter it became a point of honour with the Roman to
593 break the determination of his victim, and it was the triumph of faith when his most
594 savage expedients for that purpose were found to be in vain. The martyrs shrank from
595 suffering like other men, but such natural shrinking was incommensurable with
596 apostasy. No intensity of torture had any means of affecting what was a mental
597 conviction; and the sovereign Thought in which they had lived was their adequate
598 support and consolation in their death. To them the prospect of wounds and loss of
599 limbs was not more terrible than it is to the combatant of this world. They faced the
600 implements of torture as the soldier takes his post before the enemy's battery. They
601 cheered and ran forward to meet his attack, and as it were dared him, if he would, to
602 destroy the numbers who kept closing up the foremost rank, as their comrades who had
603 filled it fell. And when Rome at last found she had to deal with a host of Scævolas, then
604 the proudest of earthly sovereignties, arrayed in the completeness of her material
605 resources, humbled herself before a power which was founded on a mere sense of the
606 unseen.

607 In the colloquy of the aged Ignatius, the disciple of the Apostles, with the Emperor
608 Trajan, we have a sort of type of what went on for three, or rather four centuries. He
609 was sent all the way from Antioch to Rome to be devoured by the beasts in the
610 amphitheatre. As he travelled, he wrote letters to various Christian {479} Churches, and
611 among others to his Roman brethren, among whom he was to suffer. Let us see
612 whether, as I have said, the Image of that Divine King, who had been promised from the
613 beginning, was not the living principle of his obstinate resolve. The old man is almost
614 fierce in his determination to be martyred. "May those beasts," he says to his brethren,
615 "be my gain, which are in readiness for me! I will provoke and coax them to devour me
616 quickly, and not to be afraid of me, as they are of some whom they will not touch.
617 Should they be unwilling, I will compel them. Bear with me; I know what is my gain. Now
618 I begin to be a disciple. Of nothing of things visible or invisible am I ambitious, save to
619 gain Christ. Whether it is fire or the cross, the assault of wild beasts, the wrenching of
620 my bones, the crunching of my limbs, the crushing of my whole body, let the tortures of
621 the devil all assail me, if I do but gain Christ Jesus." Elsewhere in the same Epistle he
622 says, "I write to you, still alive, but longing to die. My Love is crucified! I have no taste
623 for perishable food. I long for God's Bread, heavenly Bread, Bread of life, which is Flesh
624 of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I long for God's draught, His Blood, which is Love
625 without corruption, and Life for evermore." It is said that, when he came into the
626 presence of Trajan, the latter cried out, "Who are you, poor devil, who are so eager to
627 transgress our rules?" "That is no name," he answered, "for Theophorus." "Who is
628 Theophorus?" asked the Emperor. "He who bears Christ in his breast." In the Apostle's
629 words, already cited, he had "Christ in him, the hope {480} of glory." All this may be
630 called enthusiasm; but enthusiasm affords a much more adequate explanation of the
631 confessorship of an old man, than do Gibbon's five reasons.

632 Instances of the same ardent spirit, and of the living faith on which it was founded, are
633 to be found wherever we open the *Acta Martyrum*. In the outbreak at Smyrna, in the
634 middle of the second century, amid tortures which even moved the heathen bystanders
635 to compassion, the sufferers were conspicuous for their serene calmness. "They made
636 it evident to us all," says the Epistle of the Church, "that in the midst of those sufferings
637 they were absent from the body, or rather, that the Lord stood by them, and walked in
638 the midst of them."

639 At that time Polycarp, the familiar friend of St. John, and a contemporary of Ignatius,
640 suffered in his extreme old age. When, before his sentence, the Proconsul bade him
641 "swear by the fortunes of Cæsar, and have done with Christ," his answer betrayed that
642 intimate devotion to the self-same Idea, which had been the inward life of Ignatius.
643 "Eighty and six years," he answered, "have I been His servant, and He has never
644 wronged me, but ever has preserved me; and how can I blaspheme my King and my
645 Saviour?" When they would have fastened him to the stake, he said, "Let alone; He who
646 gives me to bear the fire, will give me also to stand firm upon the pyre without your
647 nails."

