

## THE SPIRIT THAT WAS IN JESUS.

A COMMON evangelical complaint against free-thinking people is that they decry and belittle the nature of Jesus. Whenever the whole tendency of modern intelligence runs toward discrediting all narratives which involve the miraculous element, it is of course inevitable that a great deal of negation must be contributed to construct a modern conception of Jesus upon that point alone. But if the mind, stopping with that, intensifies its contempt for the supernatural, and does not proceed to a task which ought to be more congenial, — that, namely, of extricating the veritable man around whom the legendary material slowly gathered, — a complaint may be justly brought. For there was a person of great symmetry and grace: legend encrusted him, just as the acids of the soil in which old statues fell to sleep corrode, and blotch with stains, the perfect beauty which once had a pedestal.

We should not relish a purely negative criticism so applied to the person of any other great man as to volatilize him, like a substance in a retort, and make thin air of him. The scholarly mind of every age enters a vigorous protest against this dissolving operation. It thinks it is bad enough that Time should be the devourer of things; men who are in turn devoured should hold out against the great enemy of the race, and resist this obliviousness and depreciation.

In "Troilus and Cressida," Achilles complains to Ulysses of the Grecian lords who were deserting him "to clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder."

"They pass'd by me,  
As misers do by beggars; neither gave to me  
Good word nor look. What! are my deeds forgot?"

To which Ulysses replies:—

"Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion;  
A great-siz'd monster of ingratitude:  
Those scraps are good deeds past.  
Time is like a fashionable host,  
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,  
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,  
Grasps in the comer; welcome ever smiles,  
And farewell goes out sighing."

Shakspeare would seem to be describing the superficial critics of each period as they bow out the men who were guests and lords of the past; but the most sympathizing minds are not "great-siz'd monsters of ingratitude." They persist, for instance, in claiming that human nature invested largely in Socrates, and has funded earnings by him, although positively all we know of him has come down dribbling through Plato and Xenophon. He loved best to talk; but he had a stylus too, and used to scribble upon papyrus leaves, no doubt, and possibly he jotted down upon a waxen tablet the heads of his reply to the charge of impiety. What would we not give for a single leaf of the papyrus? Perhaps you will reply, Plato was that leaf. Still, how little do we know of the man! Before the battle of Potidæa he stood in the inclement weather, thinly clad, without food, motionless, for more than twenty-four successive hours. Nothing disturbed him; nothing broke up the inner attention of his trance. What was it all about? We may notice, in passing, that all minds into which an intuitive ability has been slowly harvested, can fall away from the surface of their bodies, can actually cave in, we may say, and leave the crust waiting on two legs to be reoccupied. Whither do they go; with what do they commune? Swedenborg used to vanish for long hours in this way, leaving the front door of his body locked, and disappearing through the back door into some garden, or sometimes into a paddock, or mere pound for stray cattle, with the public door-key in his transcendental pocket. Modern critics call the transaction a benumbing of the reflex and motor nerves of perception by the excessive use of coffee. Swedenborg recollected the visions which trotted through his mind upon the hare-brained steed of *caffine*. But you will find inter-

laced with their grotesqueness and absurdity the delicate lines of a moral nature, and the noble proportions of that appeal to holiness which all the prophets—drunk as Paul or sober as Jonathan Edwards—love to make.

The disciples of Socrates have transmitted the report that he kept an active *daimon*, which communicated to him in all moments of consequence what he ought to refrain from doing; never in any moment what he positively ought to do. Of course not; because what a man is constructed for doing unconsciously comes along with the drift of that organic current which descended from his ancestry, tickled into him at birth, ran through his flume, and made his wheel go round. But the refraining of a man is always accompanied by a sense of halt, of surmise, of positive demur; he becomes conscious of remonstrance: and, if he be a man qualified for letting his surface stand and wait outside,—clothes and all, watch, tooth-pick, and pencil-case,—he can run into an invisible feeling that is solid enough to be mistaken for another surface. He calls it by the name which is appropriate to his epoch and style of culture,—*daimon*, deity, saint, Heavenly Father, Virgin Mother, or Swedenborg's intensely Lutheran angels. But it is only the bursting of a life-blossom from its root in terrene ancestry into the tender petals and fragrance of a more interior air.

