

CT 159

THE TRUE TEMPTATION
OF JESUS.

BY

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THE TRUE TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

EVERY one who has opened the New Testament is aware that in the first and third Gospel a remarkable story is found (alluded to also in the second Gospel) in which the devil is represented to have assailed Jesus with three special temptations, and to have been repelled by quotation of Old Testament texts. That it is impossible to maintain the literal truth of this account has been reluctantly conceded by writers, who, like the author of "Ecce Homo," are wholly unconcerned to ascertain when, where, by whom, and with what means of knowledge, these narratives were penned. Those who desire to save their credit, try to rid them of a damaging burden by declaring this scene to be *allegorical*. No spectator is pretended. The idea that Jesus communicated such inward trials to his disciples is contrary to everything which is reported concerning his character: for he is everywhere represented as wholly uncommunicative, self-contained, more or less mysterious, and moving in a separate region of thought and feeling from the disciples. Evidently this story does but express the *opinion* of the first Christians, while Jesus was as yet believed to be only human, that he, as others, *must have* had a struggle against temptations, and therefore, against the devil. It is not here intended to point out what is plain of itself, that none of the temptations are worthy of the acumen attributed to the experienced and wily Satan;

and are merely puerile in fiction, whether Jesus be imagined as the Second Person of the Divine Trinity, or merely as a great and holy, but human prophet. Here I intend to give prominence to that which I believe to be the fundamental trial of a religious reformer, especially when he attains great ascendancy and commands high veneration. But first I must say, I shall be truly sorry, if any Trinitarian read these pages, and find himself wounded. I do not address him. I argue on the assumption that Jesus was subject to human limitations like all the rest of us, and that it is our duty to criticize him and the story of him, if it be of sufficient importance.

What are the temptations of the prophet, can be no secret in the present day: we see them in the ordinary life of the admired preacher. To be run after by a multitude, to be ministered to by fascinated ladies, to see grey-haired men submissively listening and treasuring up words,—easily puffs a young preacher into self-conceit. In one who has too much strong sense to be drawn into light vanity, fresh and fresh success inspires, first, the not unreasonable hope or belief that he is fulfilling a great work, and is chosen for it by God, (not for his own merit, but because, if a work is to be done, some one must be chosen for it); next, an undue confidence in the truth and weight of his own utterances, an extravagant conviction that whoever resists his word, impugns God's truth, and makes himself the enemy of God. In the denunciations of Luther against Zuingli, his own wiser and more temperate coadjutor, in the vehemences of John Knox, in the cruelty of Calvin to Servetus, we see variously developed the same dangerous tendency. If we cast the eye eastward, to more illiterate nations, to those accustomed to revere the hermit and the semi-savage as akin to the prophet, to peoples whose homage expresses itself by prostration, we see the tendency of the prophet to

assume a regal and dictatorial mien even in the garb of a half naked Bedouin. Many an eastern monk or prophet, Syrian, Persian, or Indian, has been obeyed as a prince; some have been attended on by large armies: to some the native king has paid solemn obeisance. In ancient Greece, where philosophy overtopped religion, ascetic philosophers have been accepted as plenipotentiary legislators; in which, no doubt, we see portrayed, on a small scale, the legislative influence of a Buddha, a Confucius, or a Zoroaster. When an Indian prophet found it natural for multitudes to kneel to him or to prostrate themselves, how hard must it have been to accept such homage and retain a sense of human equality! how hard not to think it *reasonable* that others bow down, and *unreasonable* that any stand up and argue with the prophet as his equal!

In the Gospels and Acts the habit of prostration among these nations is sufficiently indicated; and we see how it is resented (according to the narrative) by Peter. When Cornelius falls at Peter's feet and does homage (certainly intending respect only, not divine worship), Peter regards it as quite unbecoming from a man to a man. But Jesus is represented as accepting such homage without the least hesitation, and apparently with approval. The cases are not few, nor confined to any one narrative. Matt. viii. 2, "There came a leper and worshipped him." Matt. ix. 18, "There came a certain ruler and worshipped him." Matth. xiv. 33, "They worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the [*or a*] Son of God." Matt. xv. 25, "Then came the woman and worshipped him, saying, Lord! help me." On this Jesus comments approvingly, "O woman, great is thy faith." Matt. xvii. 14, "There came a certain man, kneeling down to him and saying, Lord! have mercy on my son!" Matt. xx. 20, "There came the mother of Zebedee's children, worshipping him,"

