

JESUS AND MODERN THOUGHT

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Jesus and Modern Thought by Stopford A. Brooke

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STOPFORD A. BROOKE

**JESUS AND
MODERN THOUGHT**

Jesus and Modern Thought

DISCOURSES
ON
The Humanity of Jesus
AND
The Love we bear to Jesus

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BY

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THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

I.

OF the two doctrines, one of which maintains that Jesus Christ is God, and the other that he was a man like to ourselves, we hold here the latter. The first predicates the miraculous. It is not according to reason that the absolute God and a man who lived and died as we live and die, should form one person, and when we hear of it, we say—'If this be true, it is unique in experience; it never occurred before in Man's history. It is not likely to ever occur again.' This is indeed the very thing that the orthodox declare. This traverses, they say, all experience, and it was needful for our salvation that it should do this. Man is naturally sinful, the Redeemer must be sinless; he must be different in kind from man. Jesus

could not then come into the world as other men come, or leave it as other men do. At the points of his birth and his resurrection he is not as we are. Being himself miraculous, all that belongs to him is also miraculous.

Nevertheless, we are also told by the Churches that 'his human nature was at one with ours, and that he was at all points tempted like as we are.' This preservation of ordinary Humanity alongside of complete Divinity seems a greater miracle even than the Incarnation, and the attempt to explain how this could be, has employed and strained the subtlest intelligences for many centuries. 'Vanity of vanities,' we cry, as we read the infinite labour wasted on this question. Faith, brought to the rescue, may accept the doctrine, but the moment reason takes the hand of faith and both look at it, it seems as if we caught no sight of a real thing. 'He was not then,' we say, 'really at one with us at all. His personality must differ radically from ours. The temptations he suffered seem fictitious, if he could not sin; if there were no struggle of the will against wrong—and there could not be if he were God—he cannot have been truly like a man.'

This and kindred questions have always arisen, and the result has been, both in and outside the Church, that the life and death of Jesus have become subjects of such complex metaphysical discussions—as to how he could suffer, grow, increase in wisdom, be tempted or even die, that all simplicity of thought upon the matter is at an end. Then men who do not take pleasure in solving intellectual problems, and who want some clear foundation for spiritual feeling, end at last in feeling towards Jesus in two plain fashions—either as if he were wholly a man, or as if he were wholly God. In the first instance they really believe what we believe, whether they stay or not in the Churches; in the second, they tend to lose sight of God the Father altogether, and to replace Him in their hearts by Jesus; or they worship, as they want them, two Gods. Many abide easily in conclusions of this second kind, but as many are at last driven to ask—Is all this really conceivable, or if conceivable, is it comforting? Then they are obliged to confess that they are in a maze, and have but little consolation in losing themselves therein.

Whereas, were the first conclusion true,—

were Jesus in all points a man, at one with God only as we can become at one with Him; and yet, being at one with our nature, had he conquered evil in and through our nature—that indeed would be an inspiration, an inexpressible comfort to think and to believe. If he were born as we are born, grew, lived, died and were born again into the higher world precisely as we are, in accordance with, and not in violation of the laws which regulate our being here; and if, as such, he yet lifted our nature into union with God the Father—why then, from how much that wearies the wings of our faith, and disturbs our reason, and distresses our religion, should we not be freed!

If it should also be true—that others (without, however, his spiritual genius which was as unique in its way as that of Homer or Shakspeare was in poetry) lived the same kind of holy and loving life as he lived; if he were not the solitary instance of a Revealer and a Saviour, but the representative of a thousand thousand other men who were also Revealers and Saviours on the same grounds and by the same means as his—why then, from what a host of mingled intellectual, spiritual, and moral

troubles we should be freed, and how frank and clear would be our reverence and love of him! The whole question is now actively discussed again, and I will try and place, with as much simplicity as possible, the view I hold of it before you. What was Jesus, and what relation does he bear to us?

The law of Revelation of which I have so often spoken—That God is through the ages communicating Himself in many ways and diverse manners to all men; and that He has never ceased to do so, slowly evolving the complete conception of Himself through every religion, among every people, in all the spheres of human thought and act—naturally contains within itself this other conclusion—that at certain times God's work in Man should exhibit itself in a specially heightened way in persons of special spiritual powers, of special spiritual influence; men of a divine genius for divine lives, who impel the whole world forward into a higher life of love and holiness and knowledge of God. And this, history tells us, has been actually the case. Almost every nation has had its mighty spirits of Love whose followers have been like the sands of the sea, whom men have