THE ENTANGLING ALLIANCE OF
RELIGION AND HISTORY

A visitor from another planet — if we may take down once more one of the most lifelike and serviceable of the automata that philosophers keep upon their shelves — who was familiar with the general nature and meaning of religion, but not with its terrestrial manifestations, might well find matter for some astonishment in the current religious system of civilized Europe and America. Since religion — he would be likely to argue — constitutes a man's ultimate and definitive intellectual and moral reaction upon his experience, and since it presupposes the possession of truths valid and significant for all men, religious belief will naturally affirm only truths of a universal and cosmic bearing. It will deal exclusively with the "eternal" verities, and ignore contingent and temporal matters-of-fact. It will concern itself with the nature of the universe or its source, with the meaning of the life of rational beings and with their generic destiny. Its content will consist of propositions equally pertinent to the interests, and equally accessible to the knowledge, of all such beings, at any time in any place. It will, doubtless, come into relation with the particular facts of each man's experience, by giving to them a universal interpretation and correlating them with a larger meaning; but it will not make the belief in the occurrence or non-occurrence of specific local and temporal events any part of its essence. For what, indeed, — our Martian might ask — can religion have to do with history? But upon comparing his presuppositions with the actual phenomena of Christian belief, he would discover that history appears to have almost everything to do with Christian religion, as that is commonly understood; and even the simplest and least debated of the orthodox creeds of Christendom contains no less than six statements concerning
the happening of particular incidents at a particular time
in a particular manner; and that a large part of the energy of
theologians and apologists is given up to highly technical
inquiries of an historical character — inquiries concerning
the genealogy of manuscripts, the dates of certain ancient
writings, the congruency of testimonies, the credibility of
witnesses. It would pretty certainly impress our visitor as
singular, perhaps even as a little humorous, that the interests
of a body of truth professedly cosmic in its import, and needful
for every man to know, should be supposed to be inextricably
involved in these minute inquiries. And he would doubtless
be sufficiently surprised to be called upon to find his own
salvation in the belief in the real occurrence of remote
terrestrial transactions of which he had never previously heard,
and of the reality of which he could properly convince himself
only by entering upon inquiries equally technical and minute.

In the large place which it has given to historical
elements in its traditional creeds, Christianity stands unique
among religions. Buddhism, in some of its developments, has
attached much importance to the legend of its founder; but
certainly in the Southern Buddhism — and, so far as I know,
in the divergent Northern forms of the doctrine — beliefs
about incidents in the life of the Buddha have never been
regarded as of the essence of the faith. The Buddha of the
Pitakas appears as the preacher of a method of salvation from
the evils of existence, the value of which every man is
supposed to be able to verify for himself. So little — as
would appear — did the Buddha preach about himself, or
regard his activity as anything more than a means to the
promulgation of the saving Dharma, that even the pious enthusiasm
of his followers was unable to establish more than a loose and
external bond between the essentials of the doctrine and the
personal history or legend of its enunciator. But in historic
Christianity the bond between what may be called the historical
and the philosophical elements in dogma very early came to be
far more intimate; and historical matters-of-fact presented
themselves as having a metaphysical significance. Particular
temporal incidents were conceived to have (in the proper logical
sense) an eternal aspect; beliefs about past physical events
came to be profoundly implicated in the Christian's beliefs
about God's nature and man's destiny.