Matt. xxviii. 9, "They held him by the feet and worshipped him—this is after the resurrection, thereby differing in kind from the rest. The same remark applies to verse 17. We have substantially the same fact in Mark i. 40; v. 6, 22, 33; vii. 25; x. 17. In the last passage the rich young man kneels to Jesus: he was not so represented in Matt. xix. 6. Luke v. 8, "Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees." Luke v. 12, "A man full of leprosy fell on his face, and besought Jesus." In Luke vii. an account is given, perhaps not at all authentic. A woman is represented to bathe the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wipe them dry with her long hair, and after that, anoint them with ointment and kiss his feet incessantly. Jesus, according to the narrative, highly applauds her conduct, and avows that "*therefore*, her sins, which are many, are forgiven." Such conduct on his part is far above criticism, if he was either a person of the Divine Trinity, or a superhuman being, who existed before all worlds and all angels, being himself the beginning of the creation of God. I cannot doubt that the writer, called Luke, believed Jesus to be superhuman, and therefore found no impropriety in the conduct here imputed to him; but I do not understand how any one who regards him as a human being, can fail to censure him in the strongest terms, if he believe this account. As I see special grounds for doubting it, (inasmuch as it looks like a re-making of the story reported in Matt. xxvi. 6-13, which it exaggerates), I lay no stress upon it: but even in that other account there is a self-complacency hardly commendable in a mere man. Again, in Luke viii. 20, we read, "the woman fell down before him." She does not fall down in Matt. ix. 22; therefore, here also the story may have been "improved" by credulity. But it is needless to follow this topic further. Suffice it to say, that though we do not know exactly how much to

believe, though we have frequent reason to suspect exaggeration, yet the narratives all consistently represent Jesus to have received complacently an unmanly and degrading submission from his followers, such as no apostle would have endured for a moment; and it is hard to believe that such reports could have gained currency, with no foundation *at all*. If, therefore, we are to criticize Jesus on the belief that he was man, and not God, nor a superhuman spirit, we must admit, I think, that a real and dangerous temptation beset him in this matter. He was prone to take pleasure in seeing men and women profound in their obeisance, prostrate in mind and soul before his superior greatness;—for prostration of the body brings satisfaction to pride, only as it denotes prostration of soul. It is difficult, with these narratives before us, to think that Jesus took to himself that precept which Peter gives to the elders, that they be not lords over God's heritage, but be subject one to another, and clothed with humility, that they may be ensamples to the flock. Indeed, unless we utterly throw away all the narratives, it is hardly too much to say, that this is the very opposite to the portrait of Jesus. If we will accept the theory that he was superhuman, we can justify his immeasurable assumption of superiority; but the fact remains, that in places, too many to reject, he puts himself forward as "lord over God's heritage."

Two classes of facts, presented in the narratives, must be carefully separated. The former is the general superiority asserted by Jesus for himself; the latter, is the special assumption of Messianic dignity. On the latter, there is notoriously an irreconcilable diversity of the fourth gospel from the rest. The writer of the fourth, unquestionably ascribing to Jesus pre-existence with God in some mysterious way, and sonship in a sense perfectly unique, represents his Messiahship as notorious to John the

Baptist, to Andrew and Philip, from the very beginning, says it was avowed by Nathanael (whoever this was), and preached by Jesus to Nicodemus and to the woman of Samaria. All this is in so flat contradiction to the three first gospels, that nothing historical can be made out of the account; and in trying to attain a true picture of Jesus, I necessarily set aside the fourth gospel as a mischievous romance.—Nevertheless, the element which I call an assumption of *general* superiority, is as complete and persistent in the three first gospels as in the fourth.

Keshub Chunder Sen entitles it “a sublime egotism” in Jesus, to say, “Come unto *me*, and I will give you rest: take *my* yoke upon you, and learn of *me*, for I am meek and lowly in spirit.” Yet if Luther, or John Knox, or Wesley had said it, we should adduce it in proof that he was eminently lacking in that very grace,—lowliness of spirit,—for which he was commending himself. But is this the only egotism ascribed to him in Matthew? Nay, but in the celebrated beatitudes of the sermon on the Mount, which some esteem the choice flower and prime of the precepts of Jesus, he winds up with, “Blessed are ye when men shall speak evil against you falsely *for my sake*.” He does not say “for righteousness’ sake,” if the narrative can be trusted. The discourse continues like itself to the end, for in the close he says: “Many shall say to me in that day, Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied *in thy name*, . . . and then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you*: depart from *me*, ye that work iniquity.” This is, it may be said, a very energetic way of declaring, that no pretence of following in his train as a prophet could compensate for personal iniquity. As such we may accept it: but it remains clear, that he is claiming for himself a position above the human; such as no *beauty* or *truth* of teach-