We know so little concerning Shakspeare that the corrosive chemists of literature, discovering this nebulous and undefended person, bite into him with all the teeth of Father Time. Whatever has been attributed to him is so transcendent in its way,—as that of Jesus is in another way,—that they transfer the fame of it to a man who is much better known: just as radical critics are not always content with pointing out the sympathies and similarities of ethnic religion, but try to make the Zoroastrian and Buddhist thought, and the sentiments of the Essenes, responsible for every high-minded paragraph that is put into the mouth of Jesus. Humanity is indeed responsible for all its children. Sophocles and Euripides existed to make Shakspeare possible. But all the great men have something distinctive and independent. The charge of plagiarism in literature against Richter, Goethe, Longfellow; or in music, as if Mozart was reduced to plundering Cimarosa, and Schumann to picking the pockets of Beethoven; or

in science, as if Tyndall stole from Lucretius, and Goethe from Oken, and all of the modern men from the obscure adumbrations of Swedenborg,—can only be made by minds whose tonic is envy, and who hanker to make a full square meal upon somebody. Goethe says in the "West-Easterly Divan":—

"Would envy be demolished quite?  
Leave it to eat its appetite."

The radical thinker appears to me to be the only one who has a right to offer some objection to a purely destructive criticism of great men, because it is his function to go to the root of the matter and learn what it is. And if he blames a mind which, stopping with pure negation, is like a man who thinks he is nailing the free wind when he blocks a particular vane, the liberal thinker can also blame the cause which has so largely contributed to make this narrowness of criticism possible,—that is, the evangelical tendency which set in about one hundred years after the death of Jesus, representing him, upon the strength of legends, as a person so impossible to be regarded as born of earthly parents that he must have been derived from a new mixture of the supernatural and the natural. He is dredged out of the deposit of history as if he had been some singular and abnormal growth, to be set apart, labelled, preserved in spirit, as the world's marvel. Nor is it surprising when we observe the structure of the four Gospels, which were gradual accretions from previous forms and oral traditions, and were fed by tales which grew in the telling, among a people who were so devoid of the historical sense that, when Ezra collected the books of the Old Testament which existed up to his date, there was not a scholar nor a prophet in all Jerusalem capable of expurgating them; not one of the fine Hebraic crowd trained to throw a single suspicion against the record. Of course not; all the impossibilities were preserved with child-like docility which never questions, with an implicit faith and charming wonder, like that of a child in a corner of the house transported over his first reading of the Arabian Nights: accepting every thing by the fancy's function before an intellectual sense for historical genuineness can be developed. The compilers of the Gospels belonged to this nation, which even now finds it so difficult to break away from the literal sense of the

Pentateuch that a liberal Jew is an object of aversion, if not of hatred. With the full focus of the solar microscope of modern culture upon those ancient documents, spreading apart and revealing the ill-matched mosaic of the simple old stories, the orthodox Jew does not possess enough historic sense to read this fatal handwriting that is thrown upon the wall of his temple. What must have been the mental state of the men who went about collecting notices of Jesus? Every chiffonier jerks into his bag the articles of value that he finds in refuse heaps, but also the rags, old paper, broken tins and crockery. Even the Greeks were literary chiffoniers, and crammed their religious history with impossible and scandalous tales; even in the matter of their gods making no distinction derived from ordinary likelihood.

So it is no wonder that the four Gospels, which were generated in this way, bore at length supernatural fruits of orthodoxy, till it became heresy to presume that Jesus had really been a man. Every story was converted into a little pot of incense which has been vigorously swung before the sacred personage. Through such a fumigation, across such clouds of invocation, such afterthoughts of extolling, can a real person be discerned? No doubt of it: although it is a favorite argument of the theologians that the miraculous element is so inbred, so interlaced with the morals and religion of the books, so naturally and unconsciously associated with all the thought and action of Jesus, that the attempt to disentangle and reject it involves the destruction of his person and the dissipation of his spiritual nature. The miraculous element does indeed stroll into every scene and moment, as children who, running to mix with great occasions, are overlooked and not turned out. This simple, unconscious, unpremeditated habit of the narrative, so far from confirming its truthfulness, really effects the opposite; for it is the precise style and temper of narratives which grow up in places and periods where no historic feeling yet exists. The *Iliad*, for instance, is constructed by the same honest and unsuspicious childlikeness. And for a long time it seemed to scholars so impossible to extricate any real fact like that of the Trojan war, or to separate any historical personages from the gods and goddesses who are so mixed up with every movement of the poems, that recourse was had to the theory that the *Iliad*