This, of course, was a natural consequence of the Jewish
ancestry and origin of Christianity. The religion of Jewish
prophetism centered about a religio-ethical and patriotic
interpretation of history — of the movement of events in the
history of Israel and of the nations with which Israel was
brought into relations. Political occurrences and social
tendencies were apprehended all as episodes in a great process,
in which the controller was the God of Israel, and the end and
aim the moral purification and then the visible glorification of
Israel among the nations. The messianic hope formed, as it
were, an anticipatory chapter in this particularist but
profoundly ethical philosophy of history; just as the trans-
actions by which the Supreme and Creative God was conceived
to have established special covenant relations with the
ancestors of the race and with Moses constituted the essential
opening chapters. Christianity, growing up in a milieu where
religion thus largely consisted in an attitude of historical
expectancy based upon beliefs about the course and meaning of
past historic events, inevitably came to have a similar
character. Whatever be the truth about Jesus' messianic
consciousness, and whatever the original meaning of his
gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, it is manifest that to the
early Jewish Christians the primary article of their faith was
their belief in his Messiahship, coupled with a confident
expectation of his reappearing and of the final triumph of the
faithful. Now the assertion of Jesus' messianic character meant essentially the ascription to him of a certain historic rôle; and further, the belief could be held by a Jewish Christian only upon the condition of his acceptance of prior beliefs as to the existence of the prophets, as to the meaning of their utterances, and as to the occurrence in Jesus' life of the kind of incidents necessary to prove him to be the object of the messianic prophecies. So it is that, in one of the earliest pictures which we have of the Christian apologist at work, we see Philip the deacon converting the Ethiopian eunuch by means of essentially historical arguments to an essentially historical faith. And meanwhile the Church, just because of this preoccupation about the incidents of the life of its Founder and about his future return, was losing the tradition of Jesus' utterances as a teacher of perennially fruitful conceptions of God and man. For the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew's version) and certain of the parables are good evidence that, even if Jesus' own preaching contained a large messianic and chiliastic element, it contained also many teachings whose worth depends, not upon their source or the time and place of their first publication, but upon their intrinsic spiritual profundity and their universal pertinency to the life of man, and of these utterances we have only a few fragmentary sentences.

Yet, though we owe to the Jewish messianic element in early Christianity the irreparable loss of probably a large part of the more universally significant and, in a broad sense, "philosophic" teaching of Jesus, we owe to it also the carrying over into the European consciousness of the general idea of a possible philosophy of history, and of a pedagogic significance in the course of human events — a distinctively Jewish idea destined to great and fruitful development in the Occidental mind. Moreover, this general idea was capable of being fairly easily disengaged from those particular historic beliefs and
millennial expectations in which it was at first enclosed as in a shell; and though it of itself — though any religious or philosophical interpretation of history — necessarily implies the possibility and the importance of knowing what actually has happened in the history of the planet, it does not necessarily demand more than a general knowledge of this kind; it is not concerned with the reality of specific single incidents at specific localities and dates. It was not, therefore, after all, Jewish messianism that did most to bind up the fortunes of Christianity with beliefs about historical matter-of-fact. It was rather that development of thought which begins in the Pauline writings and is continued, with a difference, in the Fourth Gospel: a development which may be defined as curious fusion of theosophy and history.

For in the Pauline notion of justification we get for the first time that extraordinary translation of historic incidents into the terms of mystical metaphysics which has had so singular and, in the long run, so harmful a vogue in subsequent Christian thought. The fulfilment of the purposes of the creation, the relations between God and man, and therefore men's hope of salvation, depend for Paul entirely upon the real occurrence of two events — Jesus's death by crucifixion, in such a manner as to make him, in a Jewish legal sense, an outlaw and his subsequent resurrection. "If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is your faith vain;" and the Crucifixion has, if not a more essential, a still more fundamental place in the Pauline system. The Crucifixion was for Paul the central fact in the universe; it was indeed more than a mere fact — a sort of cosmic force and logic prior to many things both before and after it in the order of time. Thus Paul frankly rests the whole fabric of the Christian faith, like an inverted pyramid, upon the testimony of witnesses to the happening of two very specific past events — witnesses of whom, even at the time of
the publication of his argument, "the greater part" had "fallen asleep." In reality, all that was most valuable in Paul's teaching concerning the mystical relations of the Christian to the "second Adam", Christ — his conception of the death unto sin and the new birth unto righteousness through a definite "putting off" of the old personality and the identification of the whole self with a newer and higher one — would have been no less edifying if taken as a symbolic and poetic reading of certain very real inward moral experiences. But Paul was too much of a Jewish legalist to be content merely with the realities of the inner life, which he yet understood so well; the possibility of the new birth was for him still conditioned entirely upon the historic reality of an external and past opus operatum. The effect, therefore, of his teaching was too often to divert the interests of Christianity from the inwardly verifiable facts of the soul's experience to jangling controversies over the legal and metaphysical modus operandi of Jesus' death as a means of atonement, and to the discussion of elusive questions of historical evidence.

