

That is only a very striking and clear sample. Many more could be given. Our harmony would not go very far, I think. It would soon become abundantly manifest to any one who cannot get himself to believe that the same thing may be both black and white in the same spot at the same moment, that a very different kind of procedure is necessary with these little books if we are to extract from them any tolerable data for our present purpose of seeing Jesus as he actually was. Of course, people can say with Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Blake that the Bible seems full of contradictions, but that a really religious spirit will believe them all. There are, it is true, some such religious people still, but the time is not far distant when they will be called by a less complimentary title, or else religion itself will cease to command the general respect which it has for the most part enjoyed among white men.

There are indeed many contradictions, and the simple way is to acknowledge the fact and try to account for it, which is precisely what the higher critics do, without in the least making the stupid mistake of concluding that the book is therefore a worthless book. In this particular case the thing for any sensible man to do is perfectly on the surface. He will just renounce the attempt to get any detailed story of the birth of Jesus. He will take Matthew and Luke here for what they are, as any one with an eye for such things should be able to see at a glance, namely, poets and painters. He will give himself up to the lovely poetry, especially of Luke, and set these songs and tableaux side by side with the organ chant of Milton in that splendid hymn to the Nativity, and the beautiful pictures of Raphael, and so many others. He will then find in them deep and inexhaustible meanings, such as no accurate inventory of mere facts could give. He will find what is there, not what is not, poetry namely, which Aristotle rightly said was truer than mere history, and be very thankful both for the manger and for the Magi. He will enjoy the delicate perfume of the first garlands gathered by the early church