The Character of Jesus forbidding his Possible Classification with Men

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THE

CHARACTER OF JESUS

FORBIDDING HIS

POSSIBLE CLASSIFICATION WITH MEN.

BY

HORACE BUSHNELL.

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PUBLISHER'S ADVERTISEMENT.

In this little volume we reprint, with consent of the Author, the tenth

chapter of his Treatise, Nature and the Supernatural.

This chapter, taken as a sketch of the self-evidencing, superhuman

character of Christ, has attracted much attention; and we have

solicited, many times over, in the various notices and reviews of the

book, as well as by private readers, to give it to the public by

itself. This, too, we do more readily, that it makes a complete whole

by itself, and is in a style to be read by multitudes who probably will

not undertake to master the more elaborate and difficult argument, of

which it is only a subordinate member.

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THE

CHARACTER OF JESUS.

IT is the grand peculiarity of the sacred writings, that they deal in

supernatural events and transactions, and show the fact of a celestial

institution finally erected on earth, which is fitly called the kingdom

of God; because it shows Him reigning, an a Regenerator and Restorer of

the broken order of the world. Christianity is, in this view, no mere

scheme of doctrine, or of ethical practice, but is instead a kind of

miracle, a power out of nature and above, descending into it; a

historically supernatural movement on the world, Gat is visibly entered

into it, and organized to be an institution in the person of Jesus

Christ He, therefore, is the central figure and power, and with him the

entire fabric either stands or falls.

To this central figure, then, we now turn ourselves; and, as no proof

beside the light is necessary to show that the sun shines, so we shall

find that Jesus proves himself by his own self-evidence. The simple

inspection of his life and character will suffice to show that he

cannot be classified with mankind (man though he be), any more than

what we call his miracles can be classified with mere natural events.

The simple demonstrations of his life and spirit are the sufficient

attestation of his own profession, when he says--"I am from above"--"I

came down from heaven."

We assume nothing reported of him to be true. Let us not be

misunderstood. We do not assume the truth of the narrative by which the

manner and facts of the life of Jesus are reported to us; for this, by

the supposition, is the matter in question. We only assume the

representations themselves, as being just what they are, and discover

their necessary truth, in the transcendent, wondrously self-evident,

picture of divine excellence and beauty exhibited in them. We take up

the account of Christ, in the New Testament, just as we would any other

ancient writing, or as if it were a manuscript just brought to light in

some ancient library. We open the book, and discover in it four

biographies of a certain remarkable character, called Jesus Christ. He

is miraculously born of Mary, a virgin of Galilee, and declares

himself, without scruple, that he came out from God. Finding the

supposed history made up, in great part, of his mighty acts, and not

being disposed to believe in miracles and marvels, we should soon

dismiss the book as a tissue of absurdities too extravagant for belief,

were we not struck with the souse of something very peculiar in the

character of this remarkable person. Having our attention arrested thus

by the impression made on our respect, we are put on inquiry, and the

more we study it, the more wonderful, as a character, it appears. And

before we have done, it becomes, in fact, the chief wonder of the

story; lifting all the other wonders into order and intelligent

proportion round it, and making one compact and glorious wonder of the

whole picture; a picture shining in its own clear sunlight upon us, as

the truest of all truths--Jesus, the Divine Word, coming out from God,

to be incarnate with us, and be the vehicle of God and salvation to the

race.

On the single question, therefore, of the more than human character of

Jesus, we propose, in perfect confidence, to rest a principal argument

for Christianity as a supernatural institution; for, if there be in

Jesus a character which is not human, then has something broken into

the world that is not of it, and the spell of unbelief is broken.

Not that Christianity might not be a supernatural institution, if Jesus

were only a man; for many prophets and holy men, as we believe, have

brought forth to the world communications that are not from themselves,

but were received by inspirations from God. There are several grades,

too, of the supernatural, as already intimated; the supernatural human,

the supernatural prophetic, the supernatural demonic and angelic, the

supernatural divine. Christ, we shall see, is the supernatural

manifested in the highest grade or order; viz., the divine.

The only character that has a perfect youth. We observe, then, as a

first peculiarity at the root of his character, that he begins life

with a perfect youth. His childhood is an unspotted, and, withal, a

kind of celestial flower. The notion of a superhuman or celestial

childhood, the most difficult of all things to be conceived, is yet

successfully drawn by a few simple touches. He is announced beforehand

as "that Holy Thing"; a beautiful and powerful stroke, to raise our

expectation to the level of a nature so mysterious. In his childhood,

everybody loves him. Using words of external description, he is shown

growing up in favor with God and man, a child so lovely and beautiful,

that heaven and earth appear to smile upon him together. So, when it is

added that the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with

wisdom, and, more than all, that the grace or beautifying power of God

was upon him, we look, as on the unfolding of a sacred flower, and seem

to scent a fragrance wafted on us from other worlds. Then, at the age

of twelve, he is found among the great learned men of the day, the

doctors of the temple, hearing what they my, and asking them question.

And this, without any word that indicates forwardness or pertness in

the child's manner, such as some Christian Rabbi, or silly and

credulous devotee, would certainly have added. The doctors are not

offended, as by a child too forward or wanting in modesty; they are

only amazed that such a degree of understanding eau dwell in one so

young and simple. His mother finds him there among them, and begins to

expostulate with him. His reply is very strange; it must, she is sure,

have some deep meaning that corresponds with his mysterious birth, and

the sense he has ever given her of a something strangely peculiar in

his ways; and she goes home keeping his saying in her heart, and

guessing vainly what his thought may be. Mysterious, holy secret! which

this mother hides in her bosom; that her holy thing, her child whom she

has watched, during the twelve years of his celestial childhood, now

begins to speak of being "about his Father's business," in words of

dark enigma, which she can not fathom.

The picture stands by itself. Now we do not say, observe, that there is

one word of truth in these touches of narrative. We only my that,

whether they be fact or fiction, here is given the sketch of a perfect

and sacred childhood, not of a simple, lovely, ingenuous, and properly

human childhood, such as the poets love to sketch, but of a sacred and

celestial childhood. In this respect, the early character of Jesus is a

picture that stands by itself. In no other case, that we remember, has

it ever entered the mind of a biographer, in drawing a character, to

represent it as beginning with a spot-lees childhood. The childhood of

the great human characters, if given at all, is commonly represented,

according to the uniform truth, as being more or lees contrary to the

manner of their mature age; and never as being strictly one with it,

except in those cases of inferior eminence whom the kind of distinction

attained to is that of some mere prodigy, and not a character of

greatness in action, or of moral excellence. In all the higher ranges

of character, the excellence portrayed is never the simple unfolding of

a harmonious and perfect beauty contained in the germ of childhood, but

it is a character formed by a process of rectification, in which many

follies are mended and distempers removed; in which confidence is

checked by defeat, passion moderated by reason, smartness sobered by

experience. Commonly a certain pleasure is taken in showing how the

many wayward sallies of the boy are, at length, reduced by discipline

to the character of wisdom, justice, and public heroism, so much

admired.

Besides, if any writer, of almost any age, will undertake to describe,

not merely a spotless, but a superhuman or celestial childhood, not

having the reality before him, he must be somewhat more than human

himself, if he does not pile together a mass of clumsy exaggerations,

and draw and overdraw, till neither heaven nor earth can find any

verisimilitude in the picture.

The absurd pictures given of infant prodigies. Neither let us omit to

notice what ideas the Rabbis and learned doctors of this age were able,

in fact, to furnish, when setting forth a remarkable childhood. Thus

Josephus, drawing on the teachings of the Rabbis, tells how the infant

Moses, when the king of Egypt took him out of his daughter's arms, and

playfully put the diadem on his head, threw it pettishly down and

stamped on it. And when Moses was three years old, he tells us that the

child had grown so tall, and exhibited such a wonderful beauty of

countenance, that people were obliged, as it were, to stop and look at

him as he was carried along the road, and were held fast by the wonder,

gazing till he was out of sight. See, too, what work in made of the

childhood of Jesus himself, in the Apocryphal gospels. These are

written by men of so nearly the same era, that we may discover, in

their embellishments, what kind of a childhood it was in the mere

invention of the time to make out. While the gospels explicitly say

that Jesus wrought no miracles till his public ministry began, and that

he made his beginning in the miracle of Cana, these are ambitious to

make him a great prodigy in his childhood. They tell how, on one

occasion, he pursued in his anger, the other children, who refused to

play with him, and turned them into kids; how, on another, when a child

accidentally ran against him, he was angry, and killed him by his mere

word; how, on another, Jesus had a dispute with his teacher over the

alphabet, and when the teacher struck him, how he crushed him, withered

his arm, and threw him down dead. Finally, Joseph tells Mary that they

must keep him within doors, for everybody perishes against whom he is

excited. His mother sends him to the well for water, and having broken

his pitcher, he brings the water in his cloak. He goes into a dyer's

shop, when the dyer is out, and throws all the cloths he finds into a

vat of one color; but, when they are taken out, behold, they are all

dyed of the precise color that was ordered. He commands a palm-tree to

stoop down and let him pluck the fruit, and it obeys. When he is

carried down into Egypt, all the idols fall down wherever he passes,

and the lions and leopards gather round him in a harmless company. This

the Gospel of the Infancy gives, as a picture of the wonderful

childhood of Jesus. How unlike that holy flower of paradise, in the

true gospels, which a few simple touches make to bloom in beautiful

self-evidence before us!

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Jesus the only great character that holds a footing of innocence.

Passing now to the character of Jesus in his maturity, we discover, at

once, that there is an element in it which distinguishes it from all

human characters, viz., innocence. By this we mean, not that he is

actually sinless; that will be denied, and, therefore, must not be

assumed. We mean that, viewed externally, he is a perfectly harmless

being, actuated by no destructive passions, gentle to inferiors, doing

ill or injury to none. The figure of a Lamb, which never was, or could

be applied to any of the great human characters, without an implication

of weakness fatal to all respect, is yet, with no such effect, applied

to him. We associate weakness with innocence, and the association is so

powerful, that no human writer would undertake to sketch a great

character on the basis of innocence, or would even think it possible.

We predicate innocence of infancy; but to be a perfectly harmless,

guileless man, never doing ill even for a moment, we consider to be the

same as to be a man destitute of spirit and manly force. But Christ

accomplished the impossible. Appearing in all the grandeur and majesty

of a superhuman manhood, he is able still to unite the impression of

innocence, with no apparent diminution of his sublimity. It is, in

fact, the distinctive glory of his character, that it seems to be the

natural unfolding of a divine innocence; a pure celestial childhood,

amplified by growth. We feel the power of this strange combination, but

we have so great difficulty in conceiving it, or holding our minds to

the conception, that we sometimes subside or descend to the human

level, and empty the character of Jesus of the strange element

unawares. We read, for example, his terrible denunciations against the

Pharisees, and are shocked by the violent, fierce sound they have on

our mortal lips; not perceiving that the offence is in us, and not in

him. We should suffer no such revulsion, did we only conceive them

bursting out, as words of indignant grief, from the surcharged bosom of

innocence; for there is nothing so bitter as the offence that innocence

feels, when stung by hypocrisy and a sense of cruelty to the poor. So,

when he drives the money-changers from the temple, we are likely to

leave out the only element that saves him from a look of violence and

passion. Whereas, it is the very point of the story, not that he, as by

mere force, can drive so many men, but that so many are seen retiring

before the moral power of one, mysterious being, in whom face and form

the indignant flush of innocence reveals a tremendous feeling, they can

no wise comprehend, much less are able to resist.