In the Fourth Gospel we have an extremely interesting and singular combination of the essentially historical habit of the Jewish mind, interested in the movement of temporal events and dramatic unity and meaning in them, with the essentially unhistorical fashion of thought of the Greek — especially of the Platonising Greek — mind. A metaphysical entity found in the system of the later Platonic theosophy — an entity primarily belonging purely to the supratemporal world — is identified with a particular terrestrial person who lived and died at a certain time. Christianity, in its dogmatic content, now comes to involve the belief that this historical figure identically was that metaphysical entity — and, incidentally, the belief that the pretensions which he put forward and the powers which he exercised were such as to establish this identity. On the whole, it must be said, the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Logos is less specific in its
implications of particular historical incidents than is the
Pauline doctrine of Justification. Though it implies a great
deal in a general way in regard to the circumstances of
Jesus’ life, there is no single and definite occurrence —
scarcely even the Resurrection — which is logically
indispensable to it. Thus the author of the Fourth Gospel
feels, indeed, the need of some historical evidence for the
reality of the Incarnation, and devotes himself to supplying it;
but the incidents he narrates are put forward as evidences to
something else, not as themselves of the innermost substance
of the faith which he desires to inculcate. Another imaginable
set of incidents might have done as well. His doctrine, in
short, while it is essentially historical in its content, is so
in a somewhat elusive fashion, since it is not intrinsically
tied down to detailed happenings; so that the orthodox doctrine
of the Trinity which was developed out of it has proven
capable of statement in purely non-temporal and non-historical
terms. Yet the total influence of the Fourth Gospel clearly
has been to strengthen the nexus between the historical and
the "philosophical" elements of Christianity. For that Gospel’s
conception of the Incarnation has, as it were, ostensibly
entangled the ultimate reality of metaphysics and theology
itself — has involved the God of universal religion — in
terrestrial history; and not in the total historic process, but
uniquely in a limited and local history of a life lived in
Syria in the first century.

Chiefly through the episodes in the early development of
Christianity did historical propositions come to be introduced
into the fabric of the orthodox theology of the Church. But
of course a still greater number of such propositions was more
indirectly but not less fixedly connected with the substance of
the faith through the disposition of the ecclesiastical
theology to make certain beliefs about the sources of
religious knowledge a part of the content of its system of
religious knowledge; in other words, through the formulation of
the doctrines of the inerrancy of Scripture or of the Church.

Through these doctrines there was incorporated among the
Church's credenda, to be defended no less strenuously than the deepest philosophical affirmations of religion, a whole host of miscellaneous and unlikely incidents, to many of which small cosmic import or first-hand religious value could have otherwise seemed to attach: — stories of wonder-working bones or floating axe-heads, of a backwardturning sun or an arrested moon, of demon-possessed pigs or divinely inspired asses. From this point forward the Church conceived itself to be inevitably committed to all this huge burden of historical beliefs — a burden which, it should be added, it bore lightly and even enthusiastically enough for many centuries.

The definite impeachment of the historical in Christianity, qua historical, was the characteristic work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — especially of the eighteenth-century Deists. Characteristic of modern thought, indeed, from almost its beginning was a reaction against all historically mediated beliefs — all beliefs which came to a man because he chanced to belong to a particular age and country and line of tradition. This was the essence of the Cartesian spirit. An optimistic confidence in the possibility of finding an adequate system of truth mediated inwardly, and with complete certitude, to the individual through his own reason, was what prompted Descartes' sceptical procedure; and it followed that, since all propositions about historical facts can be imparted only through outward and very devious channels of historical tradition, no such propositions can be regarded as either important or certain. Descartes himself, of course, rather ignored than opposed the historical affirmations of current religion; but Cartesianism spread through the general European consciousness the demand for a knowledge that should be certified to each individual independently by precisely the fact that it came to him, not through any sources peculiar to himself because contingent upon the historical accidents of his birth and experience, but through the necessities of reason, which must be supposed to be the same for all rational beings everywhere. And the eighteenth century applied this contempt for the historically mediated, and this demand for the universal and purely rational, where
Descartes did not apply it — to the institutions of society and the dogmas of historical religion. In its application to political and social affairs, this spirit proved, as everybody knows, upon the whole highly unfortunate and inappropriate. But in its application to religious beliefs it had a much greater force and pertinency than the nineteenth century has always recognized.