was a remnant of the old Nature-worship, and contained a Solar Myth; and some of the names have been traced back into Aryan narratives. And you cannot separate the supernatural element from the human in that poem, except by the summary rejection of the supernatural. But do the historical personages also disappear? Herr Schliemann has a word to say to that. Visiting the sight of ancient Ilium, hitting upon the spot at a venture that was half scholarship, half shrewdness, he begins to peel off the soil. Layer after layer discloses the objects that belonged to its age; at each depth some hint of an epoch of mankind is discovered, till at length, in this chronological record, he stumbles upon King Priam just where he ought to have been; amid the traces of conflagration he finds the treasures, the knick-knacks of the women, the caldrons of sacrifice. And Nature, not content with this, as if determined all along to verify her Agamemnons, Clytemnestras, Cassandras, and to vindicate herself from any taint of supernature, had been keeping covered up, and snugly tucked in, the tombs and relics of the return from Troy. There, outside of the gate of Mycenæ, Schliemann found them precisely where the historian Pausanias said they ought to be. In spite of the banter of some critics, it seems to me that no ancient period was ever more clearly identified, while at the same time the possibility of an inextricable mixture of the supernatural and the historic has been so clearly shown.

Dr. Furness, in his charming and genial "*Life of Jesus*," derives great support for his theory of the miracles from the evidently spontaneous and uncalculated nature of the narratives; and he illustrates this with all the fine tact of a poet. But stories that are false, as well as those that are true, can be constructed by unconscious Nature. If a man sets out to tell a falsehood, the more deliberately he does it the more liable he is to put some clew into the detective's fingers. The violent completeness of his narrative may create its discrepancy. But if a man is transmitting tales which have not done growing when they come to him, he will do it with all the guileless art that inheres in the popular imagination. The story finds a poet ready born for it, and not made. So the story is not made, but born. And that is the whole genesis of it. Only let a few things by way of scenery and motive be provided,—for instance, the popular belief

in demoniacal possession; the popular Jewish predilection for the wonderful and preternatural; the popular willingness to appreciate a great character with a peculiar influence; the popular expectations of a deliverer; the popular religiosity and want of culture; the absence of all historical and literary tests; little opportunity, and less capacity, to cross-question the reputed witnesses, who at length are dead, if they ever lived, — with these simple elements provided, a few cures of nervous disorders will easily generate a litter of wonderful stories, without the faintest intent to deceive, or suspicion of it anywhere, mingling in the whole transaction.

I see as much unconscious nature, as much as there *could* be of it, — that is, the organic, unconscious constructiveness of the born *raconteur*, — in the pre-natal stories as in that of Lazarus, no matter who wrote the Gospel of John or who gathered the traditions of Matthew. And there is as much, too, in the post-mortem stories. What a grace beyond the reach of art or artfulness, and achieved in the face of shouting impossibility, is the mistaking Jesus for the gardener. It suspends, and then accentuates, the narrative in the finest popular way. Was he therefore Jesus? Was there any thing? It is too late to cross-question the woman. But, verily, if the trait of unconscious nature is going to confirm and guarantee all the tales which exhibit it, no Niebuhr will find a legend left. There is a De Foe in every age and race; it is the popular imagination. Robinson Crusoe and his island will furnish all the genuineness of Gospel narratives. The make-believe De Foes depend upon it, but do not quite master its cunning consistency.