648 Christians felt it as an acceptable service to Him who loved them, to confess with
649 courage and to suffer {481} with dignity. In this chivalrous spirit, as it may be called, they
650 met the words and deeds of their persecutors, as the children of men return bitterness
651 for bitterness, and blow for blow. "What soldier," says Minucius, with a reference to the
652 invisible Presence of our Lord, "does not challenge danger more daringly under the eye
653 of his commander?" In that same outbreak at Smyrna, when the Proconsul urged the
654 young Germanicus to have mercy on himself and on his youth, to the astonishment of
655 the populace he provoked a wild beast to fall upon him. In like manner, St. Justin tells
656 us of Lucius, who, when he saw a Christian sent off to suffer, at once remonstrated
657 sharply with the judge, and was sent off to execution with him; and then another
658 presented himself, and was sent off also. When the Christians were thrown into prison,
659 in the fierce persecution at Lyons, Vettius Epagathus, a youth of distinction who had
660 given himself to an ascetic life, could not bear the sight of the sufferings of his brethren,
661 and asked leave to plead their cause. The only answer he got was to be sent off the first
662 to die. What the contemporary account sees in his conduct is, not that he was zealous
663 for his brethren, though zealous he was, nor that he believed in miracles, though he
664 doubtless did believe; but that he "was a gracious disciple of Christ, following the Lamb
665 whithersoever He went."

666 In that memorable persecution, when Blandina, a slave, was seized for confessorship,
667 her mistress and her fellow-Christians dreaded lest, from her delicate make, she should
668 give way under the torments; but {482} she even tired out her tormentors. It was a
669 refreshment and relief to her to cry out amid her pains, "I am a Christian." They
670 remanded her to prison, and then brought her out for fresh suffering a second day and a
671 third. On the last day she saw a boy of fifteen brought into the amphitheatre for death;
672 she feared for him, as others had feared for her; but he too went through his trial
673 generously, and went to God before her. Her last sufferings were to be placed in the
674 notorious red-hot chair, and then to be exposed in a net to a wild bull; they finished by

675 cutting her throat. Sanctus, too, when the burning plates of brass were placed on his
676 limbs, all through his torments did but say, "I am a Christian," and stood erect and firm,
677 "bathed and strengthened," say his brethren who write the account, "in the heavenly
678 well of living water which flows from the breast of Christ," or, as they say elsewhere of
679 all the martyrs, "refreshed with the joy of martyrdom, the hope of blessedness, love
680 towards Christ, and the spirit of God the Father." How clearly do we see all through this
681 narrative what it was which nerved them for the combat! If they love their brethren, it is
682 in the fellowship of their Lord; if they look for heaven, it is because He is the Light of it.

683 Epipodius, a youth of gentle nurture, when struck by the Prefect on the mouth, while
684 blood flowed from it, cried out, "I confess that Jesus Christ is God, together with the
685 Father and the Holy Ghost." Symphorian, of Autun, also a youth, and of noble birth,
686 when told to adore an idol, answered, "Give me leave and I will hammer it to pieces."
687 When Leonidas, {483} the father of the young Origen, was in prison for his faith, the
688 boy, then seventeen, burned to share his martyrdom, and his mother had to hide his
689 clothes to prevent him from executing his purpose. Afterwards he attended the
690 confessors in prison, stood by them at the tribunal, and gave them the kiss of peace
691 when they were led out to suffer, and this, in spite of being several times apprehended
692 and put upon the rack. Also in Alexandria, the beautiful slave, Potamiæna, when about
693 to be stripped in order to be thrown into the cauldron of hot pitch, said to the Prefect, "I
694 pray you rather let me be dipped down slowly into it with my clothes on, and you shall
695 see with what patience I am gifted by Him of whom you are ignorant, Jesus Christ."
696 When the populace in the same city had beaten out the aged Apollonia's teeth, and lit a
697 fire to burn her, unless she would blaspheme, she leaped into the fire herself, and so
698 gained her crown. When Sixtus, Bishop of Rome, was led to martyrdom, his deacon,
699 Laurence, followed him weeping and complaining, "O my father, whither goest thou
700 without thy son?" And when his own turn came, three days afterwards, and he was put
701 upon the gridiron, after a while he said to the Prefect, "Turn me; this side is done."
702 Whence came this tremendous spirit, scaring, nay, offending, the fastidious criticism of
703 our delicate days? Does Gibbon think to sound the depths of the eternal ocean with the
704 tape and measuring-rod of his merely literary philosophy?