Accustomed to no such demonstrations of vigor and decision in the

innocent human characters, and having it as our way to set them down

contemptuously, without further consideration, as

"Incapable and shallow innocents,"--

we turn the indignant fire of Jesus into a fire of malignity; whereas,

it should rather be conceived that Jesus here reveals his divinity, by

what so powerfully distinguishes God himself, when he clothes his

goodness in the tempests and thunders of nature. Decisive, great, and

strong, Christ is yet all this, even the more sublimely, that he is

invested, withal, in the lovely, but humanly feeble garb of innocence.

And that this is the true conception, is clear, in the fact that no one

ever thinks of him as weak, and no one fails to be somehow impressed

with a sense of innocence by his life. When his enemies are called to

show what evil or harm he hath done, they can specify nothing, save

that he has offended their bigotry. Even Pilate, when he gives him up,

confesses that he finds nothing in him to blame, and, shuddering with

apprehensions he cannot subdue, washes his hands to be clear of the

innocent blood! Thus he dies, a being holy, harmless, undefiled. And

when he hangs, a bruised flower, drooping on his cross, and the sun

above is dark, and the earth beneath shudders with pain, what have we

in this funeral grief of the worlds, but a fit honor paid to the sad

majesty of his divine innocence?

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The only religious character that disowns repentance. We pass now to

his religious character, which, we shall discover, has the remarkable

distinction that it proceeds from a point exactly opposite to that

which is the root or radical element in the religious character of men.

Human piety begins with repentance. It is the effort of a being,

implicated in wrong and writhing under the stings of guilt, to come

unto God. The most righteous, or even self-righteous men, blend

expressions of sorrow and vows of new obedience with their exercises.

But Christ, in the character given him, never acknowledges sin. It is

the grand peculiarity of his piety that he never regrets anything that

he has done or been; expresses, nowhere, a single feeling of

compunction, or the least sense of unworthiness. On the contrary, he

boldly challenges his accusers, in the question--Which of you

convinceth me of sin? and even declares, at the close of his life, in a

solemn appeal to God, that ho has given to men, unsullied, the glory

divine that was deposited in him.

Now the question is not whether Christ was, in fact, the faultless

being, assumed in his religious character. All we have to notice here

is, that he makes the assumption, makes it not only in words, but in

the very tenor of his exercises themselves, and that by this fact his

piety is radically distinguished from all human piety. And no mere

human creature, it is certain, could hold such a religious attitude,

without shortly displaying faults that would cover him with derision,

or excesses and delinquencies that would even disgust his friends.

Piety without one dash of repentance, one ingenuous confession of

wrong, one tear, one look of contrition, one request to heaven for

pardon--let any one of mankind try this kind of piety, and me how long

it will be ere his righteousness will prove itself to be the most

impudent conceit! how long before his passions sobered by no

contrition, his pride kept down by no repentance, will tempt him into

absurdities that will turn his pretenses to mockery! No sooner does any

one of us begin to be self-righteous, then he begins to fell into

outward sins that shame his conceit. But, in the case of Jesus, no such

disaster follows. Beginning with an impenitent or unrepentant piety, he

holds it to the end, and brings no visible stain upon it.

Now, one of two things must be true. He was either sinless, or be was

not. If sinless, what greater, more palpable exception to the law of

human development, than that a perfect and stainless being has for once

lived in the flesh! If not, which is the supposition required of those

who deny every thing above the range of human development, then we have

a man taking up a religion without repentance, a religion not human,

but celestial, a style of piety never taught him in his childhood, and

never conceived or attempted among men: more than this, a style of

piety, withal, wholly unsuited to his real character as a sinner,

holding it as a figment of insufferable presumption to the end of life,

and that in a way of such unfaltering grace and beauty, as to command

the universal homage of the human race! Could there be a wider

deviation from all we know of mere human development?

He unites characters difficult to be united. He was also able perfectly

to unite elements of character, that others find the greatest

difficulty in uniting, however unevenly and partially. He is never said

to have laughed, and yet he never produces the impression of austerity,

moroseness, sadness, or even of being unhappy. On the contrary, he is

described as one that appears to be commonly filled with a sacred joy;

"rejoicing in spirit," and leaving to his disciples, in the hour of his

departure, the bequest of his joy--"that they might have my joy

fulfilled in themselves. "We could not long endure a human being whose

face was never moved by laughter, or relaxed by humorous play. What

sympathy could we have with one who appears, in this manner, to have no

human heart? We could not even trust him. And yet we have sympathy with

Christ; for there is somewhere in him an ocean of deep joy, and we see

that he is, in fact, only burdened with his sympathy for see to such a

degree, that his mighty life is overcast and oppressed by the charge he

has undertaken. His lot is the lot of privation; he has no powerful

friends; he has not even where to lay his head. No human being could

appear in such a guise, without occupying us much with the sense of his

affliction. We should be descending to him, as it were, in pity. But we

never pity Christ, never think of him as struggling with the

disadvantages of a lower level, to surmount them. In fact, he does not

allow us, after all, to think much of his privations. We think of him

more as a being of mighty resources, proving himself only the more

sublimely, that he is in the guise of destitution. He is the most

unworldly of beings, having no desire at all for what the earth can

give, too great to be caught with any longing for its benefits,

impassible even to its charms, and yet there is no ascetic sourness or

repugnance, no misanthropic distaste in his manner; as if he were

bracing himself against the world to keep it off. The more closely he

is drawn to other worlds, the more fresh and susceptible is he to the

humanities of this. The little child is an image of gladness, which his

heart leaps forth to embrace. The wedding and the feast and the funeral

have all their cord of sympathy in his bosom. At the wedding he is

clothed in congratulation, at the feast in doctrine, at the funeral in

tears; but no miser was ever drawn to his money, with a stronger

desire, than he to worlds above the world.

Men undertake to be spiritual, and they become ascetic; or, endeavoring

to hold a liberal view of the comforts and pleasures of society, they

are soon buried in the world, and slaves to its fashions; or, holding a

scrupulous watch to keep out every particular sin, they become legal,

and fall out of liberty; or, charmed with the noble and heavenly

liberty, they run to negligence and irresponsible; so the earnest

become violent, the fervent fanatical and censorious, the gentle waver,

the firm turn bigots, the liberal grow lax, the benevolent

ostentatious. Poor human infirmity can hold nothing steady. Where the

pivot of righteousness is broken, the scales must needs slide off their

balance. Indeed, it is one of the most difficult things which a

cultivated Christian can attempt, only to sketch a theoretic view of

character, in its true justness and proportion, so that a little more

study, or a little more self-experience, will not require him to modify

it. And yet the character of Christ is never modified, even by a shade

of rectification. It is one and the same throughout. He makes no

improvements, prunes no extravagances, returns from no eccentricities

The balance of his character is never disturbed, or readjusted, and the

astounding assumption on which it is based is never shaken, even by a

suspicion that be falters in it.

The astonishing pretensions of Jesus. There is yet another point

related to this, in which the attitude of Jesus is even more distinct

from any that was ever taken by man, and is yet triumphantly sustained.

I speak of the astonishing pretensions asserted concerning his person.

Similar pretensions have sometimes been assumed by maniacs, or insane

persona, but never, so far as I know, by persons in the proper exercise

of their reason. Certain it is that no mere man could take the same

attitude of supremacy towards the race, and inherent affinity or

oneness with God, without fatally shocking the confidence of the world

by his effrontery. Imagine a human creature saying to the world--"I

came forth from the Father"--"ye are from beneath, I am from above";

facing all the intelligence and even the philosophy of the world, and

saying, in bold assurance--"behold, a greater than Solomon is here"--"I

am the light of the world"--"the way, the truth, and the life";

publishing to all peoples and religions--"No man cometh to the Father,

but by me"; promising openly in his death--"I will draw all men unto

me"; addressing the Infinite Majesty, and testifying--"I have glorified

thee on the earth"; calling to the human race--"Come unto me"; "follow

me"; laying his hand upon all the dearest and moat intimate affections

of life, and demanding a precedent love--"he that loveth father or

mother more than me, is not worthy of me." Was there ever displayed an

example of effrontery and spiritual conceit so preposterous? Was there

ever a man that dared put himself on the world in such pretensions?--as

if all light was in him; as if to follow him and be worthy of him was

to be the conclusive or chief excellence of mankind! What but mockery

and disgust does he challenge as the certain reward of his audacity!

But no one is offended with Jesus on this account, and what is a sure

test of his success, it is remarkable that, of all the readers of the

gospel, it probably never even occurs to one in a hundred thousand, to

blame his conceit, or the egregious vanity of his pretension,

His pretensions enter also into his actions. Nor is there any thing

disputable in these pretensions, least of all, any trace of myth or

fabulous tradition. They enter into the very web of his ministry, so

that if they are extracted and nothing left transcending mere humanity,

nothing at all is left. Indeed, there is a tacit assumption,

continually maintained, that far exceeds the range of these formal

pretensions. He says--"I and the Father that sent me." What figure

would a man present in such language--I and the Father? He goes even

beyond this, and apparently without any thought of excess or

presumption; classing himself with the Infinite Majesty in a common

plural, he says--We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Imagine any, the greatest and holiest of mankind, any prophet, or

apostle, saying we, of himself and the Great Jehovah! What a conception

did he give us concerning himself, when he assumed the necessity of

such information us this--"my Father is greater than I"; and above all,

when he calls himself, as he often does, in a tone of

condescension--"the Son of Man." See him also on the top of Olivet,

looking down on the guilty city and weeping words of compassion like

these--imagine some man weeping over London or New York, in the

like--"How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen

doth gather her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" See him

also in the supper, instituting a rite of remembrance for himself, a

scorned, outcast man, and saying--"this is my body"--"this do in

remembrance of me."

Nobody offended by these pretensions. I have dwelt thus on the

transcendent pretensions of Jesus, because them is an argument here for

his superhumanity, which can not be resisted. For eighteen hundred

years, these prodigious assumptions have been published and preached to

a world that is quick to lay hold of conceit, and bring down the lofty

airs of pretenders, and yet, during all this time, whole nations of

people, composing as well the learned and powerful as the ignorant and

humble, have paid their homage to the name of Jesus, detecting never

any disagreement between his merits and his pretensions, offended never

by any thought of his extravagance. In which we have absolute proof

that he practically maintains his amazing assumptions! Indeed it will

even be found that, in the common apprehension of the race, he

maintains the merit of a most peculiar modesty, producing no conviction

more distinctly, than that of his intense lowliness and humility. His

worth is seen to be so great, his authority so high, his Spirit so

celestial, that instead of being offended by his pretensions, we take

the impression of one in whom it is even a condescension to breathe our

air. I say not that his friends and followers take this impression, it

is received as naturally and irresistibly by unbelievers. I do not

recollect any skeptic or infidel who has even thought to accuse him as

a conceited person, or to assault him in this, the weakest and

absurdest, if not the strongest and holiest, point of his character.

What mere man could support such pretensions? Come now, all ye that

tell us in your wisdom of the mere natural humanity of Jesus, and help

us to find how it is, that he is only a natural development of the

human; select your best and wisest character; take the range, if you

will, of all the great philosophers and estate, and choose out one that

is most competent; or if, perchance, some one of you may imagine that

he is himself about upon a level with Jeans (as we hear that some of

you do), let him come forward in this trial and say--"follow me"--"be

worthy of me"--"I am the light of the world"--"ye are from beneath, I

am from above"--"behold a greater than Solomon is here"; take on all

these transcendent assumptions, and see how soon your glory will be

sifted out of you by the detective gaze, and darkened by the contempt

of mankind! Why not? is not the challenge fair? Do you not tell us that

you can say as divine things as he? Is it not in you, too, of course,

to do what is human? ere you not in the front rank of human

developments? do you not rejoice in the power to rectify many mistakes

and errors in the words of Jesus? Give us then this one experiment, and

see if it does not prove to you a truth that is of some consequence;

viz., that you are a man, and that Jesus Christ is--more.

