

Herakles, a demigod or a hero? Always in closest intimacy with Jehovah, he is yet a proper man, as human in all his thoughts and actions as the men of to-day. How is it, again, that the Jehovah whom he worships is not like Zeus, an incongruous conception of supernatural attributes, human imperfections, and even vile passions—hatred, cruelty, and lust? While the worshipper has no single trait of divinity, the Jehovah whom he worships has no single trait of humanity. How is it that these conceptions of the human and divine, and of their relations, so incomparably transcend all the mythologies of the world, that in fundamental ideas we have neither surpassed nor altered them since?

How is it, again, that the morality taught in the Book of Genesis so singularly transcends even that of Plato, as might easily be shown in important details; nay, that it is so wonderfully accordant with the moral conceptions and feelings of our day, so that Christian preachers deduce the greatest religious lessons from them? The characters of these old heroes—Abraham, Jacob, Joseph—are fully delineated, and their faults and immoralities exposed. The moral portraiture is suffused with the colouring of their own age and feeling; and yet wrong is never confounded with right, we are never permitted to approve the wrong or disapprove the right. Even in the delineation of Jacob, one of the most complex and tortuous characters in history, the line between right and wrong is never once blurred or transgressed. The wrong of Jacob whom God chooses, the right of Esau whom God rejects, are clearly and firmly set forth, and the religious principles which justify both are clearly indicated.

Are we then asked for a vindication of the Book of Genesis? We will not contend about the science of its first chapters, about the chronology of its generations, about the ethnology of its dispersion. Let science determine how much or how little of these are exact. We appeal to its religious evidence, to its wonderful delineations of moral character, to its grand conceptions of God as the great first cause of all things and as the ruler of men, to its lofty and unique morality, to its noble types of religious manhood. The evidence of theological and moral greatness is surely far more than that of the science or the history! How came it to pass that when the philosophy of a Plato and the morality of an Aristotle were so signally defective, this old book of three thousand years ago anticipated the fundamental theology and morality of our nineteenth Christian century? Is not the only possible answer—These were men whom God had healed, and this is God's record concerning them? Difficulties of science or of history have no weight against these moral evidences; they are negative only—difficulties of our ignorance or of our erroneous interpretation, which greater information might remove. But there can be no mistake about the positive features of these religious and moral characteristics, and before the claims of the record can be rejected these must be accounted for.

Turning to the New Testament, still grander moral delineations are presented to us. Peerless and divine stands the moral portraiture of Jesus Christ. Whence is it? of man or of God? a mere human conception or a divine inspiration? Is it history or is it romance?

Whatever we may think about Christianity, Christ himself is the greatest moral miracle of human history. Who but He, when the Pharisees asked for a sign, could have rebuked them because they did not see the divine attestation that he himself was—the divine beauty of his life, the divine truth of his words? Had they been “of the Truth” they would have “heard his voice.” His works would have appealed to their true hearts, as the Alpine horn appeals to the answering mountains; they would no more have asked the spiritual Christ to attest his divine mission by miracles, than they would have asked the astronomer to demonstrate the noonday sun. Who but he, when Philip requested to see the Father, could have replied, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father?”