

Whence, then, the New Testament conception of Jesus Christ? It is a question that has been a thousand times asked, but that has confessedly never been answered. Had Jesus never lived could his character have been imagined? Has any conception of romance approached it since? Whence that pure childhood, that sinless youth, that peerless manhood? a life without defect, a character without a flaw, in which no fault had to be corrected, no stain washed out. For Jesus did not, as others, *become* good; he *was* good, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." What a wonderful character it is, however we look at it.

Think of his calm, majestic *strength*, his perfect self-possession, his unswerving dignity, and yet his nature intense even to passion in its emotions. He denounces the Pharisees, but without a vestige of unholy passion: he drives out the money-changers, but without a spark of religious fanaticism.

Think of the *wisdom* of his holiness. His is not the innocence that is ignorant of human life, it is the strength that is above it.

Think of his *self-consciousness* and *self-assertion*. He never confesses defect, never expresses a feeling of unworthiness. No tear of penitence rolls down his cheek, no prayer for mercy breaks from his lip, no confession of moral weakness enters into his prayer. When he speaks concerning himself it is to avow his human faultlessness, to assert his divine perfection and prerogative. For nineteen centuries Jesus of Nazareth has been the world's idea of moral goodness, as perfect on earth as God is perfect in heaven. His fearless challenge to the men of his day, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" has been repeated to every gainsayer since. His character has been subjected to unparalleled tests, and without the discovery of a single flaw. Skepticism itself, while rejecting Christianity, has almost uniformly done homage to its Christ. Acknowledgments of moral admiration and reverence—almost of worship—are perpetually wrung from the apostles of infidelity, one of the latest and most emphatic from Mr. John Stuart Mill.

The purest and loftiest name of antiquity is that of Socrates. Who ventures to darken the bright portraiture of Christ with even a suggestion of the defects of Socrates? What wonder that Rousseau was constrained to say, "If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. His history has marks of truth so palpable, so striking, and so perfectly inimitable, that its inventor would incite our admiration more than its hero."

Think again of the singular *proportion and adjustment* of his character. What a wonderful harmony of greatness and gentleness, holiness and pity, strength and sympathy; the grandeur of the loftiest manhood, the tenderness of the gentlest womanhood. How the two hemispheres of human excellences are in him filled and rounded to a full-orbed humanity. He was more than perfect man, he was ideal humanity. We reverence as much as we love him, we love him as much as we worship him.

Think of his *moral excellences in combination with his intellectual greatness*. His clearness, calmness, strength! How singularly free from over-excitement of the imagination, from all approach to self-delusion, from all error and defect. He is never impulsive, never dogmatic, never in extremes. His goodness is never weak or sentimental. In everything he is wise and strong, intelligent, profound, majestic. He sanctions no single excess, he prohibits no lawful enjoyment. He wondrously holds the balance of life, always and perfectly preserving the golden mean. His teaching is still our perfect ideal of life; none of his principles are found erroneous, none of his requirements fall into disuse. His moral kingdom is planted in the heart of our common life, and claims everything in it. He does not call men out of the world in order to become his disciples; he sends them into the world, to serve him there, and to enthrone him there as the Lord of human life.

What a conception his *spiritual kingdom* is! He, a peasant of the mountain village of Nazareth, without literary education, ignorant of the world's his-