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Peculiar in the passive virtues. But there is also a passive side to

the character of Jesus which is equally peculiar, and which likewise

demands our attention. I recollect no really great character in

history, excepting such as may have been formed under Christianity,

that can properly be said to have united the passive virtues, or to

have considered them any essential part of a finished character.

Socrates comes the nearest to such au impression, and therefore most

resembles Christ in the submissiveness of his death. It does not

appear, however, that his mind had taken this turn previously to his

trial, and the submission be makes to the public sentence is, in fact,

a refusal only to escape from the prison surreptitiously which he does,

partly because he thinks it the duty of every good citizen not to break

the laws, and partly, if we judge from his manner, because he is

detained by a subtle pride; as if it were something unworthy of a grave

philosopher, to be stealing away, as a fugitive, from the laws and

tribunals of his country. The Stoics, indeed, have it for one of their

great principles, that the true wisdom of life consists in a passive

power, viz., in being able to bear suffering rightly. But they mean by

this, the bearing of suffering so as not to feel it; a steeling of the

mind against sensibility, and a raising of the will into such power as

to drive back the pangs of life, or shake then off. But this, in fact,

contains no allowance of passive virtue at all; on the contrary, it is

an attempt so to exalt the active powers, as even to exclude every sort

of passion, or passivity. And Stoicism corresponds, in this respect,

with the general sentiment of the world's great characters. They are

such as like to see things in the heroic vein, to see spirit and

courage breasting themselves against wrong, and, where the evil can not

be escaped by resistance, dying in a manner of defiance. Indeed it has

been the impression of the world generally, that patience, gentleness,

readiness to suffer wrong without resistance, is but another name for

weakness.

But Christ, in opposition to all such impressions, manages to connect

these non-resisting and gentle passivities with a character of the

severest grandeur and majesty; and, what is more, convinces us that no

truly great character can exist without them.

Does not falter in the common trials of existence. Observe him, first,

in what may be called the common trials of existence. For if you will

put a character to the severest of all tests, see whether it can bear

without faltering, the little common ills and hindrances of life. Many

a man will go to his martyrdom, with a spirit of firmness and heroic

composure, whom a little weariness or nervous exhaustion, some silly

prejudice, or capricious opposition, would, for the moment, throw into

a fit of vexation, or ill-nature. Great occasions rally great

principles, and brace the mind to a lofty bearing, a bearing that is

even above itself. But trials that make no occasion at all, leave it to

show the goodness and beauty it has in its own disposition. And here

precisely is the superhuman glory of Christ as a character, that he is

just as perfect, exhibits just as great a spirit, in little trials as

in great ones. In all the history of his life, we are not able to

detect the faintest indication that he slips or falters. And this is

the more remarkable, that he is prosecuting so great a work, with so

great enthusiasm counting it his meat and drink, and pouring into it

all the energies of his life. For when men have great works on hand,

their very enthusiasm runs to impatience. When thwarted or unreasonably

hindered, their soul strikes fire against the obstacles they meet, they

worry themselves at every hindrance, every disappointment, and break

out in stormy and fanatical violence. But Jesus, for some reason, is

just as even, just as serene, in all his petty vexations, and

hindrances, as if he bad nothing on hand to do. A kind of sacred

patience invests him everywhere. Having no element of crude will noised

with his work, he is able, in all trial and opposition, to hold a

condition of serenity above the clouds, and let them sail under him,

without ever obscuring the sun. He is poor, and hungry, and weary, and

despised, insulted by his enemies, deserted by his friends, but never

disheartened, never fretted or ruffled.

You see, meantime, that he is no Stoic; he visibly feels every such ill

as his delicate and sensitive nature must, but he has some sacred and

sovereign good present, to mingle with his pains, which, as it were,

naturally and without any self-watching, allays them. He does not seem

to rule his temper, but rather to have none; for temper, in the sense

of passion, is a fury that follows the will, as the lightnings follow

the disturbing forces of the winds among the clouds; and accordingly,

where there is no self-will to roll up the clouds and hurl them through

the sky, the lightnings hold their equilibrium, and are as though they

were not.

His passion no mere human martyrdom. As regards what is called

pre-eminently his passion, the scene of martyrdom that closes his life,

it is easy to distinguish a character in it which separates it from all

mere human martyrdoms. Thus, it will be observed, that his agony, the

scene in which his suffering is bitterest and most evident, is, on

human principles, wholly misplaced. It comes before the time, when as

yet there is no arrest, and no human prospect that there will be any.

He is at large, to go where he pleases, and in perfect outward safety.

His disciples have just been gathered round him in a scene of more than

family tenderness and affection. Indeed it is but a very few hours

since that he was coming into the city, at the head of a vast

procession, followed by loud acclamations, and attended by such honors

as may fitly celebrate the inaugural of a king. Yet here, with no bad

sign apparent, we see him plunged into a scene of deepest distress, and

racked, in his feeling, with a more than mortal agony. Coming out of

this, assured and comforted, he is shortly invested, brought to trial

and crucified; where, if there be any thing questionable in his manner,

it is in the fact that he is even more composed than some would have

him to be, not even stooping to defend himself or vindicate his

innocence. And when he dies, it is not as when the martyrs die. They

die for what they have said, and remaining silent will not recant. He

dies for what he has not said, and still is silent.

His agony misplaced, taken as being only a man's. By the misplacing of

his agony thus, and the strange silence he observes when the real hour

of agony is come, we are put entirely at fault on natural principles.

But it was not for him to wait, as being only a man, till he is

arrested, and the hand of death is upon him, then to be nerved by the

occasion to a show of victory. He that was before Abraham, must also be

before his occasions. In a time of safety, in a cool hour of

retirement, unaccountably to his friends, he falls into a dreadful

context and struggle of mind; coming out of it finally to go through

his most horrible tragedy of crucifixion, with the serenity of a

spectator!

It is, humanly speaking, excessive. Why now this so great intensity of

sorrow? why this agony? Was there not something unmanly in it,

something unworthy of a really great soul? Take him to be only a man,

and there probably was; nay, if he were a woman, the same might be

said. But this one thing is clear, that no one of mankind, whether man

or woman, ever had the sensibility to suffer so intensely; even showing

the body, for the mere struggle and pain of the mind, exuding and

dripping with blood. Evidently there is something mysterious here;

which mystery is vehicle to our feeling, and rightfully may be, of

something divine. What, we begin to ask, should be the power of a

superhuman sensibility? and how far should the human vehicle shake

under such a power? How too should an innocent and pure spirit be

exercised, when about to suffer, in his own person, the greatest wrong

ever committed?

The pathology is divine. Besides there is a vicarious spirit in love;

all love inserts itself vicariously into the sufferings and woes and,

in a certain sense, the sins of others, taking them on itself as a

burden. How then, if perchance Jesus should be divine, an embodiment of

God's love in the world--how should he feel, and by what signs of

feeling manifest his sensibility, when a fallen race are just about to

do the damning sin that crowns their guilty history; to crucify the

only perfect being that ever came into the world; to crucify even him,

the messenger and representative to them of the love of God, the

deliverer who has taken their case and cause upon him! Whomever duly

ponders these questions, will find that he is led away, more and more,

from any supposition of the mere mortality of Jesus. What he looks

upon, he will more and more distinctly see to be the pathology of a

superhuman anguish. It stands, he will perceive, in no mortal key. It

will be to him the anguish, visibly, not of any pusillanimous feeling,

but of holy character itself; nay, of a mysteriously transcendent, or

somehow divine character.

His defence before Pilate all that could be made. But why did be not

defend his cause and justify his innocence in the trial? Partly because

he had the wisdom to see that there really was and could be no trial,

and that one who undertakes to plead with a mob, only mocks his own

virtue, throwing words into the air that is already filled with the

clamors of prejudice. To plead innocence in such a case, is only to

make a protestation, such as indicates fear, and is really unworthy of

a great and composed spirit. A man would have done it, but Jesus did

not. Besides, there was a plea of innocence in the manner of Jesus, and

the few very significant words that he dropped, that had an effect on

the mind of Pilate, more searching and powerful than any formal

protestations. And the more we study the conduct of Jesus during the

whole scene, the more shall we be satisfied that he said enough; the

more admire the mysterious composure, the wisdom, the self-possession,

and the superhuman patience of the sufferer. It was visibly the

death-scene of a transcendent love. He dies not as a man, but rather as

some one might, who is mysteriously more and higher. So thought aloud

the hard-faced soldier--"Truly this was the Son of God." As if he had

said--"I have seen men die--this is not a man. They call him Son of

God--he can not be less." Can he be less to us?

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He undertakes what is humanly impossible. But Christ shows himself to

be a superhuman character, not in the personal traits only, exhibited

in his life, but even more sublimely in the undertakings, works, and

teachings, by which he proved his Messiahship.

Consider then the reach of his undertaking; which, if he was only a

man, shows him to have been the most extravagant and even wildest of

all human enthusiasts. Contrary to every religious prejudice of his

nation and even of his time, contrary to the comparatively narrow and

exclusive religion of Moses itself, and to all his training under it,

he undertakes to organise a kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven on

earth. His purpose includes a new moral creation of the race--not of

the Jews only and of men proselyted to their covenant, but of the whole

human race. He declared thus, at an early date in his ministry, that

many shall come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham,

and Jews and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; that the field is the world;

and that God so loves the world, as to give for it his only-begotten

Son. He also declared that his gospel shall be published to all

nations, and gave his apostles their commission to go into all the

world, and publish his gospel to every creature.

He assumes to set up the kingdom of God among men. Here, then, we have

the grand idea of his mission--it is to new-create the human race and

restore it to God, in the unity of a spiritual kingdom. And upon this

single fact, Reinhard erects a complete argument for his extra human

character; going into a formal review of all the great founders of

states and most celebrated lawgivers, the great heroes and defenders of

nations, all the wise kings and statesmen, all the philosophers, all

the prophet founders of religions, and discovering as a fact that no

such thought as this, or nearly proximate to this, had ever before been

taken up by any living character in history; showing also how it had

happened to every other great character, however liberalized by

culture, to be limited in some way to the interest of his own people,

or empire, and set in opposition, or antagonism, more or less

decidedly, to the rest of the world. But to Jesus alone, the simple

Galilean carpenter, it happens otherwise; that, never having seen a map

of the world in his whole life, or heard the name of half the great

nations on it, he undertakes, coming out of his shop, a scheme as much

vaster and more difficult than that of Alexander, as it proposes more

and what is more divinely benevolent! This thought of a universal

kingdom, cemented in God--why, the immense Roman empire of his day,

constructed by so many ages of war and conquest, is a bauble in

comparison, both as regards the extent and the cost! And yet the rustic

tradesman of Galilee propounds even this for his errand, and that in a

way of assurance, as simple and quiet, as if the immense reach of his

plan were, in fact, a matter to him of no consideration.

His plan covers ages of time. Nor is this all; there is included in his

plan, what, to any mere man, would be yet more remote from the possible

confidence of his frailty; it is a plan as universal in time, as it is

in the scope of its objects. It does not expect to be realized in a

lifetime, or even in many centuries to come. He calls it

understandingly, his grain of mustard-seed; which, however, is to grow,

he declares, and overshadow the whole earth. But the courage of Jesus,

counting a thousand years to be only a single day, is equal to the run

of his work. He sees a rock of stability, where men see only frailty

and weakness. Peter himself, the impulsive and always unreliable Peter,

turns into rock and becomes a great foundation, as he looks upon him.