The Deists' objections to historical religion as such were, in general, merely a natural consequence of the immense widening of men's intellectual horizon which had been taking place ever since the fifteenth century. It has often enough been remarked, and it ought by this time to be a truism, that the possibilities implied by the Copernican revolution in astronomy are alone sufficient to render paradoxical the maintenance of particular historical propositions as absolute essentials of religious truths. Nineteenth-century theology has, indeed, shown a singular facility for forgetting that it lived in the Copernican universe. But to those who, like the reformers of the eighteenth century, realized vividly all this extension of the bounds of the universe in time and space and in the multitude of its diversities and possibilities, a religion that centered its interest chiefly upon a small number of historical transactions in Palestine seemed singularly meagre, parochial, out of scale. Now, as we have by this time discovered, there is not necessarily any great harm in a certain parochialism in politics; since politics is essentially a practical, relative and temporal business, it is not — as the eighteenth century supposed — self-evident that the same order of government and society ought to prevail in France and England, in China and Peru. But a conscious and avowed parochialism in religion seems impossible without self-stultification, without a surrender of the distinctive nature and function and dignity of religion. And it was the general influence of such considerations as these — considerations the precise scope and limits of which were, doubtless, not too carefully noted — which explains broadly the anti-historical religious attitude of
Deism. But more specifically, the Deistic objection to the historical in religion resolved itself into two points, already foreshadowed in what has been said about the spirit of Cartesianism: (1) Historical propositions, even if true, could be known and verified only by the comparatively small number of persons to whom the tradition containing them chanced to come; they could not be known to possible inhabitants of other worlds, or to persons living before the incidents referred to by these propositions, or to those to whom no records of such incidents had been transmitted. And therefore that they were not appropriate to the kind of thing, religion is. The Deists, as Sir Leslie Stephen has said, simply applied more honestly and literally the Church's criterion of essential truth, Quod semper, ubique et ab omnibus; and no beliefs about events, assuredly, could be justified by that criterion. It was a peculiarly eighteenth-century way of putting this objection, to say that historical knowledge could be taught only by society and its traditions, and not by "Nature" or the "unaided light of Nature." For the typical mid-eighteenth-century thinkers almost took it for granted that no truth about religion, morals or society could be of any consequence which Nature could not be supposed to have made self-evident even to the simplest and most primitive man, or to one brought up from infancy, like Autinous, upon a desert island. If Christianity must be shown to be "as old as the creation," it was obvious that no happenings subsequent to the creation could be of interest to Christianity.

(2) But it was also a serious objection to the historical elements in dogma, that, as Locke's survey of human knowledge had not shown, historical propositions do not strictly constitute knowledge at all; that at best they can attain only to probability, and, if the events to which they refer be at once remote and particularised, to a low degree of probability; and that if those events be at the same time contrary to the usual order of experience, the presumption of probability is so strongly against them that it becomes at least debatable whether any amount of purely traditional or documentary testimony can offset that presumption. And
therefore an historical religion seemed fated to endless uncertainty, and to endless controversy about issues intricate, involved, and of no direct bearing upon the moral or religion life of men. But what eighteenth-century thought craved was a religion, simple, luminous, convincing, verifiable at first hand by the experience and reflection of all honest and reasonable men, and not compelled to wait for its attestation upon the settlement of the obscure debates of specialists in the schools.

With all this, it is true, went the characteristic aberration of eighteenth-century—and of most early modern—thought. The ignoring or the rejection of the historical elements in Christianity was coincident with, and was partly caused by, the loss of that conception of the meaning and interest and dramatic consecutiveness of the historic process which (in more or less confused forms) Christianity had brought over from Jewish prophetism. One cannot say that history was entirely destitute of interest and meaning to the representative men of the Enlightenment, since they were fond of using it to supply edifying illustrations or permanent moral or political truths. But the sequences and order of history were, to them, unmeaning and uninteresting; and most of the events of the past were regarded as only so many regrettable deviations from the one order of Nature to which at last mankind was to return.

