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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

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THREE objects, partly natural and partly architectural, I have seen which meet the reasonable expectations aroused by the descriptions of travelers—the Alhambra in Granada, Spain; the Japan Sea, and the glorious Taj Mahal, in Agra, India. Three works of artistic genius, each superb of its kind, have I seen which satisfy reasonable expectations—Raphael's "Transfiguration," Canova's "Penitent Magdalen" and Thorwaldsen's "Christ and the Twelve Apostles." Three products of literary skill have I read, each almost perfect of its kind—Shakespeare's "Hamlet," Milton's "Paradise Lost," and Tennyson's "In Memoriam." Three men have I studied, magnificent, majestic and well-nigh matchless men—Moses, the Law-giver; Paul, the Apostle, and Juason, the Missionary.

But no one of the objects of nature or works of art, and no one of these men was ideal. The ideal man, who is only a man has not yet been discovered. The ideal man has not yet been discovered among those who are mere men. No one of our noblest men was a spotless Sun; no one reached sinless perfection. From all our loftiest specimens of manhood I turn dissatisfied to Jesus Christ and in Him I find that the ideal becomes actual, the dream real, and the hope fruition. What Mount Tabor is, rising abruptly in its unique symmetry and beauty from the north-eastern arm of the plain of Esdraelon, that Jesus Christ is, rising in insulated grandeur and spotless perfection above the plane reached by the noblest men of all the centuries.

What Mont Blanc as the king of the Alps is, lifting its crystal domes and sparkling towers 15,781 feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea, compared with the other snow-clad and cloud-kissed mountains of the Alps, that Jesus Christ is compared with the loftiest men who have risen as mountain heights above their fellows through all the ages. What the Himalaya Range, the most elevated and stupendous mountain system on the globe, sweeping across historic lands as far as from New York to Chicago and back to New York, and rising so high that the superb Matterhorn, if lifted bodily and placed upon the resplendent Jungfrau, would not reach the glittering Himalayan heights in moral grandeur in the history the long line of men who have risen highest in moral grandeur in the history of the human race. Jesus Christ is the pearl and crown of humanity; He is the loftiest specimen of manhood the race has produced; He is the fullest manifestation of divinity God has given the world; He

is the effulgence of God's glory, and the very image of His substance. He rises in unapproachable glory, not only above men, but also above saints and seraphs, and above angels and archangels.

The question of the text, "What think ye of Christ?" now presses upon our consideration. The setting of this text is instructively suggestive. For some time in His discussion with the Pharisees our Lord had been acting on the defensive. Both Sadducees and Pharisees had been asking Him questions. His answers put the Sadducees to silence, and their confusion greatly gratified the Pharisees. It is now their turn to experience similar confusion from the celerity and dexterity of His replies. Never was there so skillful a debater as Jesus Christ. He was masterful in His clarity of thought, simplicity of speech and purity of motive.

In the case before us He presses from the defensive to the offensive, and He convicts Scribes and Pharisees of entertaining false views of the Messiah. They had disputed His claims as a spiritual Messiah, and He now shows the irreconcilable contradiction between their view of Him as a mere worldly Messiah and the teaching of their own prophetic scriptures. They were silenced and even stunned by His rapid, aggressive and unanswerable attack.

CONVICTIONS REGARDING CHRIST

It must, doubtless, be admitted that there are men in every community, and possibly there are some in this congregation, who have no definite convictions regarding Jesus Christ. It seems almost incredible that in a community of culture and Christianity men and women should be found who have not reached definite conclusions regarding the person and character of Christ. The question is put now to you with the utmost directness, "What think ye of Christ?" This is the broadest, deepest and loftiest question ever put to the human race. This is the question of all the ages. This question virtually engaged the thought of Abraham; it evoked a response from Moses; and it stirred the deepest emotions and loftiest praises of David as he swept his lyre and sang his immortal songs.

A New York pastor once asked a prominent business man what he thought of the Christ, and the man replied frankly, "I suppose I never do think of Jesus Christ." Then the pastor inquired when he was born and he gave the date, 1843. "B. C. or A. D." the pastor asked. The man remained silent in his confusion. Here was a man who had been dating letters for many years, and was thus commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, and living in a world whose civilization is radiant with

the glory of Christ and yet he frankly acknowledged that he had no definite thoughts regarding this unique Personage.

This was a humiliating confession for man to make. Such a confession in this century argues some degree of social inferiority, intellectual inanity and moral vacuity. It is astounding that men professing even average intelligence should not have reached well-defined views of the character of Jesus the Christ. His birthday gave the race a new era, and every man who dates a letter pays tribute to His nativity. His life and teaching are shaping the literature, the art, the architecture, and the music of the world. His spirit has given us our immortal paintings, and His hand has virtually carved the greatest figures in the modern galleries of sculpture throughout the world. He has inspired the sublimest oratorios of Bach, of Beethoven, of Handel, of Haydn, of Mozart and of Mendelssohn. Jesus Christ has created a new world along all the lines of art, music, architecture and literature for time and eternity. He is the most puissant force known among men since the creation of the race. The man who has no convictions concerning Jesus Christ is intellectually and morally an equally pitiful and reprehensible creature. He is no honor to any circle in which he moves.

In this congregation there are no hearers unwilling to admit that Jesus Christ is at least a great historic character. They frankly admit that He was born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth and crucified at Jerusalem. They are entirely correct in the outward features of His earthly career, but they may have comparatively little conception of the spiritual significance of His wonderful life and His vicarious death.

Only as we bow down at Christ's feet and worship Him as the divine-human Man can we give Him the honor which He merits and demands. Then we can employ and sanctify the loftiest poetry in chanting His praise, the noblest art in limning His person, and the profoundest logic in urging His claims upon men as the divine human Saviour. There are many who are willing to admit, and who earnestly affirm, that Jesus Christ is the ideal Man of the human race. They are ready to declare that it was a glorious thing that man was originally made like God, and that it was a still more condescending thing that God was made like man. The Christ was indeed the ideal Man of the human race. He was the great Exemplar, the perfect Model, the sublime Original to be imitated by all true men and women. In Him and in Him only, the plant of humanity blossomed and bloomed into a perfect flower.

(To be continued)