ing could ever commend, as rightful from men to a man, to the conscience of those reared in the schools of modern science : while of course, if he claimed to be higher than man, the first reasonable necessity, and therefore his first duty, was to exhibit the proofs of supernatural knowledge and authority. Undoubtedly, the alternative lies open of disbelieving the Evangelist. It may be urged, that the text represents Jesus as also saying that in his name they will claim to have cast out devils and done many wonderful works; but that this is an exaggeration belonging to a later time, and so therefore may the pretensions be, with which it is coupled. Well; so be it : let us then look further.

According to Matt. ix. 6, Jesus claimed power to forgive sin ; he brought on himself rebuke for it, but proceeded to justify himself by working a miracle. Whence did his disciples get the idea of his advancing such extravagances, if really he did not go farther than his disciples James and John? Presently after, he is represented as preaching that he is the bridegroom of the Church, in whose presence the disciples cannot mourn, and therefore ought not to fast ; but that when he is taken away, then they will fast. How very peculiar and strange a sentiment to invent for him, if it was not uttered ! Does it not rather seem to have the stamp of individualism and truth, thoroughly as it is in harmony with the tales of his rejoicing to see men and women kneel before him ?

Next when Jesus sends out twelve disciples to say, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," he is represented to assert, that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for the house or city which has not received his messenger. Surely, if any one were now to knock at our house door with such a formula of words, and on the strength of it expect to be accepted with the honours of a prophet, only the weak-minded would

give him pleasant reception. Yet no ground whatever appears for believing that there was anything to accredit such messengers *then*, any more than *now*: certainly nothing more appears in the narrative, which quite consistently everywhere holds, that Jesus regarded the non-reception of *his messengers* as a super-eminent guilt, merely because it was *he* who sent them.

When it is added, "ye shall be hated of all men *for my name's sake*," we are perhaps justified in esteeming that prediction as an after-invention of popular credulity. But in the same discourse (Matt. x. 23) we alight for the first time on the remarkable phrase, "The Son of Man," afterwards indisputably applied by Jesus to himself. "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come." No one but Jesus himself ever calls him the Son of Man. Whatever he then meant, the book puts into his mouth yet more of sublime egotism. "Whosoever shall *confess me* before men," (says he), "him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall *deny me* before men, him *will I also deny* before my Father which is heaven. He that loseth his life *for my sake* shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth *me*, and he that receiveth *me*, receiveth Him that sent me." Certainly, when we begin to pare down these utterances, and try to reduce them to something that would not be highly offensive in James or Paul, we seem in danger of cutting away so much that is characteristic, as to impair all confidence in what remains. But unless we are bound to reject the pervading colour of the narrative, I feel it not too much to say, that in a mere man, the self-exaltation approaches to impiety. What can it concern any of us, that his *brother-man* should "deny him" before our common Father? How suddenly would the honour which we felt for a preacher be turned into

grief and disappointment, or even indignation, if we heard him to say, "Blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended *in me!*" He would fall in our esteem, from the highest pinnacle to a very low place, nor could any pretence of "sublime egotism" save him.

In the same chapter in which the last words occur (Matt. xi.) the Evangelist goes on into language not dissimilar to that of the fourth gospel. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son; and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." When it is considered that, although the nucleus of this gospel probably existed before the first century was ended, we have absolutely no guarantee that the text was finally settled, as we now have it, much before the time of Irenæus, toward the close of the second century; no one has a right to be very confident that this passage, so strongly smacking of the doctrines which won ascendancy in that century, was not introduced at a later time. Perhaps the more reasonable course here, is to strike out verse 27, (about the Son and the Father) as foisted upon Jesus by a later generation. What then shall be said of the words which follow, already quoted, "Come unto *me*, take *my yoke* on you, and *I* will give you rest?" I can accept them, if he is God, or a pre-existing Mighty Spirit. I cannot accept them if he was only man: I then do not entitle them sublime at all, but something else.