See it, for instance, in the story of Naaman, the leper. Notice his pique about Abana and Pharpar; the recommendation of Elisha by that providential Samaritan captive; Naaman's washing himself, as no great thing to do, rather showing his contempt by it; and notice particularly that delightful touch of Elisha's servant swindling Naaman. The latter did not possess Dr. Furness's specific faith in a remedy; he merely washed to gratify his suite. The miracle, however, must have taken place, notwithstanding this, if unconscious truth of narrative is to decide the question.

There need never be any far-fetched attempts to rationalize the

stories of miracles. As well undertake to explain the genie who exhales vastly from the vessel caught by the Arabian fisherman. Some persons think, for instance, that the story of the raising of Lazarus is the most naturally told of any of the New Testament narratives; and they proceed to account for this by supposing that Jesus planned the whole thing with the confederate brother and sisters, hoping by this collusion to gain influence and consideration among the Jews. But the popular imagination runs with no such impoverished blood. Its resurrections are the naive exploits of almost every tongue and people.

To establish the human existence of Jesus we do not need to find the rock-tomb with the stone at the mouth, the sponge, the crown of thorns, the nail, the hammer, or feathers from the angels' wings. In the present temper of the Orthodox world, could personal relics really be discovered, they would only serve to confirm the supernatural theory. Only a few local traces of his life remain; the pool of Siloam, but the angel that troubled it has not been down there since carbonic acid gas took his place. We can muse upon the slopes dark-shadowed with the olives, and vaguely make out other spots of passion. We do not care to know whether Jesus died on the cross, or whether he was taken down in a swoon, came out of the rock-cave, and escaped into the far East, leaving behind him the legend of a supernatural night. I care as little about identifying certain personalities as I do about ability to trace the daily life of Shakspeare. The Spirit that was in Jesus lies safely embedded underneath the strata of legends which slowly accumulated above his life. Lift the whole cover off at once. Do not fear that his members are involved. His life-blood has not trickled through and indurated from top to bottom. The centuries have not been able to fossilize one genuine text.

As in the old times, men, by simply living like heroes, created the myths which associate afterwards with them, and a Helen, an Achilles, a King of Men, a Nestor, a Ulysses, were the reasons why a Venus, a Mars, a Jupiter, a Minerva, were fabricated to keep them company, so that the men and women are all of the story that is divine, — thus was Jesus the root of Christian mythology. With respect to the miracles, I indulge the opinion that the narratives were first started by a personal property

which he displayed, and then slowly propagated by amazed hearsay; the next generation inherited the tale, and amplified it; over a hundred and fifty years it spread like a banyan tree from its first root, sending down a thicket of suckers into the soil. What was this personal property, which became eventually so exaggerated? It was a piercing spiritual domination which flowed through every pore of a magnetic body kept in absolute chastity and in its best estate. It was a penetrating command, by presence, look, touch, and speech, over a class of nervous and mental disorders which have been always subject to this influence, and especially in the East. Jesus shared the oriental belief in demoniacal possession; the error was an ally to his power. It is fortunate that we can confirm this supposition by existing practices in India.<sup>1</sup> There, to this day, the average native not only believes in possession, but often gets his demons expelled through the exorcism practised by superior men in whom he believes. It is popularly imagined that, when evil men die, they can enter into the bodies of living persons. The persons are driven into solitary places and among the tombs. The exorcist is in the habit of using language almost identical with that of Scripture: I command you, come out of him! And he comes out. What comes out? The popular imagination that put him in, but that also puts faith in the charm.

These magnetising men seem also to have a limited power over some afflictions of hysteria, of convulsive seizures, of violence and melancholy. The patient's faith contributes more than half the cure; the attacks may recur, but they may again be abated. The Scripture miracles lay great stress upon faith; these cures depend upon implicit confidence on the part of the patient. Jesus would not undertake to exercise his influence, if he were not positively certain that the requisite faith was forthcoming. So, around his genuine cures of various disorders, in which the imagination was largely implicated, and particularly among impressible women, a Christian mythology began to grow: at first, by extending his power to cover more difficult cases, as of paralysis; then, to cover impossible cases, as of congenital blindness, deafness, death. Long after his own death, people could

<sup>1</sup> See a striking article in the "Dublin University Magazine," March, 1848.

not account for the tradition of such a mysterious man, except upon a theory of miracles still more impossible, — the conception, the resurrection, the eating after death, and the ascension.