705 When Barulas, a child of seven years old, was scourged to blood for repeating his
706 catechism before {484} the heathen judge—viz. "There is but one God, and Jesus
707 Christ is true God"—his mother encouraged him to persevere, chiding him for asking for
708 some drink. At Merida, a girl of noble family, of the age of twelve, presented herself
709 before the tribunal, and overturned the idols. She was scourged and burned with
710 torches; she neither shed a tear, nor showed other signs of suffering. When the fire
711 reached her face, she opened her mouth to receive it, and was suffocated. At Cæsarea,
712 a girl, under eighteen, went boldly to ask the prayers of some Christians who were in
713 chains before the Prætorium. She was seized at once, and her sides torn open with the
714 iron rakes, preserving the while a bright and joyous countenance. Peter, Dorotheus,
715 Gorgonius, were boys of the imperial bedchamber; they were highly in favour with their
716 masters, and were Christians. They too suffered dreadful torments, dying under them,
717 without a shadow of wavering. Call such conduct madness, if you will, or magic: but do

718 not mock us by ascribing it in such mere children to simple desire of immortality, or to
719 any ecclesiastical organization.

720 When the persecution raged in Asia, a vast multitude of Christians presented
721 themselves before the Proconsul, challenging him to proceed against them. "Poor
722 wretches!" half in contempt and half in affright, he answered, "if you must die, cannot
723 you find ropes or precipices for the purpose?" At Utica, a hundred and fifty Christians of
724 both sexes and all ages were martyrs in one company. They are said to have been told
725 to burn incense to an idol, or they {485} should be thrown into a pit of burning lime; they
726 without hesitation leapt into it. In Egypt a hundred and twenty confessors, after having
727 sustained the loss of eyes or of feet, endured to linger out their lives in the mines of
728 Palestine and Cilicia. In the last persecution, according to the testimony of the grave
729 Eusebius, a contemporary, the slaughter of men, women, and children, went on by
730 twenties, sixties, hundreds, till the instruments of execution were worn out, and the
731 executioners could kill no more. Yet he tells us, as an eye-witness, that, as soon as any
732 Christians were condemned, others ran from all parts, and surrounded the tribunals,
733 confessing the faith, and joyfully receiving their condemnation, and singing songs of
734 thanksgiving and triumph to the last.

735 Thus was the Roman power overcome. Thus did the Seed of Abraham, and the
736 Expectation of the Gentiles, the meek Son of man, "take to Himself His great power and
737 reign" in the hearts of His people, in the public theatre of the world. The mode in which
738 the primeval prophecy was fulfilled is as marvellous, as the prophecy itself is clear and
739 bold.

740 "So may all Thy enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Thee shine, as the sun
741 shineth in his rising!"

742 I will add the memorable words of the two great Apologists of the period:—

743 "Your cruelty," says Tertullian, "though each act be more refined than the last, doth
744 profit you nothing. {486} To our sect it is rather an inducement. We grow up in greater
745 numbers, as often as you cut us down. The blood of the martyrs is their seed for the
746 harvest."

747 Origen even uses the language of prophecy. To the objection of Celsus that Christianity
748 from its principles would, if let alone, open the whole empire to the irruption of the
749 barbarians, and the utter ruin of civilization, he replies, "If all Romans are such as we,
750 then too the barbarians will draw near to the Word of God, and will become the most
751 observant of the Law. And every worship shall come to nought, and that of the
752 Christians alone obtain the mastery, for the Word is continually gaining possession of
753 more and more souls."

754 One additional remark:—It was fitting that those mixed unlettered multitudes, who for
755 three centuries had suffered and triumphed by virtue of the inward Vision of their Divine
756 Lord, should be selected, as we know they were, in the fourth, to be the special

757 champions of His Divinity and the victorious foes of its impugners, at a time when the
758 civil power, which had found them too strong for its arms, attempted, by means of a
759 portentous heresy in the high places of the Church, to rob them of that Truth which had
760 all along been the principle of their strength.

761 10.

762 I have been forestalling all along the thought with which I shall close these
763 considerations on the subject of Christianity; and necessarily forestalling it, because it
764 properly comes first, though the course which my argument has taken has not allowed
765 me to introduce it {487} in its natural place. Revelation begins where Natural Religion
766 fails. The Religion of Nature is a mere inchoation, and needs a complement,—it can
767 have but one complement, and that very complement is Christianity.

768 Natural Religion is based upon the sense of sin; it recognizes the disease, but it cannot
769 find, it does but look out for the remedy. That remedy, both for guilt and for moral
770 impotence, is found in the central doctrine of Revelation, the Mediation of Christ. I need
771 not go into a subject so familiar to all men in a Christian country.