Something or other to the same effect is for ever cropping up in this narrative of Matthew, which I purposely take as giving a more human representation of Jesus than Luke or John. He is presently reported to say (Matt. xii. 6), "In this place is one greater than the temple. . . . the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." Unless his words have been

monstrously distorted, he intended to assert that he was *himself* the Son of Man spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, that he was personally greater than the temple, and was Lord even of the Sabbath-day. Will any one say, that Jesus merely claimed the right possessed by *every man* to interpret the law of the Sabbath by the dictates of good sense, and that he regarded *every* pious man as greater than a temple built of stone; and that the egotistic form of his utterance was an accident? In that case it certainly was a highly unfortunate accident, and we may add, an accident often repeated, which generated in his disciples a veneration for him too great for humanity. But accident so systematic is surely no accident at all. If a good man who makes *no* pretensions is worshipped as a god after his death, he is guiltless: but if a MAN be worshipped as a god, who has made enormous personal pretensions,—and if a decisive weight in the argument for worshipping him is, that he has left us no choice between worship and reprobation, can one who regards the superhuman claims untenable, doubt that self-exaltation and monstrous vanity was a deplorable foible in the prophet? I find only two ways of avoiding the disagreeable inference: (1), by the theory of Paul, or some higher theory; (2.) by so rejecting all our accounts of his doctrine and miracles alike as untrustworthy, that nothing is left us to trust at all, nothing on which a faithful picture of Jesus can be founded.

From beginning to end the narrative has but one colour as regards the self-exaltation of Jesus. Matt. xii., "Behold! a greater than Solomon is here." Matt. xiii., "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which ye see, and hear the things which ye hear. Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." And what was this so precious instruction? the Parable of the

Sower! Surely no sober-minded person can esteem this so highly above all the teaching of Hebrew sages.

But I pass to a new topic in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew,—the anger of Jesus, when he is asked for a sign from heaven. He replies by calling the persons who asked him *hypocrites*, when evidently, according to the notions of that age and nation, it was a most reasonable and proper request. In fact, the narratives elsewhere represent him as giving them miraculous signs, which are signs from heaven, in abundance; insomuch that, if he had been represented as here appealing to these signs, and alleging that these very persons had already witnessed them plentifully, his imputation of hypocrisy might have seemed natural. But that is not his line of argument. He says: “A *wicked and adulterous* generation seeketh after a sign,” as though the desire itself were wickedness, “and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.” And he left them and departed. Such words refuse a sign not to the individual only, but to the generation. Are we then to believe that he consistently repudiated all pretence of working miracle? that he esteemed the desire of seeing a miracle wrought, in confirmation of his pre-eminent claims, to be such a fatuous absurdity, that he had a right to heap contumelious epithets on the head of any one who asked for it? In favour of this opinion, appeal may be made to the epistles of Paul, who does not betray any knowledge whatever that Jesus had wrought miracles. Let us tentatively adopt this view. Then, first, what a heap of gross misrepresentation is put before us in all four narratives if Jesus not only never affected to work miracles, but even vehemently flouted the idea itself and rebuked those who desired it. Next, it will follow that no justification of his high pretensions was even attempted by him, and therefore no denuncia-

tion of men for neglect of him was reasonable. It follows that those resolved to justify him must cut out all his denunciations likewise. Who will write for us an expurgated gospel, to let us know what was the true Jesus? Who will convince us, that a history thus garbled can ever be truly recovered, or deserves our intent study?

In the same chapter of Matthew (the sixteenth) the momentous question is proposed to his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" According to the narrative, he first gave them the hint, what to reply, by a leading question, "Whom do men say that I, *the Son of Man*, am?" but perhaps that is only a stupid exaggeration of the narrator, who did not see what it would imply. Let us then drop this portion of the words. He feels his way cautiously with the disciples, and sounds them. Simon Peter replies, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Again I ask, Is this narrative grossly and delusively false? or may we trust a vague outline? According to it, Jesus is lifted by the reply into a most exalted state, "Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonas," says he, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. . . . *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven** and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, . . . &c." After this outburst, what is it that we read as a consequence? "Then charged he his disciples that *they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*"

It seems utterly irrational and unworthy alike of

* Any one who doubts whether Jesus ever uttered such words, may fortify the doubt by opining that the words have got into the gospel from Rev. iii. 7, where nevertheless Jesus, so far from giving the "power of the keys" to any apostle, retains the power strictly in his own hand. The words in Rev. iii. 7, are borrowed from Isaiah xxii. 22, which have no reference to Messiah at all, according to any scientific interpretation.