"On this rock," he says, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell

shall not prevail against it." His expectation, too, reaches boldly out

beyond his own death; that, in fact, is to be the seed of his great

empire--"except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it

abideth," he says, "alone." And if we will see with what confidence and

courage he adheres to his plan, when the time of his death

approaches--how far he is from giving it up as lost, or as an exploded

vision of his youthful enthusiasm--we have only to observe his last

interview with the two sisters of Bethany, in whom hospitality he was

so often comforted. When the box of precious ointment is broken upon

his head, which Judas reproves as a useless expense, he discovers a sad

propriety or even prophecy, in what the woman has done, as connected

with his death, now at hand. But it does not touch his courage, we

perceive, or the confidence of his plan, or even cast a shade on his

prospect, "Let her alone. She hath done what she could. She is come

aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you,

wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world,

this also that this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of

her." Such was the sublime confidence he had in a plan that was to run

through all future ages, and would scarcely begin to show its fruit

during his own lifetime.

Such attempts not human. Is this great idea then, which no man ever

before conceived, the raising of the whole human race to God, a plan

sustained with such evenness of courage, and a confidence of the

world's future so far transcending any human example--is this a human

development? Regard the benevolence of it, the universality of it, the

religious grandeur of it, as a work readjusting the relations of God

and his government with men--the cost, the length of time it will

cover, and the far-off date of its completion--is it in this scale that

a Nazarene carpenter, a poor uneducated villager, lays out his plans

and graduates the confidence of his undertakings? There have been great

enthusiasts in the world, and they have shown their infirmity by

lunatic airs, appropriate to their extravagance. But it is not human,

we may safely affirm, to lay out projects transcending all human

ability, like this of Jesus, and which cannot be completed in many

thousands of years, doing it in all the airs of sobriety, entering on

the performance without parade, and yielding life to it firmly as the

inaugural of its triumph. No human creature sits quietly down to a

perpetual project, one that proposes to be executed only at the end, or

final harvest of the world. That is not human, but divine.

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Passing now to what is more interior in his ministry, taken as a

revelation of his character, we are struck with another distinction,

viz., that he takes rank with the poor, and grounds all the immense

expectations of his cause, on a beginning made with the lowly and

dejected classes of the world. He was born to the lot of the poor. His

manners, tastes, and intellectual attainments, however, visibly outgrew

his condition, and that in such a degree that, if he had been a mere

human character, he must have suffered some painful distaste for the

kind of society in which he lived. The great, as we perceive, flocked

to hear him, and sometimes came even by night to receive his

instructions. He saw the highest circles of society and influence open

to him, if he only desired to enter them. And, if he was a properly

human character, what virtuous, but rising young man would have had a

thought of impropriety, in accepting the elevation within his reach;

considering it as the proper reward of his industry and the merit of

his character--not to speak of the contempt for his humble origin, and

his humble associates, which every upstart person, of only ordinary

virtue, is so commonly seen to manifest. Still he adheres to the poor,

and makes them the object of his ministry. And what is more peculiar,

he visibly has a kind of interest in their society, which is wanting in

that of the higher classes; perceiving, apparently, that they have a

certain aptitude for receiving right impressions, which the others have

not. They are not the wise and prudent, filled with the conceit of

learning and station, but they are the ingenuous babes of poverty, open

to conviction, prepared, by their humble lot, to receive thoughts and

doctrines in advance of their age. Therefore he loves the poor, and,

without descending to their low manners, he delights to be identified

with them. He is more assiduous in their service than other men have

been in serving the great. He goes about on foot, teaching them, and

healing their sick; occupying his great and elevated mind, for whole

years, with details of labor and care, which the nurse of no hospital

had ever laid upon him--insanities, blind eyes, fevers, fluxes,

leprosies, and sores. His patients are all below his level and unable

to repay him, even by a breath of congenial sympathy; and nothing

supports him but the consciousness of good which attends his labors.

No great social architect ever saw the wisdom of it. Meantime, consider

what contempt for the poor had hitherto prevailed among all the great

statesmen and philosophers of the world. The poor were not society, or

any part of society. They were only the conveniences and drudges of

society; appendages of luxury and state, tools of ambition, material to

be used in the wars. No man who had taken up the idea of some great

change or reform in society, no philosopher who had conceived the

notion of building up an ideal state or republic, ever thought of

beginning with the poor. Influence was seen to reside in the higher

classes, and the only hope of reaching the world, by any scheme of

social regeneration, was to begin with them, and through them operate

its results. But Christ, if we call him a philosopher, and, if he is

only a man, we can call him by no higher name, was the poor man's

philosopher; the first and only one that had ever appeared. Seeing the

higher circles open to him, and tempted to imagine that, if he could

once get footing for his doctrine among the influential and the great,

he should thus secure his triumph more easily, he had yet no such

thought. He laid his foundations, as it were, below all influence, and,

as men would judge, threw himself away.

And precisely here did he display a wisdom and character totally in

advance of his age. Eighteen centuries have passed away, and we now

seem just beginning to understand the transcendent depth of this

feature in his mission and his character. We appear to be just waking

up to it as a discovery, that the blessing and upraising of the messes

are the fundamental interest of society--a discovery, however, which is

only a proof that the life of Jesus has at length begun to penetrate

society and public history. It is precisely this which is working so

many and great changes in our times, giving liberty and right to the

enslaved many, seeking their education, encouraging their efforts by

new and better hopes, producing an aversion to war, which has been the

fatal source of their misery and depression, and opening, as we hope, a

new era of comfort, light, and virtue in the world. It is as if some

higher and better thought had visited our race--which higher thought is

in the life of Jesus. The schools of all the philosophers are gone,

hundreds of years ago, and all their visions have died away into thin

air; but the poor man's philosopher still lives, bringing up his poor

to liberty, light, and character, and drawing the nations on to a

brighter and better day,

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And still he raises no partisan feeling. At the some time, the more

than human character of Jesus is displayed also in the fact that,

identifying himself thus with the poor, he is yet able to do it,

without eliciting any feelings of partisanship in them. To one who will

be at the pains to reflect a little, nothing will seem more difficult

than this; to become the patron of a class, a downtrodden and despised

class, without rallying in them a feeling of intense malignity. And

that for the reason, partly, that no patron, however just or

magnanimous, is ever quite able to suppress the feelings of a partisan

in himself. A little ambition, pricked on by a little abuse, a faint

desire of popularity playing over the face of his benevolence, and

tempting him to loosen a little of ill-nature, as tinder to the

passions of his sect--something of this kind is sure to kindle some

fire of malignity in his clients.

No human leader in this. Besides, men love to be partisans. Even Paul

and Apollos and Peter had their sects or schools, glorying in one

against another. With all their efforts, they could not suppress a

weakness so contemptible. But no such feeling could ever get footing

under Christ. If his disciples had forbidden one to heal in the name of

Jesus, because he followed not with there, he gently rebuked them, and

made them feel that he had larger views than to suffer any such folly.

As the friend of the poor and oppressed class, he set himself openly

against their enemies, and chastised them as oppressors, with the most

terrible rebukes. He exposed the absurdity of their doctrine, and

silenced them in argument; he launched his thunderbolts against their

base hypocrisies; but it does not appear that the populace ever

testified their pleasure, even by a cheer, or gave vent to any angry

emotion under cover of his leadership. For there was something still,

in the manner and air of Jesus, which made them feel it to be

inappropriate, and even made it impossible. It was as if some being

were here, taking their part, whom it were even en irreverence to

applaud, much more to second by any partisan clamor. They would as soon

have thought of cheering the angel in the nun, or of rallying under him

as the head of their faction.

On one occasion, when he had fed the multitudes by a miracle, he saw

that their national superstitions were excited, and that, regarding him

en the Messiah predicted in the Scriptures, they were about to take him

by force and make him their king; but this was a national feeling, not

the feeling of a class. Its root was superstition, not hatred. His

triumphal entry into Jerusalem, attended by the acclamations of the

multitude, if this be not one of the fables or myths, which our modern

criticism rejects, is yet no demonstration of popular faction, or party

animosity. Robbing it of its mystical and miraculous character, as the

inaugural of the Messiah, it has no real signification. In a few hours,

after all, these hosannas are hushed, Jesus is alone and forsaken, and

the very multitudes he might seem to have enlisted, are crying "Crucify

him!" On the whole, it cannot be said that Jesus was ever popular. He

was followed at times, by great multitudes of people, whose love of the

marvellous worked on their superstitions, to draw them after him. They

came also to be cured of their diseases. They knew him as their friend.

But there was yet something in him that forbade their low and malignant

feelings gathering into a conflagration round him. He presents, indeed,

an instance that stands alone in history, as God at the summit of the

worlds, where a person has identified himself with a class, without

creating a faction, and without becoming a popular character.

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Consider him next as a teacher; his method and manner, and the other

characteristics of his excellence, apart from his doctrine. That will

be distinctly considered in another place.

Original and independent as no man is. First of all, we notice the

perfect originality and independence of his teaching. We have a great

many men who are original, in the sense of being originators within a

certain boundary of educated thought. But the originality of Christ is

uneducated. That he draws nothing from the stores of learning, can be

seen at a glance. The impression we have in reading his instructions,

justifies to the letter, the language of his contemporaries, when they

say, "this man hath never learned." There is nothing in any of his

allusions, or forms of speech that indicates learning. Indeed, there is

nothing in him that belongs to his age or country--no one opinion, or

task, or prejudice. The attempts that have been made, in a way of

establishing his mere natural manhood, to show that he borrowed his

sentiments from the Persians and the eastern forms of religion, or that

he had been intimate with the Essenes, and borrowed from them, or that

he must have been acquainted with the schools and religions of Egypt,

deriving his doctrine from them--all attempts of the kind have so

palpably failed, as not even to require a deliberate answer.

If he is simply a man, as we hear, then he is most certainly a new and

singular kind of man, never before heard of; one who visibly is quite

as great a miracle in the world as if he were not a man. We can see for

ourselves, in the simple directness and freedom of his teachings, that

whatever he advances is from himself. Shakspeare, for instance, whom we

name as being probably the most creative and original spirit the world

has ever produced, one of the class, too, that are called self-made

men, is yet tinged, in all his works, with human learning. His glory

is, indeed, that so much of what is great in history and historic

character, lives and appears in his dramatic creation. He is the high

priest, we sometimes hear, of human nature. But Christ, understanding

human nature so as to address it more skilfully than he, derives no

help from historic examples. He is the high-priest, rather, of the

divine nature, speaking as one that has come out from God, and has

nothing to borrow from the world. It is not to be detected, by any

sign, that the human sphere in which he moved imparted any thing to

him. His teachings are just as full of divine nature, as Shakspeare's

of human.

Teaches by no human method. Neither does he teach by the human methods.

He does not speculate about God, as a school professor, drawing out

conclusions by a practice on words, and deeming that the way of proof;

he does not build up a frame of evidence from below, by some

constructive process, such as the philosophers delight in; but he

simply speaks of God and spiritual things as one who has come out from

Him, to tell us what he knows. And his simple telling brings us the

reality; proves it to us in its own sublime self-evidence; awakens even

the consciousness of it in our own bosom; so that formal arguments or

dialectic proofs offend as by their coldness, and seem, in fact, to be

only opaque substances set between us and the light. Indeed, be makes

even the world luminous by his words--fills it with an immediate and

new sense of God, which nothing has ever been able to expel. The

incense of the upper world is brought out, in his garments, and flows

abroad, as perfume, on the poisoned air.

