

**THE COLLECTED WORKS OF THEODORE
PARKER, CONTAINING HIS THEOLOGICAL,
POLEMICAL, AND CRITICAL, WRITINGS,
SERMONS, SPEECHES, AND ADDRESSES, AND
LITERARY MISCELLANIES, VOL. III:
DISCOURSES OF THEOLOGY, PP. 1-318. [1875]**

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The Collected Works of Theodore Parker, Containing His Theological, Polemical, and Critical, Writings, Sermons, Speeches, and Addresses, and Literary Miscellanies, Vol. III: Discourses of Theology, pp. 1-318. [1875] by Theodore Parker

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OF
THEODORE PARKER,
MINISTER OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CONGREGATIONAL
SOCIETY AT BOSTON, U.S.

CONTAINING HIS
THEOLOGICAL, POLEMICAL, AND CRITICAL WRITINGS,
SERMONS, SPEECHES, AND ADDRESSES,
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VOL. III.
DISCOURSES OF THEOLOGY.

LONDON:
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THE RELATION OF JESUS TO HIS AGE AND
THE AGES.

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE THURSDAY LECTURE, IN BOSTON,
DECEMBER 26, 1844.

Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?—JOHN vii. 48.

IN all the world there is nothing so remarkable as a great man ; nothing so rare ; nothing which so well repays study. Human nature is loyal at its heart, and is, always and everywhere, looking for this its true earthly sovereign. We sometimes say that our institutions, here in America, do not require great men ; that we get along better without than with such. But let a real, great man light on our quarter of the planet ; let us understand him, and straightway these democratic hearts of ours burn with admiration and with love. We wave in his words, like corn in the harvest wind. We should rejoice to obey him, for he would speak what we need to hear. Men are always half expecting such a man. But when he comes, the real, great man that God has been preparing,—men are disappointed ; they do not recognize him. He does not enter the city through the gates which expectants had crowded. He is a fresh fact, brand new ; not exactly like any former fact. Therefore men do not recognize nor acknowledge him. His language is strange, and his form unusual. He looks revolutionary, and pulls down ancient walls to build his own temple, or, at least, splits old rocks asunder, and quarries anew fresh granite and marble.

There are two classes of great men. Now and then some arise whom all acknowledge to be great, soon as they

appear. Such men have what is true in relation to the wants and expectations of to-day. They say, what many men wished but had not words for; they translate into thought what, as a dim sentiment, lay a burning in many a heart, but could not get entirely written out into consciousness. These men find a welcome. Nobody misunderstands them. The world follows at their chariot-wheels, and flings up its cap and shouts its huzzas,—for the world is loyal, and follows its king when it sees and knows him. The good part of the world follows the highest man it comprehends; the bad, whoever serves its turn.

But there is another class of men so great, that all cannot see their greatness. They are in advance of men's conjectures, higher than their dreams; too good to be actual, think some. Therefore, say many, there must be some mistake; this man is not so great as he seems; nay, he is no great man at all, but an impostor. These men have what is true not merely in relation to the wants and expectations of men here and to-day; but what is true in relation to the Universe, to Eternity, to God. They do not speak what you and I have been trying to say, and cannot; but what we shall one day, years hence, wish to say, after we have improved and grown up to man's estate.

Now it seems to me, the men of this latter class, when they come, can never meet the approbation of the censors and guides of public opinion. Such as wished for a new great man had a superstition of the last one in their minds. They expected the new to be just like the old, but he is altogether unlike. Nature is rich, but not rich enough to waste anything. So there are never two great men very strongly similar. Nay, this new great man, perhaps, begins by destroying much that the old one built up with tears and prayers. He shows, at first, the limitations and defects of the former great man; calls in question his authority. He refuses all masters; bows not to tradition; and with seeming irreverence, laughs in the face of the popular idols. How will the "respectable men," the men of a few good rules and those derived from their fathers, "the best of men and the wisest,"—how will they regard this new great man? They will see nothing remarkable in him except that he is fluent and superficial, dangerous and revolutionary. He disturbs their notions of order; he

shows that the institutions of society are not perfect ; that their imperfections are not of granite or marble, but only of words written on soft wax, which may be erased and others written thereon anew. He shows that such imperfect institutions are less than one great man. The guides and censors of public opinion will not honour such a man, they will hate him. Why not ? Some others not half so well bred, nor well furnished with precedents, welcome the new great man ; welcome his ideas ; welcome his person. They say, "Behold a Prophet."

When Jesus, the son of Mary, a poor woman, wife of Joseph the carpenter, in the little town of Nazareth, when he "began to be about thirty years old," and began also to open his mouth in the synagogues and the highways, nobody thought him a great man at all, as it seems. "Who are you ?" said the guardians of public opinion. He found men expecting a great man. This, it seems, was the common opinion, that a great man was to arise, and save the Church, and save the State. They looked back to Moses, a divine man of antiquity, whose great life had passed into the world, and to whom men had done honour, in various ways ; amongst others, by telling all sorts of wonders he wrought, and declaring that none could be so great again ; none get so near to God. They looked back also to the prophets, a long line of divine men, so they reckoned, but less than the awful Moses ; his stature was far above the nation, who hid themselves in his shadow. Now the well-instructed children of Abraham thought the next great man must be only a copy of the last, repeat his ideas, and work in the old fashion. Sick men like to be healed by the medicine which helped them the last time ; at least, by the customary drugs which are popular.

In Judea, there were then parties of men, distinctly marked. There were the Conservatives—they represented the Church, tradition, ecclesiastical or theocratical authority. They adhered to the words of the old books, the forms of the old rites, the tradition of the elders. "Nobody but a Jew can be saved," said they ; "he only by circumcision, and the keeping of the old formal law ; God likes that, He accepts nothing else." These were the Pharisees, with

their servants the Scribes. Of this class were the Priests and the Levites in the main, the National party, the Native-Hebrew party of that time. They had tradition, Moses and the prophets; they believed in tradition, Moses and the prophets, at least in public; what they believed in private God knew, and so did they. I know nothing of that.

Then there was the indifferent party; the Sadducees, the State. They had wealth, and they believed in it, both in public and private too. They had a more generous and extensive cultivation than the Pharisees. They had intercourse with foreigners, and understood the writers of Ionia and Athens which the Pharisee held in abhorrence. These were sleek respectable men, who, in part, disbelieved the Jewish theology. It is no very great merit to disbelieve even in the devil, unless you have a positive faith in God to take up your affections. The Sadducee believed neither in angel nor resurrection—not at all in the immortality of the soul. He believed in the State, in the laws, the constables, the prisons, and the axe. In religious matters it seems the Pharisee had a positive belief, only it was a positive belief in a great mistake. In religious matters the Sadducee had no positive belief at all; not even in an error: at least, some think so. His distinctive affirmation was but a denial. He believed what he saw with his eyes, touched with his fingers, tasted with his tongue. He never saw, felt, nor tasted immortal life; he had no belief therein. There was once a heathen Sadducee who said, "My right arm is my God!"

There was likewise a party of Come-outers. They despaired of the State and the Church too, and turned off into the wilderness, "where the wild asses quench their thirst," building up their organizations free, as they hoped, from all ancient tyrannies. The Bible says nothing directly of these men in its canonical books. It is a curious omission; but two Jews, each acquainted with foreign writers, Josephus and Philo, give an account of these. These were the Essenes, an ascetic sect, hostile to marriage, at least, many of them, who lived in a sort of association by themselves, and had all things in common.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees had no great living and ruling ideas; none I mean which represented man, his hopes, wishes, affections, his aspirations, and power of