the most High God and of his specially anointed Prophet (if one special Prophet was indeed so promised), that Messiah should come into his nation,—should expect subjection of mind from all around,—should haughtily evade, instead of enlightening, those who mildly inquired into his claims to authority; finally, should sedulously preserve his incognito, and forbid his disciples to tell that he was Messiah. Men may be either convinced or commanded. To convince them you must kindly and candidly answer their difficulties, and allow them to argue against you; you must meet their questions as plainly and honestly as possible, not browbeat or threaten the interrogators, nor marvel over their unbelief and stupidity. You must descend in the argument on to a perfect level with the man whom you desire to convince, and entirely lay aside all airs of authority, even if you have authority. That is one course of proceeding; but it is the very opposite of that imputed to Jesus. But if men are to be *commanded*, if *submission* is to be required of them, you must make some display of **POWER**.* In that case you seek to convince them, not that a precept is wise, or a doctrine is true, but that you, its enunciator, have a special right of dictation, drawing after it in the hearer a special duty of submission. Of course, those with whom the idea of miracles is inadmissible, do not ask for signs from heaven; not the less must they justify the countrymen of Jesus in requiring from him *some* credentials, when he claimed submission and used a dictatorial tone. If the nation believed miracles to be the marks of Messiah, and was in error, it

* Men of science appeal to **POWER** as an argument why they should be believed, when want of leisure or talents forbid the mastering of their arguments: thus Astronomers appeal to their fore-knowledge of eclipses, and their power of finding the longitude by their tables; Electricians appeal to the telegraph, and so on.

belonged to Messiah to unteach them the error, and, as one aware of their folly, to take precautions lest miracles be imputed to him. Surely it was quite unjustifiable, to require *submission* from Priests and Pharisees, yet exhibit to them *no credentials whatever* of the mighty function with which he was invested. If words dropping from the mouth of Messiah were divine commands, which it was impious to dispute, nothing could supersede the public announcement of his office, and the display of his credentials, whatever they might be. No evasions are here endurable, on the ground of the political danger to be incurred, or the propriety of giving insufficient proof in order to try people's "faith." To say that political danger forbade, is to say that God sent Messiah insufficiently prepared for his work, and afraid to assume His functions publicly. As to trying "faith" by insufficient proof, nothing can be less rightful or more pernicious. If the proof adduced be of the right kind and appropriate, it cannot be excessive, but may be defective; and if defective, it is a cruel trap, as if designed to lead honesty astray. The only plausibility in this notion rises from confusion of truths which we ought to see by light from within, with truths which can only be established from without. No man can know by his inward faculties that a Messiah is promised from heaven, nor what will be the external marks of Messiah. False Messiahs had already come. To accept lightly any one as Messiah was the height of imprudence, and certainly could not be commended as pious. Under such circumstances, to dissemble Messiahship, and work upon susceptible minds by giving them evidence necessarily imperfect, was conduct rather to be imputed to a devil, than to a prophet from God, if done with serious intent. Those who defend it, plead that the evidence was moral, and did not need external proofs. If so, on the one hand full freedom

of investigation was needed, not authority and brow-beating ; on the other, this alleges external proof to be worse than superfluous,—to be in fact misleading ; so that to plead for its “insufficiency” as a needful *trial* of faith is a gross error. If external evidence was wholly inappropriate, the producing of that which you concede to be insufficient does but tend to confuse and mislead the simple-hearted, and cause unbelief in the strong-headed. But if external evidence is admissible and appropriate *at all* for faith to rest upon, then it ought to be in quantity and quality sufficient to make the faith reasonable and firm. If only internal light is to the purpose of faith, and external evidence was not wanted for Messiah, then neither was an *authoritative Messiah* wanted at all ; that is, a teacher to whom we should submit without conviction ; *then* it was right to claim that Messiah would convince by argument and reply to questions ; would invite question or opposition, not dictate and threaten ; then we have to sweep away the greater part of the four Gospels as a false representation of Messiah. Whatever else may have been true, one thing is certainly false ;—that God sent a special messenger to teach *authoritatively*, and that the messenger thus sent forbade his disciples to publish his character and claims.