The revival of what may be called the dramatic interest in history as a process, the renascence of the evolutionary imagination, began only with the work of Lessing and Herder and Condorcet. Since them, as we all know, the nineteenth century has been par excellence the age of historical and developmental points of view in all the provinces of human inquiry. With this, however, I am not concerned, nor with the new modes of critical attack upon, or transformation of, the historical content of traditional Christianity, which have been the product of nineteenth century scholarship. I desire rather to insist
upon the truth in the eighteenth century's more general and a priori objections to the historical in religion, as such; and at the same time to guard against exaggeration and misapplication of that truth.

Both the defenders and critics of orthodox Christianity seem often during the past century to have been unable to see the wood on account of the trees. Much admirable learning, and a subtlety worthy of a Sherlock Holmes, have been bestowed in the investigation of the evidential standing of this or that incident in biblical history; but it would have been worth while to stop more often to ask such logically prior questions as these: Are we really in a position to determine whether or not the incident occurred as narrated? Is not a great part of history, and notably of Jewish and early Christian history, rather a matter of honest agnosticism—for a Scotch verdict—than for positive affirmation on either side? And even when circumstances are most favorable, can we expect to establish more than a more or less weak probability on one side or the other? And must we not be constantly mindful that our conclusions in this domain can have only a precarious vitality, subject to destruction at any moment by some new discovery in archaeology or philology, some new theory in criticism? Again, is anyone entitled to believe, or to ask others to believe, in specific historical matters-of-fact except upon historical evidence? And if not, does not this mean that layman, who has no qualifications for the difficult and delicate investigations which all honest handling of historical evidences presupposes, must take the historical parts of his religious convictions at second hand from the historical critics? And does a belief held thus at second hand possess much spiritual value? And is there any very intimate relation between the activities of a
Sherlock Holmes or a cross-examining lawyer and the deepening and diffusion of religious faith? And, finally, can a proposition about the happening of a particular incident at a certain time in a little corner of the earth really be one of the fundamental verities which every man ought to know and believe for his soul's sake?

How little these seemingly obvious questions are even now considered is illustrated, in a way that would be amusing if it were not pitiable, by a recent curious episode in English and American Protestantism. The plot of an ill-written and meretricious popular romance turns upon the supposition of the discovery in Palestine of an actually forged but seemingly genuine inscription, calculated to disprove the reality of the Resurrection. As soon as the knowledge of this discovery is spread abroad, the masses of mankind begin to lose these faith in the Resurrection, therewith in supernatural Christianity, therewith in the worth of Jesus' ethical teaching, therewith in the validity of the moral law—since, for the purposes of the novel, not only religion but also morals appear to rest ultimately upon historical evidences. The bonds of social order—if my memory of the plot serves—are only saved from something like ab initio dissolution by the timely discovery that the inscription is spurious. Now, this romance, instead of being taken as an elaborate joke, was received by a large part of the religious public with fervent enthusiasm; was, it appears, preached about in a multitude of pulpits, and even canonised with an episcopal commendation, as an edifying argument in favour of the Resurrection-belief. It ought rather to have been regarded as the reductio ad absurdum of the assumption that Christianity consists in beliefs about historic happenings; and the religious leaders of the people, being thus reminded that archaeological or historical research may some day turn up some concrete bit of external evidence fatal to one or another of the historical propositions of the Creed, should have spared neither haste nor zeal in persuading their
followers to withdraw their spiritual interests from a shelter so precarious.