772 Thus it is that Christianity is the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, and of the
773 Mosaic revelations; this is how it has been able from the first to occupy the world and
774 gain a hold on every class of human society to which its preachers reached; this is why
775 the Roman power and the multitude of religions which it embraced could not stand
776 against it; this is the secret of its sustained energy, and its never-flagging martyrdoms;
777 this is how at present it is so mysteriously potent, in spite of the new and fearful
778 adversaries which beset its path. It has with it that gift of staunching and healing the one
779 deep wound of human nature, which avails more for its success than a full encyclopedia
780 of scientific knowledge and a whole library of controversy, and therefore it must last
781 while human nature lasts. It is a living truth which never can grow old.

782 Some persons speak of it as if it were a thing of history, with only indirect bearings upon
783 modern times; {488} I cannot allow that it is a mere historical religion. Certainly it has its
784 foundations in past and glorious memories, but its power is in the present. It is no dreary
785 matter of antiquarianism; we do not contemplate it in conclusions drawn from dumb
786 documents and dead events, but by faith exercised in ever-living objects, and by the
787 appropriation and use of ever-recurring gifts.

788 Our communion with it is in the unseen, not in the obsolete. At this very day its rites and
789 ordinances are continually eliciting the active interposition of that Omnipotence in which
790 the Religion long ago began. First and above all is the Holy Mass, in which He who
791 once died for us upon the Cross, brings back and perpetuates, by His literal presence in
792 it, that one and the same sacrifice which cannot be repeated. Next, there is the actual
793 entrance of Himself, soul and body, and divinity, into the soul and body of every
794 worshipper who comes to Him for the gift, a privilege more intimate than if we lived with
795 Him during His long-past sojourn upon earth. And then, moreover, there is His personal
796 abidance in our churches, raising earthly service into a foretaste of heaven. Such is the

797 profession of Christianity, and, I repeat, its very divination of our needs is in itself a proof
798 that it is really the supply of them.

799 Upon the doctrines which I have mentioned as central truths, others, as we all know,
800 follow, which rule our personal conduct and course of life, and our social and civil
801 relations. The promised Deliverer, the Expectation of the nations, has not done his work
802 by {489} halves. He has given us Saints and Angels for our protection. He has taught us
803 how by our prayers and services to benefit our departed friends, and to keep up a
804 memorial of ourselves when we are gone. He has created a visible hierarchy and a
805 succession of sacraments, to be the channels of His mercies, and the Crucifix secures
806 the thought of Him in every house and chamber. In all these ways He brings Himself
807 before us. I am not here speaking of His gifts as gifts, but as memorials; not as what
808 Christians know they convey, but in their visible character; and I say, that, as human
809 nature itself is still in life and action as much as ever it was, so He too lives, to our
810 imaginations, by His visible symbols, as if He were on earth, with a practical efficacy
811 which even unbelievers cannot deny, so as to be the corrective of that nature, and its
812 strength day by day,—and that this power of perpetuating His Image, being altogether
813 singular and special, and the prerogative of Him and Him alone, is a grand evidence
814 how well He fulfils to this day that Sovereign Mission which, from the first beginning of
815 the world's history, has been in prophecy assigned to Him.

816 I cannot better illustrate this argument than by recurring to a deep thought on the
817 subject of Christianity, which has before now attracted the notice of philosophers and
818 preachers [[Note 8](#)], as coming from the wonderful man who swayed the destinies of
819 Europe in the first years of this century. It was an argument not unnatural in one who
820 had that special passion for human glory, which has been the incentive of so many
821 {490} heroic careers and of so many mighty revolutions in the history of the world. In the
822 solitude of his imprisonment, and in the view of death, he seems to have expressed
823 himself to the following effect:—

824 "I have been accustomed to put before me the examples of Alexander and Cæsar, with
825 the hope of rivalling their exploits, and living in the minds of men for ever. Yet, after all,
826 in what sense does Cæsar, in what sense does Alexander live? Who knows or cares
827 anything about them? At best, nothing but their names is known; for who among the
828 multitude of men, who hear or who utter their names, really knows anything about their
829 lives or their deeds, or attaches to those names any definite idea? Nay, even their
830 names do but flit up and down the world like ghosts, mentioned only on particular
831 occasions, or from accidental associations. Their chief home is the schoolroom; they
832 have a foremost place in boys' grammars and exercise books; they are splendid
833 examples for themes; they form writing-copies. So low is heroic Alexander fallen, so low
834 is imperial Cæsar, 'ut pueris placeat et declamatio fiat.'

