

were further prepared for the acceptance of fresh miracles by their traditional acceptance of those of the Old Testament. So devoid were they of any conception of natural law, or of anything except a direct action of Deity, that with them a miracle would hardly be miraculous.

If we must resign the miracles, the Messianic prophecies with their supposed fulfillment in Christ, and the Trinitarian creed, what remains to us of the Gospel? There remains to us the Character, the sayings, and the parables, which made and have sustained moral, though not ritualistic, dogmatic, or persecuting, Christendom. There remain the supremacy of conscience over law and the recognition of motive as that which determines the quality of action. The character is only impaired as the model and guiding star of humanity by supposing that it was preterhuman. We cannot even conceive the union of two natures, divine and human, though we may mechanically repeat the form of words. The sayings of Christ would be not less true or applicable if they had been cast ashore by the tide of time without anything to designate their source. The parable of the prodigal son, that of the laborers in the vineyard, or that of the Good Samaritan, would touch our hearts whoever might be deemed their author. There remains, moreover, the ethical beauty of the Gospels themselves, unapproachable after its kind. Their miracles are miracles of mercy, not of destruction, like many of the miracles of the Old Testament. When James and John propose to perform an Old Testament miracle by commanding fire to come down from heaven and destroy an inhospitable village, they are rebuked and told they know not of what manner of spirit they are. In this sense it may be said that the miracles confirm the Gospel and the Gospel confirms the miracles. The Inquisition, to justify its existence, could find among Christ's words none more apposite than "Compel them to come in," said by the giver of the feast in the parable. The halo of miracle is worthy of the figure. If there is a Supreme Being, and if he is anywhere manifest in human history, it is here.

A biography of Christ there cannot be. There are no genuine materials for it, as Strauss truly says. Four compilations of legend cannot be pieced together so as to make the history of a life. No ingenuity can produce a chronological sequence of scene such as a biographer requires. The "Lives," so called, are merely the four Gospels cut into shreds, which are forced into some sort of order, while, to impart to the narrative an air of reality, it is profusely decked out with references to local scenery, allusions to national customs, and Hebrew names. Each biographer gives us a Christ according to his own prepossessions; Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, or Rationalist. The Roman Catholic priest presents him as a living crucifix; the New York minister as a divine preacher. Renan's "Life of Jesus," though it is exquisite as a work of literary art, as a biography is worth no more than the rest. It has no critical basis, and the facts are arbitrarily selected and arranged in virtue of a learned insight which Renan supposes himself to possess.

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