

There is an equally notable absence of any of the peculiarities which attend particular callings and modes of life, and which, though so inevitable under the circumstances of human society that we have learnt to think them beauties, would disqualify a character for being universal and the ideal. The Life depicted in the Gospel is one of pure beneficence, disengaged from all peculiar social circumstance, yet adapted to all. In vain would the Roman Catholic priest point to it as an example of a state like his own; the circumstances of Christ's life and mission repel any inferences of the kind.

The Christian type of character, if it was constructed by human intellect, was constructed at the confluence of three races, the Jewish, the Greek, and the Roman, each of which had strong national peculiarities of its own. A single touch, a single taint of any one of those peculiarities, and the character would have been national, not universal; transient, not eternal; it might have been the highest character in history, but it would have been disqualified for being the ideal. Supposing it to have been human, whether it were the effort of a real man to attain moral excellence, or a moral imagination of the writers of the Gospels, the chances, surely, were infinite against its escaping any tincture of the fanaticism, formalism, and exclusiveness of the Jew, of the political pride of the Roman, of the intellectual pride of the Greek. Yet it has entirely escaped them all.

Historical circumstances affect character sometimes directly, sometimes by way of reaction. The formalism of the Pharisees might have been expected to drive any character with which it was brought into collision into the opposite extreme of laxity; yet no such effect can be discerned. Antinomianism is clearly a deflection from the Christian pattern, and the offspring of a subsequent age.

The political circumstances of Judæa, as a country suffering from the oppression of foreign conquerors, were calculated to produce in the oppressed Jews either insurrectionary violence (which was constantly breaking out) or the dull apathy of Oriental submission. But the Life which is the example of Christians escaped both these natural impressions. It was an active and decisive attack on the evils of the age; but the attack was directed not against political tyranny or its agents, but against the moral corruption which was its source.

There are certain qualities which are not virtues in themselves, but are made virtues by time and circumstances, and with their