835 "But, on the contrary" (he is reported to have continued), "there is just One Name in the
836 whole world that lives; it is the Name of One who passed His years in obscurity, and
837 who died a malefactor's death. Eighteen hundred years have gone since that time, but
838 still it has its hold upon the human mind. It has possessed the world, and it maintains

839 possession. Amid the most varied nations, under the most diversified circumstances, in
840 the most {491} cultivated, in the rudest races and intellects, in all classes of society, the
841 Owner of that great Name reigns. High and low, rich and poor, acknowledge Him.
842 Millions of souls are conversing with Him, are venturing on His word, are looking for His
843 Presence. Palaces, sumptuous, innumerable, are raised to His honour; His image, as in
844 the hour of His deepest humiliation, is triumphantly displayed in the proud city, in the
845 open country, in the corners of streets, on the tops of mountains. It sanctifies the
846 ancestral hall, the closet, and the bedchamber; it is the subject for the exercise of the
847 highest genius in the imitative arts. It is worn next the heart in life; it is held before the
848 failing eyes in death. Here, then, is One who is *not* a mere name, who is not a mere
849 fiction, who is a reality. He is dead and gone, but still He lives,—lives as a living,
850 energetic thought of successive generations, as the awful motive-power of a thousand
851 great events. He has done without effort what others with life-long struggles have not
852 done. Can He be less than Divine? Who is He but the Creator Himself; who is sovereign
853 over His own works, towards whom our eyes and hearts turn instinctively, because He
854 is our Father and our God?" [Note 9]

855 Here I end my specimens, among the many which might be given, of the arguments
856 adducible for Christianity. I have dwelt upon them, in order to show how I would apply
857 the principles of this Essay to the proof of its divine origin. Christianity is addressed,
858 both as regards its evidences and its contents, to {492} minds which are in the normal
859 condition of human nature, as believing in God and in a future judgment. Such minds it
860 addresses both through the intellect and through the imagination; creating a certitude of
861 its truth by arguments too various for direct enumeration, too personal and deep for
862 words, too powerful and concurrent for refutation. Nor need reason come first and faith
863 second (though this is the logical order), but one and the same teaching is in different
864 aspects both object and proof, and elicits one complex act both of inference and of
865 assent. It speaks to us one by one, and it is received by us one by one, as the
866 counterpart, so to say, of ourselves, and is real as we are real.

867 In the sacred words of its Divine Author and Object concerning Himself, "I am the Good
868 Shepherd, and I know Mine, and Mine know Me. My sheep hear My voice, and I know
869 them, and they follow Me. And I give them everlasting life, and they shall never perish;
870 and no man shall pluck them out of My hand."

871 Notes

872 1. He appeals to the prophecies in evidence of His Divine mission, in addressing the
873 people of Nazareth (Luke iv. 18), St. John's disciples (Matt. xi. 5), and the Pharisees
874 (Matt. xxi. 42, and John v. 39), but not in details. The appeal to details He reserves for
875 His disciples. *Vide* Matt. xi. 10; xxvi. 24, 31, 54; Luke xxii. 37; xxiv. 27, 46.

876 2. *Vide supra*, pp. 341, 375, 413-416.

877 3. *Vide supra*, pp. 23-30 and 75-80.

- 878 4. Had my limits allowed it, I ought, as a third subject, to have described the existing
879 system of impure idolatry, and the wonderful phenomenon of such multitudes, who had
880 been slaves to it, escaping from it by the power of Christianity,—under the guidance of
881 the great work ("On the Gentile and the Jew") of Dr. Döllinger.
- 882 5. On the subjects which follow, *vide* Lami, *De Eruditione Apostolorum*;
883 Mamachius, *Origines Christ.*; Ruinart, *Act. Mart.*; Lardner, *Credibility, &c.*;
884 Fleury, *Eccles. Hist.*; Kortholt, *Calumn. Pagan.*; and *De Morib. Christ.*, &c.
- 885 6. Ep. ad Diognet.
- 886 7. Essay on Development of Doctrine, ch. iv. § 1.
- 887 8. Fr. Lacordaire and M. Nicolas.
- 888 9. Occas. Serm., pp. 49-51.