What the time really calls for, in other words, is the general proclamation of the dissolution of this ancient and entangling alliance between Christianity and detailed history. For though both conservative and radical critics, alike unable to point to any piece of clinching external evidence upon the now most debated matters of biblical history, must content themselves with involved conclusions drawn from internal evidences, the fact shows all the more plainly that just those incidents to which theology has attached the greatest dogmatic weight have been removed from the sphere of the clearly ascertainable to that of the problematical. For the fault with them is not so much that their reality has been disproved—though to many that must seem true, too—as that they are, in any case, dubious, incapable of conclusive verification in the present state of knowledge, a matter for the subtle debates of technically trained experts. It may, indeed, be objected that our religious issues are equally problematical and subject to debate. Men's views, it will be said, differ upon almost everything—upon metaphysics, upon the existence and nature of God, upon questions of right and wrong, as well as upon points of history. But there is a vital difference between the cases. A man's purely religious and moral convictions—his thoughts and feelings about the world in which he lives, about God, himself and his right relations to other men—are, in the last analysis, the result of the total experience and reflection of his life—a vital reaction, a final expression of his personality and character. While men differ in these convictions, it is reasonable to believe that through the widening of their physical and the deepening of their moral experience, and especially through the mind's progressive clarification of its own fundamental ideas and categories, all men will gradually and naturally tend to reach, for themselves, the same general beliefs upon the more essential issues of life. But we have no good
reason to anticipate any similar development with respect to our knowledge of some minute matter of past history. And the source and method of our knowledge in the two classes of cases must always remain different. Upon religious or moral or even broadly metaphysical questions, the plain man, who has neither time nor learning to go into the nice reasonings of specialists, has his own inner lights of reason, and direct outer evidences from experience, which, even if imperfect, are capable of progressive improvement; upon these great matters there is truly a light that lighteth (though unequally) every man coming into the world. But where the doctors of history so greatly disagree, what lights of his own has the average man which should entitle him to hold, upon historical questions, any opinion whatever? In truth, the greater number of the historical propositions that have found a place even in the simpler of the traditional creeds have come to be so obscure and so involved in purely technical and nicely balanced controversies that no serious mind ought longer to reward them as matters of vital religious interest. It is the great merit of Professor G. B. Foster's recent book, The Finality of the Christian Religion, to have candidly and forcibly insisted on this. Professor Foster offers, indeed, an extended inquiry into the historical character and content of the Gospels; but he at pains also repeatedly "to point out how intolerable is the present situation to the Christian who fails to understand that the Object on which his faith reposes is not one of the objects in the region which historical science has both the right and the duty to explore. One cannot too earnestly asseverate that the principle of Christianity is not to be found among historic data which science can doubt, but in the filial relationship to God, with which science can have nothing whatever to do." One may hope that such language may in time become commonplace of theological treatises. But for the present, it still needs copious iteration.
Meanwhile, it is important to avoid exaggerating even this truth. What precisely—we must ask—is the significance of historical facts, and especially of historical beliefs concerning Christianity and its founder, in relation to religion? Space is lacking for an adequate answer to this question; but a few primary considerations ought to be set down. In the first place, the mere question of reality in connection with a supposed matter of history is, in several respects, of far less religious value than has often been supposed. One cannot, indeed, agree with Professor Santayana in cheerfully identifying the whole substance of religion with poetry. There are religious issues where the existential predicate assuredly makes a difference—a practical and emotional difference—to the mind. But religious history, undeniably, often becomes more available and more useful religiously when it is taken as poetry. If we take even the life and character of Jesus, and consider them solely with respect to their inspirational and exemplary value, it is not a question of primary religious importance whether that life and character existed in bodily incarnation upon the solid earth of Galilee, or chiefly in the devout imagination of earlier believers. There happen, just now, to be signs of a revival of the theory of the non-historicity of Jesus of Nazareth; Professor W. B. Smith's newly published and important volume Der vorchristliche Jesus, offers evidence that Jesus was primarily a divine being worshipped by a gnostic sect in Syria some time before the Christian era. The theory seems to the present writer in the last degree improbable, although Professor Smith's patristic learning is far too solid to entitle one to dismiss his conclusions without careful examinations. But suppose the theory established; it would make far less difference than the shocked imagination of multitudes of devout souls would at first fancy. Indeed, there would be some real gain. The Gospels would become more wonderful and encouraging than before; for the profound wisdom and the lofty character
found in them would prove to be the expression, not of a single and unique religious genius, but of the spiritual idealism of many humble and unknown men. That a group of men should be able to conceive the hero of the Synoptic Gospels is more inspiring than that one wholly exceptional man should have been that hero—but, for the same reason, doubtless, more improbable. In so far, then, as religious history simply affords ideals for our reverence and imitation, the ideals are no worse XXXX their lack of past reality; they were, at least, the products of some other men's minds, and foreshadowings of possible realities to come, in the human nature of the future. Our feeling with respect to Jesus would undoubtedly be in significant ways altered, if Professor Smith's theory were to prove true. But nothing of the deepest religious concernment can be at issue here. New Testament historians are under obligations in some measure to suspend their judgments, but religious believers are not under obligations to suspend their religion, until this and any other such new historical theory can be duly examined by experts.

