

# **THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTENDOM**

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The Founder of Christendom by Goldwin Smith

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BY

**GOLDWIN SMITH**

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## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE demand for a second edition of this address, delivered to the Unitarian Club of Toronto and published at their instance, seems to show that the address has attracted the attention of some who sympathize with its general views. That traditional belief in supernatural Christianity has been overthrown or shaken in many minds by the advance of criticism and science is evident. Criticism applied to the historical character of the Gospels, as well as to the evidence of the miraculous generally, has caused many to doubt, many to reject, the Christian miracles. The creeds repose on the Atonement; the Atonement assumes the Fall; and the Fall seems to have been disproved by science, which has demonstrated that man, instead of falling, was raised by evolution from a lower order of being.

Yet spiritual Christianity may live, even

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though supernatural Christianity dies. If the miracles must be set aside as mythical, and the dogma must be resigned, still the spiritual Teacher, his character and his words, remain. If we have lost the Jesus of Bethlehem, we have not lost the Jesus of Nazareth, or the testimony of his life to the existence of a spiritual world.

That man is made up of a body and a spirit, the spirit being a separate entity infused into him by a distinct act of the Creator, pent in the body but parted from it at death, and itself imperishable, is a belief which many of us, perhaps most of those who are educated and have any tincture of science, have resigned. We see that what has been called the *soul is*, in fact, our conscious personality, the outcome, mental and moral, of our general frame. Still, there appears to be in man that which may be rightly called spiritual, as distinct from physical, life. Free will or, as perhaps it had better be called, our power of choice, perception of moral good and evil, moral aspirations, notably such as lead to self-sacrifice, the faculty and habit of



idealization, are apparently real phenomena of our nature, hitherto not explained by physical causation or brought within the domain of physical science. To what these phenomena may point, who can say? Yet, if they have no meaning, man, while he is higher than the other animals, is more unhappy than they are, inasmuch as he has always going on in him a conflict between good and evil, with the sense of failure to reach an ideal and a consciousness of a power of development beyond his present condition which is doomed to frustration by death. We cannot see beyond the grave. On the other hand, it is by no means certain, or even likely, that, aided as we may be by the telescope, the microscope, and the spectroscope, we see the universe as it really is. There is, apparently, no reason for assuming that the evidence of our physical senses is exhaustive and that all intimations of anything beyond given us by our spiritual nature are delusive. This may be said without any disloyalty to science, which bids us recognize all phenomena, whether at present explained or not.

On the solution of the question, so much debated, about the origin of life, however interesting it may be to physical science, nothing regarding man's spiritual nature and destiny seems to depend. Certain it is that man, with all his faculties and aspirations, is developed out of a senseless embryo. It is at the same time certain that the embryo is not the man, and that an active power, apart from rudimentary elements, is revealed in the development.

There are many Lives of Christ, some of them pietist, others rationalist, others intermediate not excluding but minimizing the miraculous element. The popular Life by the late Dean Farrar shows a tendency to rationalize the miraculous. His treatment of the miracle of the Gadarene swine is a notable instance of this mode of manipulation, which no doubt meets a popular demand and keeps doubt at bay, but is not likely to be found satisfactory in the end.

Strauss's second Life is the extreme of scepticism. We rise from perusing it, thinking that we know little or nothing of the Founder

of Christendom. Yet, imperfect as our materials are, the character and the doctrine are distinct. The character is clearly mirrored in the writings of Paul. The character and the words together have embodied themselves in the creation of Christendom.

Renan's *Life of Christ*, like everything else that came from his pen, combines, in the highest degree, literary grace with erudition. But his is the work of a great artist, hardly in touch with simple Galilee. His authorities are fully set forth, but his principle in making use of them is not always clear. For the quintessence and climax of Christ's teaching, he goes to the Fourth, and least historical, Gospel. From the miracles he arbitrarily picks out the raising of Lazarus as a real occurrence, insinuating that it was a pious fraud contrived by the enthusiasm of the family.

From deity, the character of Jesus has sunk so much among violent enemies of his faith and of the Christian order of society as to be the mark of the most revolting caricature. His extreme precepts, such as those