Warped by no desire to gain assent. At the same time, he never reveals

the infirmity so commonly shown by human teachers, when they veer a

little from their point, or turn their doctrine off by shades of

variation, to catch the assent of multitudes. He never conforms to an

expectation, even of his friend. When they look to find a great prophet

in him, he offers nothing, in the modes of the prophet. When they ask

for places of distinction in his kingdom, he rebukes their folly, and

tells them he has nothing to give, but a share in his reproaches and

his poverty. When they look to see him take the sword as the Great

Messiah of their nation, calling the people to his standard, he tells

them he is no warrior and no king, but only a messenger of love to lost

men; one that has come to minister and die, but not to set up or

restore the kingdom. Every expectation that rises up to greet him, is

repulsed; and yet, so great is the power of his manner, that multitudes

are held fast, and can not yield their confidence. Enveloped as he is

in the darkest mystery, they trust him still; going after him, hanging

on his words, as if detained by some charmed influence, which they

cannot shake off or resist. Never was there a teacher that so uniformly

baffled every expectation of his followers, never one that was followed

so persistently.

Comprehensive, under no human conditions. Again, the singular balance

of character displayed in the teachings of Jesus, indicates an

exemption from the standing infirmity of human nature. Human opinions

are formed under a law that seems to be universal. First, two opposite

extremes are thrown up, in two opposite leaders or parties; then a

third party enters, trying to find what truth they both are endeavoring

to vindicate, and settle thus a view of the subject, that includes the

truth and clears the one-sided extremes, which opposing words or

figures, not yet measured in their force, had produced. It results, in

this manner, that no man, even the broadest in his apprehensions, is

ever at the point of equilibrium as regards all subjects. Even the

ripest of us are continually falling into some extreme, and losing our

balance, afterward to be corrected by some other who discovers our

error, or that of our school.

Could not hold a one-sided view. But Christ was of no school or party,

and never went to any extreme--words could never turn him to a

one-sided view of anything. This is the remarkable fact that

distinguishes him from any other known teacher of the world. Having

nothing to work out in a word-process, but every thing clear in the

simple intuition of his superhuman intelligence, he never pushes

himself to any human eccentricity. It does not even appear that he is

trying, as we do, to balance opposites and clear extravagances, but he

does it, as one who can not imagine a one-sided view of any thing. He

is never a radical, never a conservative. He will not allow his

disciples to deny him before kings and governments, be will not let

them renounce their allegiance to C�sar. He exposes the oppressions of

the Pharisees in Moses' seat, but, encouraging no factious resistance,

says--"do as they command you." His position as a reformer was

universal; according to his principles almost nothing, whether in

church or state, or in social life, was right, and yet he is thrown

into no antagonism against the world. How a man will do, when he

engages only in some one reform, acting from his own human force; the

fuming, storming phrenzy, the holy rage and tragic smoke of his

violence, how he kindles against opposition, grows bitter and restive

because of delay, and finally comes to maturity in a character

thoroughly detestable--all this we know. But Christ, with all the world

upon his hands, and a reform to be carried in almost every thing, is

yet as quiet and cordial, and as little in the attitude of bitterness

or impatience, as if all hearts were with him, or the work already

done; so perfect is the balance of his feeling, so intuitively

moderated is it by a wisdom not human.

Clear of all the current superstitions. We can not stay to sketch a

full outline of this particular and sublime excellence, as it was

displayed in his life. It will be seen as clearly in a single

comparison or contrast as in many, or in a more extended inquiry. Take,

then, for an example, what may be observed in his open repugnance to

all superstition, combined with his equal repugnance to what is

commonly praised as a mode of liberality. He lived in a superstitious

age and among a superstitious people. He was a person of low education,

and nothing, as we know, clings to the uneducated mind with the

tenacity of a superstition. Lord Bacon, for example, a man certainly of

the very highest intellectual training, was yet harmed by superstitions

too childish to be named with respect, and which clung to him despite

of all his philosophy, even to his death. But Christ, with no learned

culture at all, comes forth out of Galilee, as perfectly clean of all

the superstitions of his time, as if he had been a disciple, from his

childhood, of Hume or Strauss. "You children of superstition think," he

says, "that those Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their

sacrifices, and those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, must

have been monsters, to suffer such things. I tell you, nay; but except

ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." To another company he

says--"You imagine, in your Pharisaic and legal morality, that the

Sabbath of Moses stands in the letter; but I tell you that the Sabbath

is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; little honor, therefore,

do you pay to God, when you teach that it is not lawful to do good on

this day. Your washings are a great point, you tithe herbs and seeds

with a sanctimonious fidelity, would it not be as well for you,

teachers of the law, to have some respect to the weightier matters of

justice, faith, and benevolence?" Thus, while Socrates, one of the

greatest and purest of human souls, a man who has. attained to many

worthy conceptions of God, hidden from his idolatrous countrymen, is

constrained to sacrifice a cock to Esculapius, the uneducated Jesus

lives and dies superior to every superstition of his time; believing

nothing because it is believed, respecting nothing because it is

sanctified by custom and by human observance. Even in the closing scene

of his life, we see his learned and priestly associates refusing to go

into the judgment-hall of Caiaphas, lest they should be ceremonially

defiled and disqualified for the feast; though detained by no scruple

at all as regards the instigation of a murder! While he, on the other

hand, pitying their delusions, prays for them from his cross--"Father,

forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But no liberalist. And yet Christ is no liberal, never takes the ground

or boasts the distinction of a liberal among his countrymen, because it

is not a part of his infirmity, in discovering an error here, to fly to

an excess there. His ground is charity, not liberality; and the two are

as wide apart in their practical implications, as adhering to all

truth, and being loose in all. Charity holds fast the minutest atoms of

truth, as being precious and divine, offended by even so much as a

thought of laxity. Liberality loosens the terms of truth; permitting

easily and with careless magnanimity variations from it; consenting, as

it were, in its own sovereignty, to overlook or allow them; and

subsiding thus, ere long, into a licentious indifference to all truth,

and a general defect of responsibility in regard to it. Charity extends

allowance to men; liberality, to falsities themselves. Charity takes

the truth to be sacred and immovable; liberality allows it to be marred

and maimed at pleasure. How different the manner of Jesus in this

respect from that unreverent, feeble laxity, that lets the errors be as

good as the truths, and takes it for a sign of intellectual eminence,

that one can be floated comfortably in the abysses of liberalism.

"Judge not," he says, in holy charity, "that ye be not judged"; and

again, in holy exactness, "whosoever shall break, or teach to break,

one of these least commandments shall be least in the kingdom of

God"--in the same way, "he that is not with us is against us"; and

again, "he that is not against us is for us"--in the same way also, "ye

tithe mint, anise, and cummin"; and again, "these things ought ye to

have done, and not to leave the other undone"--once more, too, in the

same way, "he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone"; and

again, "go, and sin no more." So magnificent and sublime, so plainly

divine, is the balance of Jesus, Nothing throws him off the centre on

which truth rests; no prejudice, no opposition, no attempt to right a

mistake, or rectify a delusion, or reform a practice. If this be human,

I do not know, for one, what it is to be human.

His simplicity is perfect. Again, it is a remarkable and even

superhuman distinction of Jesus, that, while he is advancing doctrines

so far transcending all deductions of philosophy, and opening mysteries

that defy all human powers of explication, he is yet able to set his

teachings in a form of simplicity, that accommodates all classes of

minds. And this, for the reason that he speaks directly to men's

convictions themselves, without and apart from any learned and curious

elaboration, such as the uncultivated can not follow. No one of the

great writers of antiquity had even propounded, as yet, a doctrine of

virtue which the multitude could understand. It was taught as being to

kalon [the fair], or to prepon, [the becoming], or something of that

nature, as distant from all their apprehensions, and as destitute of

motive power, as if it were a doctrine of mineralogy. Considered as a

gift to the world at large, it was the gift of a stone, not of bread.

But Jesus tells them directly, in a manner level to their

understanding, what they want, what they must do and be, to inherit

eternal life, and their inmost convictions answer to his words.

Besides, his doctrine is not so much a doctrine as a biography, a

personal power, a truth all motivity, a love walking the earth in the

proximity of a mortal fellowship. He only speaks what goes forth as a

feeling and a power in his life, breathing into all hearts. To be

capable of his doctrine, only requires that the hearer be a human

creature, wanting to know the truth.

Shining as pure light. Call him, then, who will, a man, a human

teacher; what human teacher ever came down thus upon the soul of the

race, as a beam of light from the skies--pure light, shining directly

into the visual orb of the mind, a light for all that live, a full

transparent day, in which truth bathes the spirit as an element. Others

talk and speculate about truth, and those who can may follow; but Jesus

is the truth, and lives it, and if he is a mere human teacher, he is

the first who was ever able to find a form for truth, at all adequate

to the world's uses. And yet the truths he teaches outreach all the

doctrines of all the philosophers of the world. He excels them a

hundred-fold more, in the scope and grandeur of his doctrine, than he

does in his simplicity itself.

Is this human, or is it plainly divine? If you will see what is human,

or what the wisdom of humanity would ordain, it is this--exactly what

the subtle and accomplished Celsus, the great adversary of Christianity

in its original promulgation, alleges for one of his principal

arguments against it "Woollen manufacturers," he says, "shoemakers and

curriers, the most uneducated and boorish of men are zealous advocates

of this religion; men who can not open their mouths before the learned,

and who only try to gain over the women and children in families." [1]

And again, what is only the same objection, under a different form,

assuming that religion, like a philosophy, must be for the learned, he

says, "He must be void of understanding who can believe that Greeks and

barbarians, in Asia, Europe, and Lybia--all nations to the ends of the

earth--can unite in one and the same religious doctrine." [2] So also,

Plato says, "it is not easy to find the Father and Creator of all

existence, and when he is found it is impossible to make him known to

all." [3] "But exactly this," says Justin Martyr, "is what our Christ

has effected by his power." And Tertullian, also, glorying in the

simplicity of the gospel, so already proved to be a truly divine

excellence, says, "Every Christian artisan has found God, and points

him out to thee, and in fact, shows thee every thing which is sought

for in God, although Plato maintains that the Creator of the world is

not easily found, and that, when he is found, he can not be made known

to all," [4] Here, then, we have Christ against Celsus, and Christ

against Plato. These agree in assuming that we have a God, whom only

the great can mount high enough in argument to know. Christ reveals a

God whom the humblest artisan can teach, and all mankind embrace, with

a faith that unifies them all.

This morality is not artistic. Again, the morality of Jesus has a

practical superiority to that of all human teachers, in the fact that

it is not an artistic, or theoretically elaborated scheme, but one that

is propounded in precepts that carry their own evidence, and are, in

fact, great spiritual laws ordained by God, in the throne of religion.

He did not draw long arguments to settle what the summum bonum is, and

then produce a scheme of ethics to correspond. He did not go into the

vexed question, what is the foundation of virtue? and hang a system

upon his answer. Nothing falls into an artistic shape, as when Plato or

Socrates tusked what kind of action is beautiful in action? reducing

the principles of morality to a form as difficult for the uncultivated,

as the art of sculpture itself. Yet Christ excels them all in the

beauty of his precepts, without once appearing to consider their

beauty. He simply comes forth telling us, from God, what to do, without

deducing any thing in a critical way; and yet, while nothing has ever

yet been settled by the critics and theorizing philosophers, that could

stand fast and compel the assent of the race, even for a year, the

morality of Christ is about as firmly seated in the convictions of men,

as the law of gravity in their bodies.