In regard to such a specific XXXX occurrence as the Resurrection, it must be confessed that its reality, if it could be established with a very high degree of historical probability, would properly make some difference. It would have a significance similar in kind, but perhaps superior in degree, to that of the conclusions offered by Professor Hyslop concerning the reality of his intercourse with deceased friends, if those conclusions, too, could be established. Those who believed it real, in other words, would possess a source of encouragement, and a vivid piece of empirical evidence concerning life after death, which would be lacking to those XXXX found themselves quite unconvinced of its reality. But, as I have intimated, even the believer ought not to regard the occurrence as the sort of central and metaphysically fundamental thing in religion which it has so often been declared to be. For since the number of those who can never have even known of the occurrence, together with those who are never likely to be convinced of it, is so great, he who is convinced ought to be honest and modest enough to recognize that
his supposed historical fact cannot belong among the essentials of universal and verifiable religious truths. To such a distinction between the essential and spiritually discernible in religion, and the secondary and (even if possible) inevitably problematical, the churches are imperatively called by the present situation; and it will be well, also, if they realize how deeply problematical, and how much less than probable, even the most cherished historical affirmations of their creeds are likely hereafter to seem to minds of modern training. Meantime, for those unpersuaded of the historicity of the Resurrection, one tolerably certain historical truth about it remains—namely, that, at any rate, the belief in its reality arose among the early Christians, and this is a highly interesting and encouraging fact. For it is evident that, without the belief in the Resurrection and other like marvels, no sort of Christianity could have survived and spread in the intellectual atmosphere of first-century Palestine. Without the help of these illusions, the invaluable treasure of the Christian teaching and of the figure of the Teacher must necessarily have been lost to humanity, at least until rediscovered after two millenniums by the diligence of modern historical research. I know of no more striking example of what has been called the "conservation of values" in the historic process, than the way in which Christianity took upon itself the bold illusions indispensable to its survival. If the embalmed body of the crucified Nazarene did not rise again on Easter morning, at all events the Christian Church and its message appear to have been marvellously resurrected after what must have seemed a final extinction; and the latter circumstance is not only better evidenced, but also really more notable, than the former. For it is the mind of fact that should serve to encourage us in holding to the postulate that the large process of human history, the order of the race's experience, is not, after all, wholly fortuitous or wholly meaningless or wholly sterile.

And this last and very general point of historical belief, brought over by Christianity by Judaism, must, I think, remain as a real essential of any religion justly to be called Christian. At this point at least, is religious faith organically involved
with historic fact. A purely unhistorical religion is, indeed, conceivable; and it finds exemplification in more than one of the great systems of India;—a religion that denies the worth or even the reality of the temporal process, that attaches no value to the struggling and achieving will or to the concrete historic tasks of society, but turns men's minds wholly to a mystical other world, and bids them destroy their will and lose their personalities in an eternal abstraction that never enters into time-existence at all. But such a religion has no kinship with the spirit of Christianity or the temper of the Occident.

At this point one cannot merely syncretise religions; we are called upon for a plain choice between radically opposed types. And if the Christian type is to survive, it must carry with it the affirmation that, through all the confusion and waste and cross-purposiveness of the historic turmoil, here or in any other worlds, something that has meaning and worth is getting achieved; that history is the scene of the working of some power, greater than any one of us, that makes, through orderly and "natural" processes, for righteousness; and that man's participation in this process, just because it contains the possibility of significant and conscious activity of will and thought, is a participation in the supreme good. Christianity in a word, ought no longer to let itself be involved in obscure and uncertain issues of historical detail; but it ought still, if it is to be true to its distinctive essence, to proclaim the worth of personal and racial experience under the form of time, and the divineness of the historic order. In this large and general but far from unmeaning postulate lies the expugnable residuum of the historical element in Christianity. This will necessarily always imply an interest in the great sequences of past history, in the nature and causes of the successive movements through which human thought has developed, in the outstanding personalities who have been at once the most expressive products and the
most efficacious causes of that development; and it will consequently give to the work of the historical investigator a real spiritual import, a large capacity for religious and moral incitement and instruction. But it will not make the historian—what in Christianity he has hitherto been—the keeper of the Ark of the Covenant.