

God that they were not as other men, I could not see that they were any better than the Arabs or the Turks. Among such a people Christ was born. The Jews of his day were not indeed sunk so low as their modern successors. The country was vastly more populous, and there was a strong national life. But it was not a time of spiritual inspiration, when the heart of the nation beat high, as the voices of the seers and prophets stirred their blood, like a mighty wind coming up out of the Great Sea. The nation was prostrate at the feet of Rome, whose dominion extended over all the East. That iron rule reached its climax in the reign of Tiberius. This did not break the spirit of the people, but it made them sullen and defiant. There is no pride like the pride of a conquered race, who despise the masters they obey. Such was the temper of the Jews towards the Romans. They paid tribute to Caesar, while they cursed him in their hearts. Hatred of their foreign masters intensified their religious fanaticism. They demanded a temporal deliverer, but cared nothing for a spiritual teacher and guide—a spirit utterly alien to the new kingdom which Christ came to set up. So far therefore from being a natural outgrowth of his time or of His race, He was the very antipodes of both. The Jews were the most narrow bigoted people on the face of the earth: He taught and exercised the largest charity. They were lifted up with spiritual pride: He taught the virtue of humility. Thus out of a mass of pride, selfishness, and hypocrisy, sprang the consummate flower of virtue. This is a reversal of the order of nature, which is the marvel of history; and the more we think upon it, the more the wonder grows. All this was in my mind on those memorable days that I rode over the hills and through the valleys of Judea and Galilee, and I could not help saying to myself, "To suppose that the character of Jesus Christ was the natural product of such a race, of such a people, and of such a time, is to believe in that which is more improbable and impossible than the Divine origin of our religion."

I know how skeptical writers try to break the force of this argument. They tell us, with a great show of historical learning, that there were spiritual influences in Judaism which prepared the way for Christianity. Such is the argument of Renan, who, though he pronounces Jesus the greatest of men,

the leader of the human race, yet tries to explain that greatness by ascribing it in part to surrounding influences. As he is an Oriental scholar, and is familiar with the literature and the history of that age, he makes the most of these. He would have us believe that Jesus was the pupil of Hille! or other venerable rabbis; and that, though He improved on His masters, He derived from them the substance of what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount. True, His was an exceptional nature, cast in a fine mould, sensitive to all the better influences of His time, and absorbing into Himself all that was good around Him. But, for all that, He was the outgrowth of His age, the very highest product, it is true, but still a natural product, and not a supernatural being.

Such is the theory of Renan, who, like the brilliant Frenchman that he is, puts it forward with the utmost assurance. But this he does without a particle of proof. The temporary influences of which he makes so much, he is able to designate only in the most vague and general way. The fact is abundantly proved by historians that such influences *did not exist*; and when Renan has the assurance to tell us that there was a Christianity before Christ—that the New Religion was in the air—I answer, "Yes it was very much in the air, for it certainly was not on the earth." There is but one Christ in the race; He stands alone in all the ages, His shining figure relieved against the dark background of the world's history—a character unlike any other—a being without pattern and without successor, furnishing in Himself the perfect argument for the divinity of His Religion.

Since the character of Christ is the chief argument for the Christian Religion, does it not become one who undertakes to destroy it to set himself first to this central point, instead of wasting his time on mere outposts? When you next address one of the great audiences that hang upon your words, is it unfair to ask that you lay aside such familiar topics as Miracles and Ghosts or a Reply to Talmage, and tell us what you think of JESUS CHRIST: whether you look upon Him as an impostor, or merely as a dreamer—a mild and harmless enthusiast; or are you ready to acknowledge that He is entitled to rank among the great teachers of mankind?

But if you are compelled to admit the greatness of Christ, you take your revenge on the Apostles, whom you do not hesitate