Jesus also interpreted the texts of the Old Testament, which the Jews of his day applied to their hope of a deliverer, as referring to himself; and in this he received copious encouragement. No wonder that the subtle influences of his person, which enclosed such innate nobility, should have impressed people to accept a reference that so fell in with the public temper. He lived in the last period of Jewish expectation and despair. There must be some Messiahship to lead the chosen people out of their last captivity. He mentally elected himself to be the Messiah; sometimes, it is plain, hoping to effect a popular deliverance, but far more often throwing off the delusion, and spiritualizing the idea of Messiahship to mean a leadership of souls. But so far as he shared the desire of his countrymen, his error was an ally of his immediate power. Their attention was kept upon the strain toward him; their expectation refused to give him up; the common people hung upon his words; sometimes their souls were penetrated with a novel spiritual flavor, and every touch of his presence conspired to keep alive their hopes. And the hopes survived his death, because he had promised to his followers a Second Coming and a kingdom of Israel. Under such circumstances is it wonderful that lips passed along to lips the fond exaggerations of his personality? And the whisper was that if he, though crucified, intended to reappear, he must have risen from the grave. The whole story is enclosed in the nut-shell of an epoch, but it has the sweetest kernel.

The notion of a millennium and a final triumph of good over evil was as old as the Persian Zarvanism which succeeded Zoroaster. The name was derived from the title of a Being superior to the antithesis of Good and Evil; he was called *Zarvana Akarana*, — a phrase which is equivalent to our Eternity, only this Being is final umpire and settler of the great dispute. Then a millennial idea began to be evolved into distinctness. Final deliverance would be wrought by a Messiah, born of a virgin, to wage a great, conclusive battle. It is easy to perceive that here is the origin of some of the ideas belonging to the Christian mythology; we have provided for us the miraculous conception, the

Messiahship, and the Second Coming. The New Testament is saturated with these Oriental notions, as we might suppose it would be. The Jews desired a political deliverer, but Jesus declared that his kingdom was not of this world; that the world, in fact, was about to pass away, and that some of his people would not taste of death before they should behold his Coming to establish the true kingdom. This expectation was not originated by the apostles; they derived it from him. It pervades and colors all his ideas and the most spiritual of his conversations. It led to his depreciation of industry and honest accumulation. Nothing was of any particular consequence, because nothing would last long. While Jesus shared the gloom and depression of his nation's temperament under the Roman rule, he did not so much expect to lift it up by his pure morals and piety as to establish a new, anti-terrestrial kingdom in which righteousness might reign. When he began to anticipate his fate, he still clung to his idea; out of this came the promise to his friends of a resurrection. And with the expectation which was thus excited, their tender fancies pried the stone away.

Thus the notion of a Second Coming survived, and has been propagated to the latest time. It is a thoroughly pessimistic idea: sell all that you have; take no thought for the morrow, as the Gentiles do; expect the kingdom of God, — and then you will obtain what you languish for. In the meantime, live, if you can, like the birds and the flowers. And when the time approaches, look out for miseries, for famine, pestilence, earthquakes; if you are on the housetop, stay there, and do not try to save any thing; if in the field, do not return to the house, but go up as you are, for nothing is of any consequence. Of two men in the field, only one shall be taken; of two women grinding, only one may be good enough to go; alas for them that shall be then with child! of two men sleeping together, only one may be found competent to ascend. And when he was asked what should be the premonitions of this millennial year, he replied, All this will happen just after the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the hated Romans; that will be the sign of it. "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." No language can be plainer than this, which the theologians, in their attempt to spiritualize, to make it seem to refer to a last judg-

ment or to be a mere bit of Orientalizing, — in short, to rub off in some way the millennial gloss, — only make more impracticable than it is; for it is quite natural that a noble soul, pure and exalted, should be easily infected with this pessimistic notion of the East, and indulge in such a strain of language. Nor is it justifiable to pretend that Jesus meant, in any text, something different from what he literally said. We cannot, of course, decide whether he spoke every text that is recorded.

