IF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES ARE MYTHICAL-WHAT THEN?

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"Qu'ils apprennent au moins quelle est la religion qu'ils combattent, avant que de la combattre."—PASCAL.

EDINBURGH:
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS.
1869.

PREFACE.

A FEW copies of this tract having been printed about a twelvemonth ago, and dispersed among friends, I find that its purpose has in some respects been a little misunderstood, and one or two notes of explanation may therefore not be quite out of place here.

1. It is no part of my intention to cast doubts either on the inspiration of Scripture, or on the historical credibility of any part of it. I simply leave all consideration of these questions out of view—pronouncing no opinion on the one side or the other, and proceed at once to argue with those who have such doubts, that even if these could be conclusively shown to be well founded, it does not affect the truth of what Christianity teaches. I may add to this, that the title which I have chosen is not meant to imply that I consider the historical truth of Christianity unimportant. The meaning which I attach to the words "What then?" is not, as I find has been supposed—What matter is it?—but simply, What follows?—or, What conclusions may be drawn?

2. I do not pretend in these pages to establish on grounds of observation or experience the *whole* circle of Christian doctrine. All that I attempt to show is

that certain central or fundamental truths (as I regard them) of Christianity are capable of being so established. There may be a difference of opinion, indeed, as to whether these truths really do constitute the characteristic and essential substance of Christianity. But without entering into any dispute on this head, it is, I think, certain that in the manner I have indicated the special personal relations of God to every individual are plainly discoverable. It is shown too, that not only access to, but the closest possible communion with, God may be attained, and that reconciliation, gratitude, trust and love towards Him, may take full possession of the soul, without previously determining the gospels to be either inspired or historical. This may not be the whole of Christianity —I nowhere say that it is—but it is at all events a very material part of it, and it is surely some gain to the Christian evidence if so much may be reached without reference to, and altogether independently of, any investigation into the confessedly difficult and stumbling questions of inspiration and historical credibility. I am quite content that what I have written should be pronounced imperfect and fragmentary; they who are able to receive it, let them receive it, and take what comfort it brings them; the rest who see nothing in it can leave it alone.

3. Nothing that I have said ought to be regarded as interfering in any way with other doctrines of

Christianity not here referred to. To say (which is all that I have done) that this or that truth is capable of being inductively proved from facts of observation and experience, does not surely imply that everything else is to be thrown to the winds, and that what depends on merely probable evidence is henceforth to go for nothing. On the contrary, I rather venture to anticipate that the natural effect of such an attempt as mine will be to prepare the minds of readers for going a good deal further in the acceptance of evangelic thought than I have here brought them. But whether this shall be the case or not, I at least raise no obstacle to the belief of any other truth which may be considered important or necessary. I am not aware that I deny anything, that I exclude anything, that I interfere with anything in the theological opinions of any class or section of Christians whatsoever. It is true that, in writing freely on the subject of Religion, it is seldom quite easy to avoid indicating that some theory or opinion—not quite agreeable to every reader—may be floating in one's mind, and that there is an entire absence of everything of this kind in these pages, it would be very rash in me to assert. But if such offensive matter is anywhere apparent, I shall be glad if the reader will do me the courtesy of simply putting it aside—disconnecting his mind from it altogether, attaching no importance to it, and keep-