But intuitive and original. He comes into the world full of all moral

beauty, as God of physical; and as God was not obliged to set himself

to a course of �sthetic study, when he created the forms and landscapes

of the world, so Christ comes to his rules, by no critical practice in

words. He opens his lips, and the creative glory of his mind pours

itself forth in living precepts--Do to others as ye would that others

should do to you--Blessed are the peacemakers--Smitten upon one cheek,

turn the other--Resist not evil--Forgive your enemies--Do good to them

that hate you--Lend not, hoping to receive--Receive the truth as little

children. Omitting all the deep spiritual doctrines he taught, and

taking all the human teachers on their own ground, the ground of

preceptive morality, they are seen at once to be meager and cold;

little artistic inventions, gleams of high conceptions caught by study,

having about the same relation to the Christian morality that a statue

has to the flexibility, the self-active force, and flushing warmth of

man, as he goes forth in the image of his Creator, to be the reflection

of His beauty and the living instrument of his will. Indeed, it is the

very distinction of Jesus that he teaches, not a verbal, but an

original, vital, and divine morality. He does not dress up a moral

picture and ask you to observe its beauty, he only tells you how to

live; and the most beautiful characters the world has ever seen, have

been those who received and lived his precepts without once conceiving

their beauty.

Never anxious for success. Once more, it is a high distinction of

Christ's character, as seen in his teachings, that he is never anxious

for the success of his doctrine. Fully conscious of the fact that the

world is against him, scoffed at, despised, hated, alone too, in his

cause, and without partisans that have any public influence, no man has

ever been able to detect in him the least anxiety for the final success

of his doctrine. He is never jealous of contradiction. When his friends

display their dulness and incapacity, or even when they forsake hint,

he is never ruffled or disturbed. He rests on his words, with a

composure as majestic as if he were sitting on the circle of the

heavens. Now the consciousness of truth, we are not about to deny, has

an effect of this nature in every truly great mind. But when it has had

an effect so complete? What human teacher, what great philosopher, has

not shown some traces of anxiety for his school, that indicated his

weakness; some pride in his friends, some dislike of his enemies, some

traces of wounded ambition, when disputed or denied? But here is a lone

man, a humble, uneducated man, never schooled into the elegant fiction

of an assumed composure, or practised in the conventional dignities of

manners, and yet, finding all the world against him, the world does not

rest on its axle more firmly than he upon his doctrine. Questioned by

Pilate what he means by truth, it is enough to answer--"He that is of

the truth heareth my voice." If this be human, no other man of the

race, we are sure, has ever dignified humanity by a like example.

Such is Christ as a teacher. When has the world seen a phenomenon like

this; a lonely uninstructed youth, coming forth amid the moral darkness

of Galilee, even more distinct from his age, and from every thing

around him, than a Plato would be rising up alone in some wild tribe in

Oregon, assuming thus a position at the head of the world, and

maintaining it, for eighteen centuries, by the pure self-evidence of

his life and doctrine! Does he this by the force of mere human talent

or genius? If so, it is time that we begin to look to genius for

miracles; for there in really no greater miracle.

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There is yet one other and more inclusive distinction of the character

of Jesus, which must not be omitted, and which sets him off more widely

from all the mere men of the race, just because it raises a contrast

which is, at once, total and experimental. Human characters are always

reduced in their eminence, and the impressions of awe they have raised,

by a closer and more complete acquaintance. Weakness and blemish are

discovered by familiarity; admiration lets in qualifiers; on approach,

the halo dims a little. But it was not so with Christ. With his

disciples, in closest terms of intercourse, for three whole years;

their brother, friend, teacher, monitor, guest, fellow-traveler; seen

by them under all the conditions of public ministry, and private

society, where the ambition of show, or the pride of power, or the

ill-nature provoked by annoyance, or the vanity drawn out by

confidence, would most certainly be reducing him to the criticism even

of persons most unsophisticated, he is yet visibly raising their sense

of his degree and quality; becoming a greater wonder and holier

mystery, and gathering to his person feelings of reverence and awe, at

once more general and more sacred. Familiarity operates a kind of

apotheosis, and the man becomes divinity, in simply being known.

At first, he is the Son of Mary and the Nazarene carpenter. Next, he is

heard speaking with authority, as contrasted even with the Scribes.

Next, he is conceived by some to be certainly Elias, or some one of the

prophets, returned in power to the world. Peter takes him up, at that

point, as being certainly the Christ, the great mysterious Messiah;

only not so great that he is not able to reprove him, when he begins to

talk of being killed by his enemies; protesting "be it far from thee,

Lord." But the next we see of the once bold apostle, he is beckoning to

another, at the table, to whisper the Lord and ask who it is that is

going to betray him; unable himself to so much as invade the sacred ear

of his Master with the audible and open question. Then, shortly after,

when he comes out of the hall of Caiaphas, flushed and flurried with

his threefold lie, and his base hypocrisy of cursing, what do we see

but that, simply catching the great Master's eye, his heart breaks

down, riven with insupportable anguish, and is utterly dissolved in

childish tears. And so it will be discovered in all the disciples, that

Christ is more separated from them, and holds them in deeper awe, the

closer he comes to them and the more perfectly they know him.

The same, too, is true of his enemies. At first, they look on him only

as some new fanatic, that has come to turn the heads of the people.

Next, they want to know whence he drew his opinion, and his singular

accomplishments in the matter of public address; not being, as all that

knew him testify, an educated man. Next, they send out a company to

arrest him, and, when they hear him speak, they are so deeply impressed

that they dare not do it, but go back, under a kind of invincible awe,

testifying--"never man spake like this man." Afterward, to break some

fancied spell there may be in him, they hire one of his own friends to

betray him; and even then, when they come directly before him and hear

him speak, they are in such tremor of apprehension, lest he should

suddenly annihilate them, that they reel incontinently backward and are

pitched on the ground. Pilate trembles visibly before him, and the more

because of his silence and his wonderful submission. And then, when the

fatal deed is done, what do we see but that the multitude, awed by some

dread mystery in the person of the crucified, return home smiting on

their breasts for anguish, in the sense of what their infatuated and

guilty rage has done.

Our experience of men reverse in him. The most conspicuous matter,

therefore, in the history of Jesus, is, that what holds true, in all

our experience of men, is inverted in him. He grows sacred, peculiar,

wonderful, divine, as acquaintance reveals him. At first he is only a

man, as the senses report him to be; knowledge, observation,

familiarity, raise him into the God-man. He grows pure and perfect,

more than mortal in wisdom, a being enveloped in sacred mystery, a

friend to be loved in awe--dies into awe, and a sorrow that contains

the element of worship! And exactly this appears in the history,

without any token of art, or even apparent consciousness that it does

appear--appears because it is true. Probably no one of the evangelists

ever so much as noticed this remarkable inversion of what holds good

respecting men, in the life and character of Jesus. Is this character

human, or is it plainly divine?

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Recapitulation. We have now sketched some of the principal distinctions

of the superhuman character of Jesus. We have seen him unfolding as a

flower, from the germ of a perfect youth; growing up to enter into

great scenes and have his part in great trials; harmonious in all with

himself and truth, a miracle of celestial beauty. He is a Lamb in

innocence, a God in dignity; revealing an impenitent but faultless

piety, such as no mortal ever attempted, such as, to the highest of

mortals, is inherently impossible. He advances the most extravagant

pretensions, without any show of conceit, or even seeming fault of

modesty. He suffers without affectation of composure and without

restraint of pride; suffers as no mortal sensibility can, and where, to

mortal view, there was no reason for pain at all; giving us not only an

example of gentleness and patience in all the small trials of life, but

revealing the depths even of the passive virtues of God, in his agony

and the patience of his suffering love. He undertakes also a plan,

universal in extent, perpetual in time; to unite all nations in a

kingdom of righteousness under God; laying his foundations in the

hearts of the poor, as no great teacher had ever done before, and yet

without creating ever a faction, or stirring one partisan feeling in

his followers. In his teachings he is perfectly original, distinct from

his age and from all ages; never warped by the expectation of his

friends; always in a balance of truth, swayed by no excesses, running

to no oppositions or extremes; clear of all superstition, and equally

clear of all liberalism; presenting the highest doctrines in the lowest

and simplest forms; establishing a pure, universal morality, never

before established; and, with all his intense devotion to the truth,

never anxious, perceptibly, for the success of his doctrine. Finally,

to sum up all in one, he grows more great and wise, and sacred, the

more he is known--needs, in fact, to be known, to have his perfection

seen. And we say, is Jesus, the Christ; manifestly not human, not of

our world--some being who has burst into it, and is not of it. Call him

for the present, that "Holy Thing," and say, "by this we believe that

thou camest from God."

Not to say that we are dissatisfied with this sketch, would be almost

an irreverence of itself, to the subject of it. Who can satisfy himself

with any thing that he can say of Jesus Christ? We have seen, how many

pictures of the sacred person of Jesus, by the first masters; but not

one, among them all, that did not rebuke the weakness which could dare

attempt an impossible subject. So of the character of Jesus. It is

necessary, for the holy interest of truth, that we should explore it,

as we are best able; but what are human thoughts and human conceptions,

on a subject that dwarfs all thought and immediately outgrows whatever

is conceived. And yet, for the reason that we have failed, we seem also

to have succeeded. For the more impossible it is found to be, to grasp

the character and set it forth, the more clearly it is seen to be above

our range--a miracle and a mystery.

Did such a being actually exist? Two questions now remain, which our

argument requires to be answered. And the first is this--did any such

character, as this we have been tracing, actually exist? Admitting that

the character, whether it be fact or fiction, is such as we have seen

it to be, two supposition are open; either that such a character

actually lived, and was possible to be described, because it furnished

the matter of the picture, itself; or else, that Jesus, being a merely

human character as he lived, was adorned to set off in this manner, by

the exaggeration of fancy, and fable, and wild tradition afterward. In

the former alternative, we have the insuperable difficulty of

believing, that any so perfect and glorious character was ever attained

to by a mortal. If Christ was a merely natural man, then was he under

all the condition privative, as regards the security of his virtue,

that we have discovered in man. He was a new-created being, as such to

be perfected in a character of steadfast holiness, only by the

experiment of evil and redemption from it. We can believe any miracle,

therefore, more easily than that Christ was a man, and yet a perfect

character, such as here is given.

In the latter alternative, we have four different writers, widely

distinguished in their style and mental habit--inferior persons, all,

as regards their accomplishments, and none of them remarkable for gifts

of genius--contributing their parts, and coalescing thus in the

representation of a character perfectly harmonious with itself, and,

withal, a character whose ideal no poet had been able to create, no

philosopher, by the profoundest effort of thought, to conceive and set

forth to the world. What is more, these four writers are, by the

supposition, children all of credulity, retailing the absurd gossip and

the fabulous stories of an age of marvels, and yet, by some accident,

they are found to have conceived and sketched the only perfect

character known to mankind. To believe this, requires a more credulous

age than these writers ever saw. We fall back, then, upon our

conclusion, and there we rest. Such was the real historic character of

Jesus. Thus he lived; the character is possible to be conceived,

because it was actualized in a living example. The only solution is

that which is given try Jesus himself, when he says--"I came forth from

the Father, and am come into the world."