The millennial notion deeply colored the ethics of Jesus. If any man sues thee and gets thy coat, besides paying the costs, make him a present of thy coat. How preposterous would the world's social transactions become, if they were graduated to the scale of such advice, unless the world was really going to stop in the course of a week and wind up its concerns! Certainly, in the present moral condition of this country, advice of a precisely opposite nature ought to be given to all ingenuous youth, for it is difficult to keep one's own clothes on one's back; the sharpers, without saying "by your leave," strip every neighborhood. The manly gospel is, Resist evil, and whosoever compels you to go a mile, compel him to go the next one; and turn away from all borrowers with forged collateral, even if they are members in prime evangelical standing, else the financial and commercial world at least is near its end.

Jesus, in sad sincerity, believed in a Second Coming. Here again, his error was an ally of the influence which he exercised through his generation and the next, till non-fulfilment blunted the edge of expectation. But by that time, and by virtue of the popular surmise, a supernatural Christ had been developed in the minds of men and portrayed in the four Gospels. Nothing could be more natural, more conclusive from the temper of unhistorical times and places, than this phenomenon of a real Jesus converted by this method into God. All the other impossible doctrines have followed in the simplest way from erroneous expectations propagated in the forms of apostolic texts.

Now, it is not sufficient to emphasize the errors which he shared with the spirit of his age. The thing to discover is not what he thought about himself, or what other people thought, but *what was he*. We can show that all his erroneous opinions helped to give him a mighty start for two or three generations.

Yes, — but essentially what was started? Pry off, then, the supernatural crust; unlace the tendrils of miracle; brush away the dust and rubbish of error, — does any thing come up into this modern, biting air that ought to demand the light and continual reverence of the human mind? Plenty of it: one may be pardoned if a few pages are too small space in which to exhibit this, when we reflect that the Christian world has been nineteen centuries busily occupied in failing to embody it.

A woman who was present when one of the chambers in the house of Balbus at Pompeii was opened before Admiral Farragut, told me that the workmen found a vase that was so beautiful it seemed to come up to the light with the joy of a child. Alas! it is not a mere matter of excavation to bring to light that pious child of God and lover of children. The workman ought to belong to the same kingdom of heaven. But perhaps he can uncover the soil, and let other people come and recognize.

Jesus was fond of poor men, a lover of despicable people, a sympathizer with those who were not in society. In a most despotic, reckless, cruel age of the world, that played the game of empire with nations for pawns, and limited fraternity to clique feelings; that sacked whole provinces to garnish a Roman triumph, squeezing tributary people to provide for Roman banquets; that made Jewish patriotism and religious recollection the object of its particular spite, — he, standing all alone, under the flapping Roman eagle, renewed the old protest of humanity, denounced the feeling of caste, deliberately took the side that was then the most forlorn and miserable, and longed to have the heavy-laden sympathize with him, because, he said by way of inducement, he had a meek and lowly heart. Such pride of heaven resided in him that he found no company fit for himself, except among sinners. There were never alabaster boxes enough in Judæa to celebrate with fragrance this immeasurable haughtiness which made the abandoned more companionable than the respectable. His age adored "degree, priority, and place;" he worshipped at the shrine of the beggar's person, and wafted his wishes for incense. So strenuously he wafted them that they sometimes curled into fantastic shapes, and he talked as if poverty deserved to live like the birds and to put on garments as the flowers do. When he saw the oppressiveness of the rich

men who esteemed the rabble as fit only to crowd the wayside and shout at their pomp, he denounced the injustice, and easily ran into a depreciation of the just rewards of mental effort that is applied to the organization of labor. For even in Judæa labor suffered from unadjusted relations to property. But the sentiment made him very dear to the poor, believing hearts; his appreciation of their condition in that decaying old society supported them in secret under all the insolence of the times, while they longed and waited for his kingdom to appear. It began to appear in their longing, but is not yet clearly seen. Whoever seeks for reasons why the primitive Christianity could take root, could start and, under such inclement weather, begin to spread, need not find them in the supernatural traditions of his person, nor in the meagre surmise that he was a member of a Trinity, but in the natural enthusiasm of his soul for lowly men. On account of them it was that his disappointed heart yearned for a Second Coming. He rose to the level of their meekness, but it was for their sakes that he broke into those invectives whose language, across the distance of time and through so many eddies of history, continues to keep its withering quality.

