

It is not, however, an essay in New Testament "Higher Criticism" or even in Literary Criticism as such. Rather, it is conceived as, to use Pater's term, an "Appreciation", belonging to the department of *belles-lettres*. Still, it will contain elements of literary history and criticism and, as I think, some novel orienting of the *differentia* of prose (rhetorical and rhythmical) poetry, and *vers libre*. The aim of an essay, if it can have an extrinsic aim, is to show forth that the true Poet who is earth-born is kin to Him who was Poet as well as Prophet and Preacher; that on the genius and function of the authentic modern Poet is the imprimatur of Him who spake as never man spake.

In an "appreciation" of the genius of Christ, there can be no problems—no Synoptic Problems or other problems of New Testament Higher Criticism. Any one who has been a student of the Homeric Problem or of the Platonic Problem, or of Old Testament Problems in Higher Criticism, knows that the Synoptic Problem—the dates, authorship, genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels—are *sui generis*, so far as conclusiveness in these questions is concerned: the more one investigates, the more does one find the inquiry become fatuous and futile; one only gets farther and farther away from true knowledge, and even from justifiable opinion, and ends in hopeless confusion. But there are certain *a priori* principles which must be accepted before the text of the Matthæan Gospel can be employed as material or data from which to construe a literary appreciation of the poetic genius of Christ. First, paradoxically, the very death of Christ is proof that His epoch was rife with ideas or, rather, expectancies, of the fulfilment of the Messianic hopes expressed in the literature of the ancient Hebrews. The *a priori* probability is that the epoch of Christ, in which, as ardently wished for and expected, was to be fulfilled the hopes expressed in the beautiful, noble, and exalting proph-

ecies and psalms of the ancient Hebrews, should have a literature—the "Life" and "Sayings" of Jesus—quite as poetical, as beautiful in matter and form, as that of the anterior ages in Hebraic culture and civilization. The Literature of the Realization of Hope would be as lovely as that of Spiritual Desire and Hope.

Now, this *a priori* probability must have its own *a priori* grounds to make it more than merely antecedently plausible. The grounds are these two:—that the Christ or the Messiah, when He came, would necessarily, as the greatest Hebrew Prophet, Preacher, and Teacher, clothe His message—the greatest to be given to the world—in human speech not only consistent with spiritual dignity of the message, but made lovely or winning or compelling, or exalting by all the means of perfect human, that is Hebraic, rhetorical and poetical art; and that, secondly, Christ's message, orally given, should be reported in written speech by one who had so profound an enthusiasm for the matter and form of Christ's message, and who was himself such a student of the ancient Hebrew literature and so gifted in expressing himself poetically, that he would faithfully reproduce, in whatever language he wrote, whether Aramaic or Greek, an exact transcript of Christ's words. In short, the grounds for presuming, before investigation, that the gospel literature would be necessarily as beautiful, noble and exalting as the ancient Hebraic prophesies and psalms, that is to say, as poetical as the older scriptures or literature, are, first, that by racial genius, training, and realization of the spiritual dignity of His message, Christ would become, and express Himself as, a Poet, and that, secondly, amongst the Evangelists there should be one who, along with, to use our anachronism, a Boswellian enthusiasm for the mind and speech of Christ, possessed a fine sense of poetic beauty, and was able to employ it in what he wrote, whether in original composition or in faithful translation.