Was he a sinless character? The second question is this: whether this

character is to be conceived as an actually existing sinless character

in the world? That it is I maintain, because the character can no

otherwise be accounted for in its known excellences. How was it that a

simple-minded peasant of Galilee, was able to put himself in advance,

in this manner, of all human teaching and excellence; unfolding a

character so peculiar in its combinations, and so plainly impossible to

any mere man of the race? Because his soul was filled with internal

beauty and purity, having no spot, or stain, distorted by no obliquity

of view or feeling, lapsing, therefore, into no eccentricity or

deformity. We can make out no account of him so easy to believe, as

that he was sinless; indeed, we can make no other account of him at

all. He realized what are, humanly speaking, impossibilities; for his

soul was warped and weakened by no human infirmities, doing all in a

way of ease and naturalness, just because it is easy for clear waters

to flow from a pure spring. To believe that Jesus got up these high

conceptions artistically, and then acted them, in spite of the

conscious disturbance of his internal harmony, and the conscious

clouding of his internal purity by sin, would involve a degree of

credulity and a want of perception, as regards the laws of the soul and

their necessary action under sin, so lamentable as to be a proper

subject of pity. We could sooner believe all the fables of the Talmud.

Besides, if Jesus was a sinner, he was conscious of sin as all sinners

are, and, therefore, was a hypocrite in the whole fabric of his

character; realizing so muck of divine beauty in it, maintaining the

show of such unfaltering harmony and celestial grace, and doing all

this with a mind confused and fouled by the affectations acted for true

virtues! Such an example of successful hypocrisy would be itself the

greatest miracle ever heard of in the world.

Furthermore, if Jesus was a sinner, then he was, of course, a fallen

being; down under the bondage, distorted by the perversity of sin and

its desolating effects, as men are. The root, therefore, of all his

beauty is guilt. Evil has broken loose in him, he is held fast under

evil. Bad thoughts are streaming through his soul in bad successions;

his tempers have lost their tune; his affections have been touched by

leprosy; remorse scowls upon his heart; his views have lost their

balance and contracted obliquity; in a word, he is fallen. Is it then

such a being, one who has been touched, in this manner, by the demon

spell of evil--is it he that is unfolding such a character?

Mr. Parker's estimate of him. What, then, do our critics in the school

of naturalism say of this character of Christ? Of course they are

obliged to say many handsome and almost saintly things of it. Mr.

Parker says of him, that "He unites in himself the sublimed precepts

and divinest practices, thus more than realizing the dream of prophets

and sages; rises free from all prejudice of his age, nation, or sect;

gives free range to the Spirit of God, in his breast; sets aside the

law, sacred and true--honored as it was, its forms, its sacrifice, its

temple, its priests; puts away the doctors of the law, subtle,

irrefragable, and pours out a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime

as Heaven, and true as God." [5] Again--as if to challenge for his

doctrine, the distinction of a really supernatural excellence--"Try him

as we try other teachers. They deliver their word, find a few waiting

for the consolation who accept the new tidings, follow the new method,

and soon go beyond their teacher, though less mighty minds than he.

Though humble men, we see what Socrates and Luther never saw. But

eighteen centuries have passed since the Sun of humanity rose so high

in Jesus; what man, what sect has mastered his thought, comprehended

his method, and so fully applied it to life." [6]

Mr. Hennel's estimate. Mr. Hennel, who writes in a colder mood, but

has, on the whole, produced the ablest of all the arguments yet offered

on this side, speaks more cautiously. He says, "Whilst no human

character, in the history of the world, can be brought to mind, which,

in proportion as it could be closely examined, did not present some

defects, disqualifying it for being the emblem of moral perfection, we

can rest, with least check or sense of incongruity, on the imperfectly

known character of Jesus of Nazareth." [7]

Faults charged. But the intimation here is, that the character is not

perfect; it is only one in which the sense of perfection suffers "least

check." And where is the fault charged? Why, it is discovered that

Jesus cursed a fig-tree, in which he is seen to be both angry and

unreasonable. He denounced the Pharisees in terms of bitter animosity.

He also drove the money changers out of the temple with a scourge of

rode, in which he is even betrayed into an act of physical violence.

These and such like specks of fault are discovered, as they think, in

the life of Jesus. So graceless in our conceit, have we of this age

grown, that we can think it a point of scholarly dignity and reason, to

spot the only perfect beauty that has ever graced our world, with such

discovered blemishes as these! As if sin could ever need to be made out

against a real sinner, in this small way of special pleading; or as if

it were ever the way of sin to err in single particles or homoeopathic

quantities of wrong! A more just sensibility would denounce this

malignant style of criticism, as a heartless and really low-minded

pleasure in letting down the honors of goodness.

Faults supposed and intimated. In justice to Mr. Parker, it must be

admitted that he does not actually charge these points of history as

faults, or blemishes in the character of Jesus. And yet, in justice

also, it must be added that he does compose a section under the

heading--"The Negative Side, or the Limitations of Jesus,"--where

these, with other like matters, are thrown in by insinuation, as

possible charges sometimes advanced by others. For himself, he alleges

nothing positive, but that Jesus was under the popular delusion of his

time, in respect to devils or demoniacal possessions, and that he was

mistaken in some of his references to the Old Testament. What, now, is

to be thought of such material, brought forward under such a heading,

to flaw such a character! Is it sure that Christ was mistaken in his

belief of the foul spirits? Is it certain that a sufficient mode of

interpretation will not clear his references of mistake? And so, when

it is suggested, at second hand, that his invective is too fierce

against the Pharisees, is there no escape, but to acknowledge that,

"considering his youth, it was a venial error?" Or, if there be no

charge but this, "at all affecting the moral and religious character of

Jesus," should not a just reverence to one whose life is so nearly

faultless, constrain us to look for some more favorable construction,

that takes the solitary blemish away? Is it true that invective is a

necessary token of ill-nature? Are there no occasions where even

holiness will be most forward in it? And when a single men stands out

alone, facing a whole living order and caste, that rule the

time--oppressors of the poor, hypocrites and pretenders in religion,

corrupters of all truth and faith, under the names of learning and

religion--is the malediction, the woe, that he hurls against them, to

be taken as a fault of violence and unregulated passion; or considering

what amount of force and public influence he dares to confront and set

in deadly enmity against his person, is he rather to be accepted as

God's champion, in the honors of great and genuinely heroic spirit?

His invective against the Pharisees. Considering how fond the world is

of invective, how ready to admire the rhetoric of sharp words, how many

speakers study to excel in the fine art of excoriation, how many

reformers are applauded in vehement attacks on character, and win a

great repute of fearlessness, just because of their severity, when, in

fact, there is nothing to fear--when possibly the subject is a dead

man, not yet buried--it is really a most striking tribute to the more

than human character of Jesus, that we are found to be so apprehensive

respecting him in particular, lest his plain, unstudied, unrhetorical

severities on this or that occasion, may imply some possible defect, or

"venial error," in him. Why this special sensibility to fault in him?

save that, by his beautiful and perfect life, he has raised our

conceptions so high as to make, what we might applaud in a man, a

possible blemish in his divine excellence?

The glorious old reformer and blind poet of Puritanism--vindicator of a

free commonwealth and a free, unprelatical religion--holds, in our

view, a far worthier and manlier conception of Christ's dealing with

the Pharisees, and of what is due to all the usurpations of titled

conceit and oppression in the world. With truly refreshing vehemence,

he writes--"For in times of opposition, when against new heresies

arising, or old corruptions to be reformed, this cool, impassionate

mildness of positive wisdom, is not enough to damp and astonish the

proud resistance of carnal and false doctors, then (that I may have

leave to soar awhile, as the poets use,) Zeal, whose substance is

ethereal, arming in complete diamond, ascends his fiery chariot, drawn

by two blazing meteors figured like beasts, but of a higher breed than

any the zodiac yields, resembling those four which Ezekiel and St. John

saw--the one visaged like a lion, to express power, high authority, and

indignation; the other of man, to cast derision and scorn upon perverse

and fraudulent seducers--with them the invincible warrior, Zeal,

shaking loosely the slack reins, drives over the heads of scarlet

prelates and such as are insolent to maintain traditions, bruising

their stiff necks under his flaming wheels. Thus did the true prophets

of old combat with the false; thus Christ, himself the fountain of

meekness, found acrimony enough to be still galling and vexing the

prelatical Pharisee. But ye will say, these had immediate warrant from

God to be thus bitter; and I say, so much the plainer is it found that

there may be a sanctified bitterness against the enemies of the truth."

[8]

Probably Christ himself had no other account to give of his conduct, on

the occasion referred to; and no other was needed, than that he felt a

zeal within him (answering to Milton's picture), which could not, must

not be repressed. His disciples felt his terrible severity, and were

going to be shocked by it, but they remembered the Scripture--"The zeal

of thy house hath eaten me up." After all, it was, when rightly viewed,

the necessary outburst, only, of that indignant fire, which is kindled

in the sweet bosom of innocence, by the insolence of hypocrisy and

oppression.

I conclude, then, (1.) that Christ actually lived, and bore the real

character ascribed to him in the history. And (2.) that he was a

sinless character. How far off is he now from any possible

classification in the genus humanity!

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The fact of his miracles implied. Here, then, is a being who has broken

into the world, and is not of it; one who has come out from God, and is

even an expression to us of the complete beauty of God--such as he

should be, if he actually was, what he is affirmed to be, the Eternal

Word of the Father incarnate. Did he work miracles? This now is the

question that waits for our decision--did he work miracles? By the

supposition, he is superhuman. By the supposition, too, he is in the

world as a miracle. Agreeing that the laws of nature will not be

suspended, any more than they are by our own supernatural action, will

they yet be so subordinated to his power, as to permit the performance

of signs and wonders, in which we may recognize a superhuman force?

Since he is shown to be a superhuman being, manifestly nature will have

a relation to him, under and by her own laws, such as accords with his

superhuman quality, and it will be very singular if he does not do

superhuman things; nay, it is even philosophically incredible that he

should not, and that without any breach upon the integrity of nature.

Thus an organ is a certain instrument, curiously framed or adjusted in

its paste, and prepared to yield itself to any force which touches the

keys. An animal runs back and forth across the key-board, and produces

a jarring, disagreeable jumble of sounds. Thereupon he begins to

reason, and convinces himself that it is in the nature of the

instrument to make such sounds, and no other. But a skilful player

comes to the instrument, as a higher presence, endowed with a

super-animal sense and skill. He strikes the keys, and all-melodious

and heavenly sounds roll out upon the enchanted air. Will the animal

now go on to reason that this is impossible, incredible, because it

violates the nature of the instrument, and is contrary to his own

experience? Perhaps he may, and men may sometimes not be wiser than he.

But the player himself, and all that can think it possible for him to

do what the animal can not, will have no doubt that the music is made

by the same laws that made the jargon. Just so Christ, to whose will or

touch the mundane system is pliant as to ours, may be able to execute

results through its very laws subordinated to him, which to us are

impossible. Nay, it would be itself a contradiction of all order and

fit relation if he could not. To suppose that a being out of humanity,

will be shut up within all the limitations of humanity, is incredible,

and contrary to reason. The very laws of nature themselves, having him

present to them, as a new agent and higher first term, would require

the development of new consequences and incidents, in the nature of

wonders. Being a miracle himself, it would be the greatest of all

miracles if he did not work miracles.

His errand is order itself. Let it be further noted, that Christ is

here on an errand high enough to justify his appearing, and also of a

nature to exclude any suspicion that he is going to overthrow the order

of God's works. He declares that he has come out from God, to be a

restorer of sin, a regenerator of all things, a new moral creator of

the world; thus to do a work that is, at once, the hope of all order,

and the greatest of all miracle. He tells us, indeed, that he is come

to set up the kingdom of God, and fulfil the highest ends of the divine

goodness in the creation of the world itself; and the dignity of his

work, certified by the dignity also of his character, sets all things

in proportion, and commends him to our confidence in all the wonders he

performs.