From narratives so disfigured by false representation, as every one is obliged to confess them, who does not believe the miracles, and seeks to defend Jesus by remoulding the accounts of Him ; how can any one be blamed for despairing to arrive at accurate and sound knowledge concerning his character and teaching ? What right has any one to expect to recover lost history, or to think worse of his brother if he regard the effort to be waste time ? Yet if I were to say, I seem to myself to know *nothing* of Jesus, I should speak untruly ; for in the midst of the obscurity and the inconsistencies of the narratives, there are

some things unvarying, many things very hard to invent, and others unlikely to be invented, yet easily admitting explanation, if we reason about Jesus as we do about every other public teacher or reformer. The details of doctrine are often untrustworthy, but the current, the broad tendencies, the style and tone of the teacher, seem to have made too strong an impression to be lost, though round them has been gathered a plentiful accretion of mistake and fable. In outline we must say that the first peculiarity of the preacher was, that he did not comment upon the law and prophets, but spoke dictatorially, dogmatically, as with authority—a thing quite right and proper, while *only moral truth* is taught, which makes appeal to the conscience of the hearer. But the Jews, accustomed like the modern English to nothing but comment and deduction from a sacred book, were apt to enquire of Jesus by what right he spoke so confidently, and paid so little deference to the learned. On one occasion he is said to have given a very fair reply, to the effect that they had listened to the preaching of John the Baptist, without asking his authority: "If John might preach to you dogmatically, why may not I?" was the substance of that argument. But it is clear that, numbers of honest sincere Jews, impressed by the moral weight in these preachings, had begun to inquire whether this was not a *renewal of divine prophecy*, whether divine prophets must not have some recognizable note of their mission, other than the influence of their doctrine on the human conscience; whether, in fine, Jesus might not be the expected Messiah. This was a very anxious question, especially since delusive Messiahs had appeared; but it was a question that Jews were sure to make, and the three narratives before us, defective as they are, persuade me that it was made, both in private talk, and in direct interrogation to Jesus.

Now if we accept to the full the traditional Jewish

belief of what Messiah was to be, (which falls short of the dignity ascribed to him by Christians), it is incredible that after commencing his public functions he should remain ignorant of his being Messiah, or need confirmation from his disciples or from others. But if Jesus had little trust in learned Rabbis or traditional doctrine, he may have had a very vague and imperfect belief as to what Messiah was to be; and the idea that he himself was Messiah may not have at all occurred to him, until after he had experienced the zeal of the multitude, and was aware that a rumour was gone abroad among the people, that "a great prophet was arisen," and that some said he was the Messiah. Can any one study his character as that of a man, subject to all human limitations, and not see, that the question, "Am I then possibly the Messiah?" if at all entertained, instantly became one of extreme interest and anxiety to Jesus himself? Indeed from the day that it fixed itself upon him for permanent rumination his character could not but lose its simplicity. Previously he thought only, What doctrine is true morality? What are the crying sins of the day? But now his own personality, his own possible dignity, became matters of inquiry; and the inquiry was a Biblical one. He was brought hereby on to the area of the learned commentator, who studies ancient books to find out what has been promised and predicted about a Messiah. An unlearned carpenter, however strong and clear-minded while dealing with a purely moral question, was liable to lose all his superiority and be hurtfully entangled when entering into literary interpretation. Wholly to get rid of traditional notions was impossible, yet enough of distrust would remain, to embarrass fixed belief and produce vacillation. Nothing is then more natural, than that the teacher should desire to know what was the general opinion concerning him, should be pleased when it confirmed his rising hopes, should be elated

when Simon Peter declared him to be Messiah, and should bless his faith, even if not with the extravagance of giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; finally, should be displeased with himself and frightened at his own elation, and, in order to repair his error, should charge his disciples to tell no one that he was Messiah; not that he desired to keep the nation in ignorance, but because he was himself conscious of uncertainty. After this his conduct could not be straightforward and simple.

Such is the only reasonable interpretation which I have ever been able to see, of this perplexed and perplexing narrative, which is not likely to have grown out of nothing. Jesus came into a false position from that day, and of necessity (as I think) his whole character must have changed for the worse. Thenceforth, the dogmatism which had been a mere form of teaching, and had involved arrogance only in appearance, changed into definite and systematic personal assumption. It is not likely that he began it so early, or ever carried it so far, as even the narrative of Matthew pretends; for as a caricaturist exaggerates every peculiarity of a face, making its prominences more prominent, so does tradition deal with the popular hero. I pretend not to know how much is exactly true; but it comes before me as certain fact, that the true temptation of Jesus was the whisper made to him, "*Are not you possibly the Messiah?*" and by it the legendary devil overcame him. That whisper has cost to Europe an infinite waste of mind and toil, no end of religious wars, cruelties, injustices, anathemas, controversies, without bringing any sure advance of religious truth to mankind. How much more convulsion of hearts and entanglement of intellects, how much of violent political upturnings are inevitable, before European nations can now become able to learn that to think freely is a duty, and that religion is spiritual and rational, not magical and supernatural?