For it was love that inspired this man with anger. We still hear the snap of that whip in the temple; indeed, we hope the report of that was not fabricated. No, it has a sound too human. It intensifies for us the tone of his great soul. How many things the world has lost for ever: plays of the old Greek tragedians, some books of Livy and of the younger Pliny, poems of Dante, and all the manuscripts of Shakspeare! But we would not, for all of them, nor for gems and treasures sunk in seas, miss the sound that the scourge made. It builds in the air the outline of a brave protester, of one who hated to see merchandise made of holy things. How salutary it would be if many broad aisles could hear that stinging lash beating time for the organ! But the sexton preserves decorum!

So this man, who could comfort, could also denounce and appeal. He put his presence between the Pharisees and the people; "woe unto you," — it was enough; that, and the look that feathered it, pierced the vital part. There he stands to-day between the crowd of ceremony and the crowd whom ceremony starves; between the priests of a defunct God and the children who suffer



and yearn for a Father. He is one of the most startlingly distinct figures in history. No man ever rose to the pitch of his denunciation, for I cannot believe that the disciples had genius enough to manufacture it; no man ever dared to hurl such stones of language from his sling of love. He was a good hater, because he was an adorable lover; that is the reason why we never can taste ill-temper in his words. They gathered on the horizon, sombre and stern; they rolled over guilty heads; they came up edged with lightning: but they were condensed from Nature's great elements, not from the petty pique of a man; and their freight was an auspicious errand. Wherever in modern times, while a critical moment of morality impends, we hear a mutter of that thunder from Judæa's remote horizon, it bids us shudder with the expectation of a refreshing season near at hand; the elemental Jesus menaces in his apostles; the sullen air shall be broken into clearness by these bolts. We would willingly miss scores of "sugared sonnets" out of literature, strains of politeness, grace, and charm, — yea, even whole stacks and centuries of decorous and gentlemanly sermons, — but not one of that man's denunciations. They applauded to the echo his Beatitudes.

Instead of being the obscurest, most dubiously outlined figure of the past, he stands chiselled. His whiteness makes miracle and error incandescent, and it shines through. Chiselled out of the simple elements of human nature that are slowly deposited by time; out of the primitive passions and sentiments which we practise, and exist by means of, to-day; out of love, pity, scorn, wrath, desire for justice; out of that sense of fraternity which makes all our various cliques and fashions suspect themselves of great absurdity. An elemental man, Nature seemed to gather in him to preserve herself from the malice of time, to remind men that to live like that is to outwit oblivion.

Shall we speak of his natural piety? Yes; and his deficiency in the scientific method does not crumple its charm. He saw mercy, where we can see nothing but inexorability; a providence, where we trace the lines of law; a divine interest in persons, where we cannot depend upon any thing but a divine impartiality that has no respect to persons. No sparrow falls without God's care, but he takes care that the sparrows shall fall in the order of Nature, with no exception in favor of individuals. But when Je-

sus saw the little sparrows of mankind, ill-fledged, shivering in the wintry weather of indifference that covers with a crust the world, he threw them all the crumbs of comfort that he had. Can we do more? We are nineteen hundred year-old pupils in the immutability of God. Have we more bread to throw to the sparrows, more wintry cheer to leave on the window-sill for the timid ones to chirp at and peck? Do not lay outside there in the frostiness your latest scientific treatise upon the causes of mortality in poor districts, upon the statistics of beggary, upon the unavoidable nature of social laws: but repeat in a new form the old hint of the Spirit, and dispense some kind of positive bread. Then it may turn out to be a fact that "your Heavenly Father feedeth them."