No disruption of law or system. Nor shall we apprehend in his miracles

any disruption of law; for we shall see that he is executing that true

system, above nature and more comprehensive, which is itself the basis

of all stability, and contains the reel import of all things. Dwelling

from eternity in this higher system himself, and having it centred in

his person, wheeling and subordinating thus all physical instruments,

as doubtless he may, to serve those better ends in which all order

lies, it will not be in us when he comes forth from the Father, on the

Father's errand, to forbid that he shall work in the prerogatives of

the Father. Visibly not one of us, but a visitant who has come out from

a realm of spiritual majesty, back of the sensuous orb on which our

moth-eyes dwell as in congenial dimness and obscurity of light, what

shall we think when we see diseases fly before him, and blindness

letting fall the scales of obscured vision, and death retreating from

its prey, but that the seeming disruption of our retributive state

under sin, is made to let in mercy and order from above? For, if man

has buried himself in sense, and married all sense to sin, which sin is

itself the soul of all disorder, can it be to us a frightful thing that

he lays his hand upon the perverted casualties, and says, "thou art

made whole?" If the bad empire, the bitter un-nature of our sin, is

somewhere touched by his healing power, must we apprehend some fatal

shock of disorder? If, by his miraculous force, some crevice is made in

the senses, to let in the light of heaven's peace and order, must we

tremble lest the scientific laws are shaken, and the scientific causes

violated? Better is it to say--"This beginning of miracles did Jesus

make in Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and we believe in

him." Glory breaks in through his incarnate person, to chase away the

darkness. In him, peace and order descend to rebuild the realm below,

they have maintained above. Sin, the damned miracle and misery of the

groaning creation, yields to the stronger miracle of Jesus and his

works, and the great good minds of this and the upper worlds behold

integrity and rest returning, and the peace of universal empire secure.

Out of the disorder that was, rises order; out of chaos, beauty. Amen!

Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!

The mythical hypothesis impossible. At the same time, it must not be

overlooked, that the account which is made of the Christian miracles,

by the critics who deny them, is itself impossible. It is that they are

myths or legendary tales, that grew up out of the story-telling and

marvelling habit of the disciples of Christ, within the first thirty

years after their Master's death. They were developed, in other words,

in the lifetime of the eye-witnesses of Christ's ministry, and recorded

by eye-witnesses themselves. We are also required to believe that four

common men are able to preserve such a character as that of Christ,

while loading down the history thus, with so many mythical wonders that

are the garb of their very grotesque and childish credulity! By what

accident, then, we are compelled to ask, was an age of myths and fables

able to develop and set forth the only conception of a perfect

character ever known in our world? Were these four mythological

dreamers, believing their own dreams and all others beside, the men to

produce the perfect character of Jesus, and a system of teachings that

transcend all other teachings ever given to the race? If there be a

greater miracle, or a tax on human credulity more severe, we know not

where it is. Nothing is so difficult, ell human literature testifies,

as to draw a character, and keep it in its living proportions. How much

more to draw a perfect character, and not discolor it fatally by marks

from the imperfection of the biographer. How is it, then, that four

humble men, in an age of marvels and Rabbinical exaggerations, have

done it--done what none, not even the wisest and greatest of mankind,

have ever been able to do?

Their success Mr. Parker concedes. So far, even Mr. Parker concedes the

right of my argument. "Measure," he says, "the religious doctrine of

Jesus by that of the time and place he lived in, or that of any time

and any place. Yes, by the doctrine of eternal truth. Consider what a

work his words and deeds have wrought in the world. Remember that the

greatest minds have seen no farther, and added nothing to the doctrine

of religion; that the richest hearts have felt no deeper, and added

nothing to the sentiment of religion; have set no loftier aim, no truer

method than his, of perfect love to God and man. Measure him by the

shadow he has cast into the world--no, by the light he has shed upon

it. Shall we be told such a man never lived? the whole story is a lie?

Suppose that Plato and Newton never lived. But who did their wonders,

and who thought their thought? It takes a Newton to forge a Newton.

What man could have fabricated a Jesus? None but a Jesus." [9]

Exactly so. And yet, in the middle of the very paragraph from which

these words are gleaned, Mr. Parker says, "We can learn few facts about

Jesus"; also, that in certain things--to wit, his miracles, we

suppose--"Hercules was his equal, and Vishnu his superior." Few facts

about Jesus! all the miracles recited of him, as destitute of

credibility as the stories of Hercules and Vishnu! And yet these

evangelists, retailing so many absurd fictions and so much childish

gossip, have been able to give us a doctrine upon which the world has

never advanced, a character so deep that the richest hearts have felt

nothing deeper, and added nothing to the sentiment of it. They have

done, that is, the difficult thing, and broken down under the easy!

preserved, in the life and discourses of Jesus, what exceeds all human

philosophy, all mortal beauty, and yet have not been able to recite the

simplest facts! Is it so that any intelligent critic will reason?

The miracles are in place in a gospel. Neither let it be objected that,

since the miracles have in themselves no moral quality, there is no

rational, or valuable, or even proper place for them in a gospel,

considered as a new-creating grace for the world. For it is a thing of

no secondary importance for a sinner, down under sin, and held fast in

its bitter terms of bondage, to see that God has entered into his case

with a force that is adequate. These mighty works of Jesus, which have

been done and duly certified, are fit expressions to us of the fact

that he can do for us all that we want Doubtless it is a great and

difficult thing to regenerate a fallen nature; no person, really awake

to his miserable and dreadful bondage, ever thought otherwise. But he

that touched the blind eyes and commanded the leprosy away, he that

trod the sea, and raised the dead, and burst the bars of death himself,

can tame the passions, sweeten the bitter affections, regenerate the

inbred diseases, and roll back all the storms of the mind. Assured in

this manner by his miracles, they become arguments of trust, a

storehouse of powerful images, that invigorate courage and stimulate

hope. Broken as we are by our sorrow, cast down as we are by our

guiltiness, ashamed, and weak, and ready to despair, we can yet venture

a hope that our great soul-miracle may be done; that, if we can but

touch the hem of Christ's garment, a virtue will go out of him to heal

us. In all dark days and darker struggles of the mind, in all outward

disasters, and amid all storms upon the sea of life, we can yet descry

him treading the billows, and hear him saying, "It is I, be not

afraid." And lest we should believe the miracles faintly, for there is

a busy infidel lurking always in our hearts to cheat us of our faith,

when he cannot reason it away, the character of Jesus in ever shining

with and through them, in clear self-evidence, leaving them never to

stand as raw wonders only of might, but covering them with glory, as

tokens of a heavenly love, and note that only suit the proportions of

his personal greatness and majesty.

There are many in our day, as we know, who, without making any

speculative point of the objection we are discussing, have so far

yielded to the current misbelief as to profess, with a certain air of

self-compliment, that they are quite content to accept the spirit of

Jesus; and let the miracles go for what they are worth. Little figure

will they make as Christians in that kind of gospel. They will not, in

fact, receive the spirit of Jesus; for that, unabridged, is itself the

Grand Miracle of Christianity, about which all the others play as

scintillations only of the central fire. Still less will they believe

that Jesus can do any thing in them which their sin requires. They will

only compliment his beauty, imitate or ape his ways in a feeble lifting

of themselves, but that he can roll back the currents of nature,

loosened by the disorders of sin and raise them to a new birth in

holiness, they will not believe. No such watery gospel of imitation,

separated from grace, will have any living power in their life, or set

them in any bond of unity with God. Nothing but to say--"Jesus of

Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and signs which God did by

him," can draw the soul to faith, and open it to the power of a

supernatural and new-creative mercy.

Jesus himself the all-sufficient evidence. We come back, then, to the

self-evidencing superhuman character of Jesus, and there we rest. He is

the sun that holds all the minor orbs of revelation to their places,

and pours a sovereign, self-evidencing light into all religious

knowledge. We have been debating much, and ranging over a wide field,

in chase of the many phantoms of doubt and false argument, still we

have not far to go for light, if only we could cease debating and sit

down to see. It is no ingenious fetches of argument that we want; no

external testimony, gathered here and there from the records of past

ages, suffices to end our doubts; but it is the new sense opened in us

by Jesus himself--a sense deeper than words and more immediate than

inference--of the miraculous grandeur of his life; a glorious agreement

felt between his works and his person, such that his miracles

themselves are proved to us in our feeling, believed in by that inward

testimony. On this inward testimony we are willing to stake every

thing, even the life that now is, and that which is to come. If the

miracles, if revelation itself, can not stand upon the superhuman

ohmmeter of Jesus, then let it fall. If that character does not contain

all truth and centralize all truth in itself, then let there be no

truth. If there is any thing worthy of belief not found in this, we may

well consent to live and die without it. Before this sovereign light,

streaming out from God, the deep questions, and dark surmises, and

doubts unresolved, which make a night so gloomy and terrible about us,

hurry away to their native abyss. God, who commanded the light to shine

out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This it is

that has conquered the assaults of doubt and false learning in all past

ages, and will in all ages to come. No argument against the sun will

drive it from the sky. No mole-eyed skepticism, dazzled by its

brightness, can turn away the shining it refuses to look upon. And they

who long after God, will be ever turning their eyes thitherward, and

either with reason or without reason, or, if need be, against manifold

impediments of reason, will see and believe.

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But before we drop a theme like this, let us note more distinctly the

immense significance to our religious feeling of this glorious advent

of Jesus, and have our congratulations in it, This one perfect

character has come into our world, and lived in it; filling all the

molds of action, all the terms of duty and love, with his own divine

manners, works and charities. All the conditions of our life are raised

thus, by the meaning he has shown to be in them, and the grace he has

put upon them. The world itself is changed, and is no more the same

that it was; it has never been the same since Jesus left it. The air is

charged with heavenly odors, and a kind of celestial consciousness, a

sense of other worlds, is wafted on us in its breath. Let the dark ages

come, let society roll backward and churches perish in whole regions of

the earth, let infidelity deny, and, what is worse, let spurious piety

dishonor the truth; still there is a something here that was not, and a

something that has immortality in it. Still our confidence remains

unshaken, that Christ and his all-quickening life are in the world, as

fixed elements, and will be to the end of time; for Christianity is not

so much the advent of a better doctrine, as of a perfect character; and

how can a perfect character, once entered into life and history, be

separated and finally expelled? It were easier to untwist all the beams

of light in the sky, separating and expunging one of the colors, than

to get the character of Jesus, which is the real gospel, out of the

world. Look ye hither, meantime, all ye blinded and fallen of mankind,

a better nature is among you, a pure heart, out of some pure world, is

come into your prison and walks it with you. Do you require of us to

show who he is, and definitely to expound his person? We may not be

able. Enough to know that he is not of us--some strange being out of

nature and above it, whose name is Wonderful. Enough that sin has never

touched his hallowed nature, and that he is a friend. In him dawns a

hope--purity has not come into the world, except to purify. Behold the

Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world! Light breaks in,

peace settles on the air, lo! the prison walls are giving way--rise,

let us go.

END.

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[1] Neander's Memorials of Christian Life, p. 29.

[2] Neander's Memorials of Christian Life, p. 33.

[3] Tim�us.

[4] Neander's Memorials of Christian Life, p. 29.

[5] Discourses of Religion, p. 294.

[6] Discourses of Religion, p. 303.

[7] Inquiry, p. 451.

[8] Apology for Smectymnus, Sect. I.

[9] Life of Jesus, p. 363.

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