Jesus had no perception of laws and methods: that would indeed have been a miracle. But he had a sublime sense of the immanence of a Power that was once outside the earth and is now outside and inside all the earths. His observation of Nature was not critical; and the modern sentiment for her had not been born. He was content with homely images; but only compare them with Oriental conceits to observe how his piety ennobled them! From his heart sprung the pith of the bristled reed, the lily's root, the spikes of the corn-field; the minute seeds of the mustard-blossom were ripened there. In his heart sang the birds of the field and the fowls of the air. Every live form of Nature was referred to a presence behind her, by no tedious process of evolution, but by a direct and instantaneous sympathy that preserved the bloom of every thing: the down of no nectarine, cheek of no plum, was smirched; neither butterfly nor flower was botanized. When he rubbed the ears of corn in his hand, both the hungering body and the brave spirit refreshed themselves directly from the Lord of the harvest. He was a poet, and not a dissector of Nature; all his similes, therefore, are full of the natural piety that feels there is a life within the life. And the human soul was to him only one other plant of a Heavenly Father. How many notices of his imagination must have slipped through the coarse sieves of the disciples! They are lost, like that manuscript poem of Dante's which was illustrated by Michael Angelo.

Shall we try to form an idea of what his attitude would be toward the afterthoughts of the theologians who have filched his



nature for their authority? That is too broad a question for the present. Let one point suffice to show how uncompromisingly he dealt with the nature of religion. If we may trust the memory of the disciples, allowing for a strict debenture upon the Gospel of John, he sometimes said, "Believe in me; come to me and be saved; I am the vine": and, if we may rely upon the record, these appeals sometimes ran into a personal assumption of a Messiahship. No doubt they did, for he represented his epoch. The error helped to keep the life in the real sentiment of his appeal. What was that? Get religion by loving your fellow men; be made over sound and safe by the heaven of good works. To-day, in Boston, our ears are dinned with the clamor, "ye are saved by grace;" by no beautiful and noble living, but by belief in Christ. If Christ could rise in the Tabernacle to put his hand over that certificate signed with his forged name, the thrill would bid the Bible open to his parable of the shepherd dividing the sheep from the goats. Does your sentiment revolt at the phrases it contains concerning everlasting fire, the devil and his angels, at the "depart from me, ye cursed"? Yes; but see against whom he prepared this tremendous invective and hurled it: It was against those who left Christ to hunger, to thirst, to be shelterless, to go unclad, to be sick without care, to be in prison without the visits of comfort; not against any who disbelieved his own theories of his person: and there is no clause prepared against those who reject the Calvinistic doctrine of grace, not one torpedo of a text to be floated under men who, in his name, despise modern Orthodoxy. The men of good works are surprised at their inheritance of heaven: "when saw we thee; when met we thee in these plights?" That is true; perhaps they never saw him, nor ever pretended that they saw him, dressed up in the latest millinery, or reflected in the afterthoughts of men. But the answer of Christ shatters at a blow the whole system of strict evangelical theology. "I was Christ when you found a hungry man and fed him; I longed for your bread, not for your belief. I was Christ when a man fell sick, went naked, unhoused, when at length a prison was his house. You came to me; I went by another man's name; but, depend upon it, there is no other man of my name." The tremendous assumption of a hell that is to be peopled with devils and kept white-hot for ever, is taken up fear-

lessly in the sweet palm of this parable's meaning, and for ever quenched. But if, in spite of Jesus himself, God could nourish such infinite wrath, and turn on the blast of it to sustain the incandescent hells, what sort of people would enter into that unrest? Why, according to the sentiment of the parable, those who have converted the meeting of a live Christ in need of works into a doctrinal Christ who despises living works unless he can be first supplicated for grace and depleted of atoning blood!

How impossible it was for the real Jesus to imagine such a relation to himself! We may trust to the exquisite humanity of the record which makes him say, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee,—leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." In his book of etiquette, fraternity preceded ordinance; it outranked every form of religious observance. The genuine person of Jesus stands full-statured in the comprehensive simplicity of such texts, which were bitten by poverty and lowliness into the memory of disciples. Let us not tinker at the immortal words; the Son of Man became a finished shape when he said: Pretend to no religion or devotion before any altar, till the demands of justice and brotherly love have been adjusted. Settle first with the claims of your morality; that may give you a receipt for some aspect of religion: but at any rate the infinite debt will have been paid with your own blood, the same which runs in the atoning vein of Deity.

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